

GENDERING THE MARVELLOUS: STRATEGIES
OF RESPONSE IN REMEDIOS VARO, ELENA
GARRO AND CARMEN BOULLOSA.
(Volume I)

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Sí

el surrealismo

pasó, pasa, pasará

por México

espejo magnético

síguelo sin seguirlo

es llama y ama y llama

[...]

en el bosque de las prohibiciones

lo maravilloso

canta

cógelos

está al alcance de tu mano

es el momento en que el hombre

es

el cómplice del rayo

(Octavio Paz, 'Poema Circulatorio')

I declare that the entirety of this thesis has been composed by myself and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Inés Ferrero Cándenas
Edinburgh, 27th September, 2007.

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ABSTRACT

My doctoral research constitutes three case studies dealing with the work of the painter Remedios Varo and the writers Elena Garro and Carmen Boullosa. Their works incorporate a mixed imagery and iconography to which criticism has attached the label of surrealist, fantastic or magical realist respectively and sometimes even indiscriminately. Uncertain about the usefulness of defining this artist and these writers as 'surrealist' or 'marvelous realist', I would rather suggest that their work enters into dialogue with surrealism, as well with the specific American vocabulary Carpentier attributed to *lo real maravilloso americano*. The fundamental objective of this thesis is to prove how this dialogue creates a counter aesthetic of 'revisionist mythmaking' that foregrounds the existing gender problematic within these two discourses, while strategically reassessing the role woman has played in relationship to love, myth, history and creativity. It is my belief that a different account of surrealism and *lo real maravilloso* lies within the work of these women and that to start writing the story of such account will reveal important connections between Varo's assimilation of Latin American narratives and Garro's and Boullosa's absorption of surrealism. On the one hand, this study provides a new insight from which to comprehend the transcendence of surrealism in the ambit of Mexican culture, amplifying the already existing critical work on the field. On the other, it provides a new lens through which to understand and read the specific work of Remedios Varo, Elena Garro and Carmen Boullosa while discerning a common strategy of response between them.

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INTRODUCTION

THE MOTIVATION

The idea of carrying out a study that involves two Mexican writers and a Spanish surrealist painter exiled in Mexico emerged, generally, from the curiosity of exploring how the existing cultural relationship between surrealism and Mexico has evolved over the last five decades. More specifically, it emerged from the wish to understand to what extent, how and why, within this context, women's cultural manifestations have been different from that of their male counterparts. Very little or no attention has been directed towards Elena Garro and Carmen Boullosa's fiction in relationship to surrealism. While in the case of Boullosa this is fairly understandable due to her use of techniques that are today more associated with postmodern literary theory, it ceases to be that comprehensible in the case of Garro.¹ Orenstein's case study of her theatre as belonging to 'the theatre of the marvellous' in her book of the same name, is the only study to date that systematically considers and explores Garro's work in direct relationship to surrealism.² As I will show throughout this study, looking at the traces of surrealism in both women's narratives can significantly contribute to the understanding of their literary work as well as towards comprehending the relevance of the legacies of surrealism in contemporary Mexican women's fiction.

In contrast, many critics have often said that Remedios Varo's work has remained surprisingly untouched by Mexican culture: 'tanto los cuadros de Remedios Varo como los de Leonora Carrington pintados en México, no reciben de este país ninguna influencia. Las dos pintoras han pasado por México sin ser tocadas por el mundo tan característico y *sui generis* del país. Ni el colorido, ni las formas, ni los personajes, ni la atmósfera parecen haber dejado huellas en ninguna de las dos artistas' (Rodríguez-Prampolini 74). Janet Kaplan has made similar statements (*Unexpected* 130, *Subversive* 124). Chadwick mentions that 'although Varo was an avid collector of pre-Columbian art, its forms and content play little if any

¹ She lived through the era in which the already mentioned cultural interchange between Paris and Mexico was establishing itself. She was also part of the Mexican cultural scene in the 1950s that was in direct contact with surrealist ideas. Her marriage to Octavio Paz, a key figure for this dialogue, led Garro to meet several surrealist members and their work, not only in Mexico but also in Paris (Rosas-Lopátegui 56).

² Joan Marx's dissertation 'Aztec Imagery in the Narrative works of Elena Garro: A Thematic Approach' provides important connections between Garro and the surrealist imagery of Michaux, although her thesis is rather focused on showing the relevance of Aztec imagery in her works.

role in her own work' (*Women* 201). The inclusion of Varo in this study emerges from these and similar critical comments, from the suspicion (or the hope) that it cannot be entirely true, and from the fact that the influence of a Mexican and Latin American literary context in her art has often been unsystematically treated.³ It is true that Remedios Varo's paintings have been repeatedly approached from a narrative point of view, as well as that recent criticism has felt that her art has not remained wholly indifferent to Latin American culture. Some critics have sought to connect her with several Latin American writers who are associated with the fantastic and *lo real maravilloso americano* (see Parkinson-Zamora, *Magical*, Santos-Phillips, Sánchez, Junco). In fact, Parkinson-Zamora's assertion that the 'contradictory human reality-"la conciencia de ser otra cosa, de ser una cosa nueva"-to use Carpentier's phrase- is the source of *lo maravilloso* in Varo's art' (*Magical* 141-2) presents an analogous point of departure to my own as regards Varo's art. However, neither Parkinson-Zamora nor any other critic of Varo's work has sought, as it is my intention to do in this study, to comprehend how Varo's art is marked by a literary imagination comparable to that of Mexican women writers, and how within this literary imagination, there exists between Varo, Garro and Boullosa a common strategy of response characterised by a dialogue between European surrealism and Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano*.

THE CONTEXT

Surrealism has had a rich and complex relationship with Mexico. Already in the 1929 *Surrealist Map of the World*, Mexico replaces the whole of the United States and is considerably bigger than the half-existing Europe. The representation of these countries symbolises the relevance that, for political, social and cultural reasons, each presupposed for surrealism. By the late 1930s and under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, Mexico saw an influx of large numbers of European exiles, mostly refugees from the wars in Europe. Among these, a vast number of artists, writers and intellectuals, including many French and Spanish surrealists, were given asylum (see Rodríguez-Prampolini 54-55). After the wars were over, some returned to Europe, but many others found a comfortable and productive place within Mexican society, staying there until their death and largely contributing to the enrichment of the country's cultural scene.

³ With the exception of Lourdes Andrade (see *Las metamorfosis* and 'Sueño de un nuevo mundo'). Andrade, although endowing Varo's paintings with a Mexican flavour by connecting some of her paintings with the myths of discovery of the new world and specifically with Nueva España ('Sueño' 40-41), never touches upon her literary imagination and how this might be similar to other Mexican and Latin American writers.

The 1940 international surrealist exhibition in Mexico City, organized by André Breton, Wolfgang Paalen and César Moro and including the participation of eminent Mexican artists and authors like Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Xavier Villaurrutia, represents a landmark in the relationship between Mexican culture and surrealism. As Rodríguez-Prampolini has expressed it,

fue la apertura de una brecha, una ruptura con la tradición inmediata en el sentido que -por primera vez- desde la Revolución, el arte mexicano basado en el principio de una autonomía o independencia ideológica y nacional, se ligó con el mundo europeo, estableció relaciones directas y se dejó influir [...] la preparación del terreno para la evolución del arte mexicano posterior se iniciaba en este momento (66).

The evolution of ideas worked in both directions. Not surprisingly, Mexican society already constituted an instance of surreality, and as Breton asserted in an interview with Heliodoro Valle on his arrival in the country, he considered Mexico to be 'the surrealist country par excellence' (in Rodríguez-Prampolini 54).⁴ There was in Mexican culture a convergence of elements that inevitably emerged as 'fantastic' or contradictory from a European perspective, including visits to *curanderos* instead of doctors, sugar skulls, the magic practices of the *santeros*, the half-women, half-swan statuettes of Colima, or the celebration of death itself (Breton, *Surrealism* 139). The surrealists were generally overwhelmed by Mexico's pre-Columbian past, cultural traditions and revolutionary character (Breton, *Surrealism* 140-1). Moreover, there were in Mexico painters such as José Guadalupe Posadas, Roberto Montenegro or Frida Kahlo who were by now producing an art appealing to surrealist ideas. In his famous essay on Kahlo, Breton states how her work 'blossomed forth into pure surreality [...] despite the fact that it had been conceived without any prior knowledge whatsoever of the ideas motivating the activities of my friends and myself' (*Surrealism* 144).⁵

Despite the attention that a figure like Frida Kahlo received, whose painting *Las dos Fridas* (1939) dominated the 1940 International Surrealist Exhibition in Mexico City (Adès, *Mexico* n.p.), and besides the international reputation of the Mexican painter María Izquierdo, it was only during the 1950s that women really started to

⁴The interview is reproduced in Rodríguez-Prampolini's book. Elsewhere, she mentions how 'Breton es tocado por lo que México tiene de vivencia extraña, mágica, contradictoria, alucinante, única. La eterna sorpresa, el encuentro de los contrarios, la paradoja continua, la unión de lo más dispar, la incongruencia cotidiana del país, las imágenes estupeficientes [...] estas características de México dieron a Breton la impresión de encontrarse en el país surrealista por excelencia' (44).

⁵This is not however entirely true. In 1937, Kahlo travelled to Paris for a brief time where she met Breton and stayed among the surrealist group. She was there acquainted with surrealism, even if her work was not particularly defined by it at the time (see Rodríguez-Prampolini 60).

make a significant appearance on the Mexican artistic scene.⁶ A decade that, together with the first solo exhibition of Kahlo in 1953 (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 133) saw the first individual exhibitions of Remedios Varo.⁷ In the literary scene, even though renowned historical figures such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and several contemporary women publishing during the 1950s like Rosario Castellanos and Inés Arredondo have now been accepted as ‘part of’ the Mexican literary canon, it was not until the 1980s that society observes an unprecedented demand for literary production written by women. Elena Garro lived through both eras, publishing her first plays at the same time that Remedios Varo was seeing her work exhibited in Mexican art galleries. Garro was also involved with the group ‘poesía en voz alta’, and among its most renowned members was one of Varo’s best friends, the English surrealist Leonora Carrington.⁸

Carmen Boullosa belongs to that ‘young’ generation of writers who saw the flourishing of women’s literature during the 1980s. By the time she was part of Mexican literary circles, surrealism had ceased to be an active presence within the artistic and literary scene, yet its cultural legacies were far from being dead. Boullosa’s fantastic imaginary and experimental writing can be seen as a product of the counter culture that emerged in Mexico in the 1950s and bloomed during the 1980s. Jean Franco has also interpreted her work in this way, commenting how ‘la naturaleza de la escritura de Boullosa va a ser mucho más afin a esta vertiente de la literatura mexicana [Poesía en voz alta] que al sonoro rugir del canon nacionalista’ (‘Piratas’ 19-20). Although Mexican writers such as Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes constitute important examples of the cultural exchange between Mexican society and European surrealism, and although Varo, Garro and Boullosa’s work will be discussed on several occasions in relation to them, I will focus throughout this study on the cultural concept put forward by another decisive figure for the interchange of ideas between European surrealism and Latin American culture, the Cuban Alejo Carpentier.

⁶ The success of María Izquierdo was not really noticed in Mexico, even though she was the first Mexican woman painter to have a one-woman exhibition in the United States in 1930 (Ferrer, *Art in Context*, n.p.).

⁷ Her first solo exhibition took place in 1956, at the Galería Diana, where she included twelve works. One of Varo’s paintings, *Recuerdo de la Walkiria* (1939), was also included in the 1940 Mexican surrealist exhibition (see Kaplan, *Unexpected* 133).

⁸ Theatrical group founded by Juan José Arreola and taking place under the auspices of the UNAM. Among its most well known members were Octavio Paz, Juan Soriano, Elena Garro, Leonora Carrington and Héctor Mendoza (De la Fuente n.p.).

The presence of Carpentier in France at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, his close contact with the surrealist group and the impact this had on his thought, are emblematic of the development of the culture of surrealism in the whole of Latin America (see Birkenmaier 18-20). *Lo real maravilloso americano* marked the new direction Latin American literature would take after its first contacts with surrealism; for some, it became the 'prólogo a la nueva novela Latinoamericana' (Rodríguez-Monegal in Chiampi 36). It is thus for this reason and for its key relevance for understanding the connections between contemporary Latin American literature and surrealism, that I am choosing Carpentier's cultural concept and not others -such as Miguel Ángel Asturias' definition of magical realism- as my point of departure from which to understand the connections between surrealism and contemporary Mexican literature in the work of Varo, Garro and Boullosa.

Hence, in the prologue to *El reino de este mundo*, Carpentier formulates a specific Latin American concept that nonetheless would not have emerged, at least not in the same form, were it not for an existing dialogue with surrealism. As Chiampi has noted, 'la motivación original de esa conciencia de la realidad americana está vinculada a la crisis personal que culminó la experiencia surrealista del autor en Francia' (36). She then quotes Carpentier, expressing where this need might have emerged from: 'Me pareció una idea vana mi esfuerzo surrealista. Sentí ardientemente el deseo de expresar el mundo americano. Aún no sabía cómo. Me alentaba lo difícil de la tarea por el desconocimiento de las esencias americanas' (37). On the one hand, alongside Carpentier there were many other Latin American writers and artists who remained in the Paris of the surrealist movement for long enough to make the transatlantic dialogue dynamic. Among these were Miguel Ángel Asturias, César Moro, Diego Rivera, Octavio Paz, Aimé Césaire, Arturo Uslar Pietri, Julio Cortázar and Wilfredo Lam (Weiss 45-67).⁹ On the other hand, the surrealist movement observed with delight that its 'spirit' and theories were confirmed in the societies and communities of certain Latin American countries.¹⁰ After a first contact with this land, not only Breton but many others perceived that the potential of its myths, indigenous 'magical' rituals and mentalities, cultural history and astonishing nature could provide new ingredients for their conception

⁹ The names of these and many other Latin American writers and artists appear throughout Jason Weiss' *The Lights of Home*. On the other hand, Anke Birkenmaier considers that in contrast with other Latin American writers and artists that had contact with surrealism, Carpentier 'por su bilingüismo [...] mantuvo un contacto más sostenido, y más desde dentro, con cierto ambiente intelectual francés' (14).

¹⁰ Breton comments how 'I was witnessing here, at the other end of the earth, a spontaneous outpouring of our own questioning spirit' (*Surrealism* 144).

of the world as well as for their artistic and literary production. In this respect, it is worth considering Nadeau's statement regarding the surrealist awareness of the American land:

There exist certain societies situated precisely outside of time and history [...] the shaman makes rain; the witch doctor cures his patient by pronouncing certain formulas; game is killed not by the arrow but by the virtue of certain rites; [...]. The mental universe of these societies is not thereby incoherent or illogical [...]. Of little importance are rational explanations which, we attempt to convince the men of these societies, are alone acceptable. They live in a magical universe (250).¹¹

This account equally reflects what Artaud had by now perceived living among the Mexican indigenous tribe of the Tarahumaras, an account of whom he had written between 1936 and 1948 (Hayman 111), and writings which in fact precede Carpentier's prologue.¹² By 1940, in *Mirror of the Marvelous*, Pierre Mabillet defined *le merveilleux* (henceforth the surrealist marvelous) as a condition both internal and external to man, refusing, like Carpentier and Breton, all separation between the objective and the sensible. Perhaps more interesting is the fact that Mabillet selects his examples from the folklore of 'marginal' and 'primitive' societies and cultures in which Mayans and Aztecs were included, to conclude with the certainty that these communities are far richer in the experience of the marvelous than occidental ones would ever be.¹³ Benjamin Péret compiled an anthology of indigenous folklore named *Antologie des mythes, légendes et contes populaires d'Amérique*, showing how European knowledge could renovate itself through the understanding and exploration of Latin American mythical cosmogonies and 'primitive' modes of cultural knowledge (see Núñez 323).¹⁴ Concerned with the fusions between Latin American natural landscapes and surrealist aesthetic forms in a way that presents echoes with scenes from Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*, Edward James, a surrealist sympathiser, contributor and art collector, constructed a surrealist castle in Xilitla,

¹¹ On this point, and although not specifically related to surrealism, it is worth seeing Sir James Fraser *The Golden Bough* and J.L. Borges 'El arte narrativo y la magia'.

¹² Strikingly similar ideas regarding the magic mentality of indigenous tribes can be found between these two writers. In an echo of some of Carpentier's reflections on the subject we find Artaud mentioning how 'a nuestra idea inerte y desinteresada (y petrificada) del arte, una cultura auténtica opone su concepción mágica y violentamente egoísta, es decir, interesada. Pues los mexicanos captan el Manas, las fuerzas que duermen en todas las formas, que no se liberan si contemplamos las formas como tales, pero que nacen a la vida si nos identificamos mágicamente con esas formas' (in Núñez 319).

¹³ According to Chiampi, 'la exaltación de la fe (49) y de los estados psicológicos límites (68), el rechazo de la religión para explorar lo maravilloso (32), su crítica a la fabricación de lo maravilloso mediante convenciones literarias-opuesta a la autenticidad de las imágenes populares y primitivas(51-2)-, su sensibilidad para la magia y los incetismos religiosos de Haití (101-3) donde vivió en el inicio de los años cuarenta como agregado cultural, inseminaron los motivos básicos del famoso prólogo del escritor Cubano (Chiampi 40). To this influence on Carpentier it is also worth mentioning that of Spengler's *The Decline of the West* which, according to González Echevarría, was the main source for Carpentier's essay (226).

¹⁴ Where no English translation is available, I quote the original French title.

Mexico. This project presupposed that the unfinished surrealist architecture was organically completed through the workings of the surrounding jungle: 'no era entonces una escenografía. Era un sueño rodeado de selva, nacido de ella' (Romero 58).

If, as has been mentioned, many well-known Latin American cultural figures travelled to Paris, no less renowned surrealists made the journey to Latin America. Benjamin Péret, André Breton, Antonin Artaud, Leonora Carrington, Henry Michaux, Remedios Varo, André Masson, Eva Sulzer, Kati Horna, Luis Buñuel, Alice Rahon and Wolfgang Paalen among others lived in or travelled extensively through Latin American countries. The contact with this new culture provided them with the possibility of regenerating their aesthetic visions and enriching their creative work. As Juan Larrea puts it, 'Breton percibe que [...] ha puesto pie en el auténtico mundo de la realidad, allí donde el surrealismo ha de ceder el paso a un nuevo y más positivo movimiento' (*Del Surrealismo* 39). This 'new world', whose societies, history, landscapes, politics and cultures constituted for Carpentier the paradigm of *lo real maravilloso americano*, also comprised a cultural scene that, by the end of the 1940s, incorporates a surrealist awareness brought from Europe. And conversely, the culture of this 'new world' was capable of enlarging and transforming European surrealists' visions of life and art. It is within this channel of communication that I will locate the work of Remedios Varo, Elena Garro and Carmen Boullosa.

THE STUDY

This thesis constitutes three different case studies, each dealing with the artistic and literary production of Varo, Garro and Boullosa. Their work suggests a mix of influences, comprising a collage of aesthetic imagery to which criticism has attached the label of surrealist, fantastic or magical realist respectively and sometimes indiscriminately. Uncertain about the usefulness of defining this artist and these two writers as 'surrealist' or 'marvellous realist', I would rather suggest that their work enters into dialogue with surrealism, as well as with the concrete American vocabulary Carpentier attributed to *lo real maravilloso americano*. Varo, Garro and Boullosa's exploration of love, creativity, mythology, history, woman and her body has at its centre a yearning to escape from an over totalising rationalism in order to reach knowledge, freedom and integration within the self. Garro and Boullosa have also sought to represent the extraordinary aspect of Mexican socio-historical and political reality, and Varo has filled her paintings with scenery drawn from natural, occult, mystical and hermetic themes. It is not difficult to recognize within these

sources an amalgamation of the practices, concerns and aesthetics associated with both surrealism and *lo real maravilloso*.

The central aim of my study is not to search for a determinant source or influence within their texts and paintings. Rather, the main thesis is to prove how the dialogue that the work of these three women maintains with surrealism and *lo real maravilloso americano* creates a counter aesthetic of 'revisionist mythmaking' that foregrounds the existing gender problematic within these, while strategically reassessing the role woman has traditionally played in relationship to love, myth, history and creativity.¹⁵ Due to the employment of different media, that is, visual images and texts, my theoretical patterns are necessarily diverse but united by the interest of showing how the work of these three figures presents a similar strategy of response that redefines both surrealist postulates and what the Latin American critical tradition has called *lo real maravilloso americano*. It is my belief that a different account of both aesthetic approaches lies within the work of these women and that to start writing its story will reveal important connections between Varo's assimilation of Latin American culture and Garro's and Boullosa's assimilation of surrealism.

I start out from the view that surrealism, as well as a significant number of Latin American narratives, whether subscribing or not to Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano* and in particular those which do, convey a similar, mythical approach towards woman and endow the love she embodies with a particular significance as a metaphor for reaching a truer and deeper reality. Yet, as Daly has mentioned, 'myth can be a force tending either toward the diminution or the augmentation of woman's status and strength in society, depending upon the way in which the mythic material is elaborated and interpreted' (in Virgillo 6). Varo, Garro and Boullosa's 'narratives' are in this study considered to be undertaking a demythologising enterprise, in the sense that all of them reinterpret and reelaborate

¹⁵ 'Although the term 'revisionist mythmaking' is borrowed from Lauter, which she in turn borrowed from Susan Griffin and a wider tradition of feminist criticism that aims to reassess the role of woman within myth, it is important to signal my difference from the meaning ascribed to this term by Lauter and Griffin. Lauter looks through a network of images in terms of woman's relationship to nature, seeking to find an 'essential nature of woman' (8), a 'female epistemology' (20) as well as to reevaluate the 'beauty of female sexual organs' (18). Nothing could be further from the aims of this study. First, I deny the existence of an 'essential nature of woman', second, I am not seeking a common language available to all women, as this denies and overlooks each woman's historical, chronological, and cultural's experiences, who given the differences of geographical location, modes of cultural knowledge, societal and political organizations, cannot possess the same language. I equally see it as completely unfruitful to revindicate the beauty of female sexual organs, as this has largely been done in canonical poetry and art, often reducing women's historical, cultural and psychological experiences to her body and the relationships this body establishes with others. Without rejecting her body and sexuality, there is a need to focus on all other aspects of life, as universal as those touched upon by the (often male) canon, to really see how women, historically and artistically, have had a different relationship with these 'universals' and why.

myths to the augmentation rather than the diminution of women's status and strength in society. Without renouncing the potential of myth for searching for self-realization and knowledge within existence, in their endeavour these three figures include a revaluation of mythical patterns to endow woman with a different role and representation in what has been a pervading masculine Western master narrative and enterprise.

The analysis of Varo, Garro and Boullosa's work shows that despite the fact that Carpentier initially conceived of his notion in opposition to surrealism, the two aesthetic approaches towards depicting reality have continued to enrich and feed each other in surrealist art and in subsequent generations of Latin American writers. By looking at specific texts and paintings, the two approaches will be seen to work as 'communicating vessels', while being simultaneously framed within a chronological and gendered development. The purpose of establishing such communication, is not to classify Varo, Garro and Boullosa's work under a single label, neither does it mean that all three convey the expression of surrealism and *lo real maravilloso* uniformly. Each figure possesses an individual aesthetic as well as a personal mode of contestation defined by their historical, social and personal milieu and therefore this study does not claim to be, neither is it interested in being, totalising. Each of them seeks out a concrete vocabulary and a specific set of metaphors and images adequate to express the search for that integrative and revelatory moment which has been defined as *le merveilleux* by the French surrealists or as *lo real maravilloso* by Carpentier. Therefore, I am not looking for a common language available to these three women, but for similar strategies of contestation that in themselves will establish the commonality.

It is also important to highlight that this study does not claim that there is a different female practice within literature or painting, neither does it assert that, by being women, their work is essentially different from men's. To investigate how these women have provided a different aesthetic representation of notions associated with surrealism as well as with *lo real maravilloso americano* does not mean starting a search for a particular female language or looking into a 'feminine' form of experience. Rather, I locate their strategies of response within the socially constructed category of woman and within the sociological and cultural field of women's writing and painting. The assertion that they realise a different aesthetic representation is therefore inscribed within a cultural and historical discourse that

does not emerge from their 'female' condition, but as a counter reaction that surges forth as consequence of how historically, the literary and artistic representation of woman has been either objectified and sexualised, or intellectually and creatively dismissed. This common strategy of response can be found, first by specifically focusing on how Varo, Garro and Boullosa have revised Classical, surrealist and American mythology, how they have translated their perception of the extraordinary, their yearning for integration of the self, their understanding of trance-like inspirational states or revelatory experiences and the elements they have used to provoke them. Secondly, by analysing the alternative set of images, metaphors, concepts and myths they have employed in order to make this experience and vision accessible, via artistic or literary representation, to readers and viewers.

In order to see how they have translated the aforementioned notions in a form that differs significantly from that established by the canon, some theoretical questions are addressed through the first chapter. What does the marvellous consist of within surrealism and how is this different from and similar to, Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano*? What are the particular problems that both notions might present for the woman artist or writer as well as for the woman spectator/reader? Therefore, it is important to clarify at this stage that when referring to *lo real maravilloso americano*, the term is understood in the strict sense given it by Carpentier. It encompasses all that literature which includes a discourse concerned with expressing a concrete, yet universal Latin American language as well as denoting social, cultural and historical experiences that might seem extraordinary from a western or European perspective (see *Ensayos* 154). Most of the examples I have selected belong to what criticism has called the literature of the 'Boom'. While some of the chosen works do not exactly subscribe to Carpentier's concept in as far as their writings are concerned with modes of knowledge other than the indigenous ones or they just enact a complete different aesthetic and world view, I have nonetheless chosen a set of authors who are in one way or another concerned with a 'collectively legendary side of a people's subconscious which exists on a mythic level in everyday life' (Picon n.p.), and authors who have had much contact and encounters with surrealism. It is equally important to mention that when referring to surrealism, the term is employed in exclusive reference to the Paris-based movement and the theories and aesthetic approaches that have emerged from it.

To overcome the previously noted difficulty of dealing with two different media, it is necessary to bear in mind two main points. The first is that ‘when accompanied by a set of standard and accepted differentiations between the institution of “literature” and “visual art” a conceptual framework for comparative study is established’ (Mitchell, *Picture* 85).¹⁶ The second is that in surrealist art, visual and textual expressions have often flowed into one another. In the case of surrealist women artists, this line is especially blurred. According to Whitney Chadwick: ‘literary expression played an even more central role in the lives of women artists associated with the [surrealist] group; in many cases it shaped their pictorial conceptions, in others it became the true *métier* through which they explored their surrealist vision [...] turning Varo’s [...] symbolic quests into narrative journeys, Kahlo’s self-portraits into autobiography’ (*Women* 219). Utilising this comparative framework, I am considering the profound relevance of painting for the cultural interchange between Mexico and Paris as well as the importance that narrative has played in the imagination of surrealist woman artists, seeing thus the connections between painting and literature as a particularly appropriate combination of media for the research of this thesis.¹⁷ It is for this reason that I incorporate an introductory section on Varo that deals exclusively with the understanding of her artistic production working as narratives.¹⁸

The relationship between surrealism and Mexican culture is an area that has received extensive critical attention. Octavio Paz is obviously a key figure in determining the importance, promotion and impact of surrealism in Mexico. Other renowned scholars in the field are Lourdes Andrade and Ida Rodríguez-Prampolini. Rodríguez-Prampolini has written about surrealist exiles in Mexico and the impact Mexican culture and society has had on their art. Andrade has researched extensively on Alice Rahon, but has also written brief monographs on Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo.¹⁹ Rodríguez-Prampolini’s book, *El surrealismo y el arte fantástico de México* is another key text in the field. This area of knowledge keeps

¹⁶ This set of accepted differentiations between literature and art are addressed throughout the first section of Chapter Two.

¹⁷ Varo’s paintings will be thus approached as narratives, where the focus is placed not merely on an examination of perspective, colour and composition, but mostly on the paintings’ semantics, the ‘stories’ they suggest and how these follow similar strategies of response to those of Boullosa and Garro.

¹⁸ It is for this reason that the chapter on Varo is substantially longer than the chapters on Garro and Boullosa, but this is a task I felt the need of undertaking, since the veracity and meaning of the term narrative painting needed to be resolved before moving into the paintings’ semantics.

¹⁹ Within the art series named ‘Artes de Mexico’ Lourdes Andrade edited two volumes devoted to the relationship between Mexico and Surrealism (see bibliography) treating the work of many exiles among them Remedios Varo, Benjamin Péret, Edward James, Alice Rahon, Leonora Carrington and Wolfgang Paalen. She wrote another valuable book of essays called *Para la desorientación general: Trece ensayos sobre México y el Surrealismo*.

attracting contemporary critics such as Dawn Adès or Valerie Fraser, proven by the 2005 colloquium in Essex University named 'Kahlo's Contemporaries', following the London exhibition of the same name. There seems however to be a tendency towards exploring the work of Frida Kahlo as the key figure for the interchange of ideas between surrealism and Mexican art, as well as an overall emphasis on visual art rather than literature. Therefore, the connection between exiled women surrealists, concretely Remedios Varo, and contemporary Mexican women writers has been given considerably less notice, constituting one of the main novelties of my study.

Now, I would like to suggest that there is a contemporary appropriation of surrealism whose theoretical and cultural practices are exemplified in writers such as Carmen Boullosa. The 'ism' of surrealism has seen many 'isms' after it. However, every movement that has a past has a future, despite the willingness of some to erase all other 'isms' from the face of contemporary culture. Surrealism might be dead today, but its legacies are far from being so.²⁰ Exploring and creating new formulations of the supernatural, the dream-like, the collective subconscious, the absurd, the arational, the instinctive or the search for a truer, supra reality have not ceased, nor have they lost, in many of today's 'postmodern writers', the strength that surrealism once championed. In fact, all the aforementioned formulations have taken a strong hold on the imagination of Boullosa, as is perceptible in all of her literary production to date. Therefore, one of the reasons for incorporating her work into this study (despite her not having been in direct touch with the Paris-based movement) is because I see it as providing a fruitful way of exploring the ongoing and multivalent legacy of surrealism within recent Mexican literature as well as a central discourse through which to understand fully her literary work. That is, I am not simply justifying surrealism as a context in which and through which to interpret her work and its effects, but as will be seen throughout Chapter Four, there are actual surreal elements -whether she was conscious of them or not - within her work, as well as there are other 'fantastical' elements that can be traced back to surrealism.²¹

²⁰ In an essay named 'Surrealism in the Sixties', J.H Mathews made a statement that seems to me to be entirely reasonable even today: 'over a period of years, surrealism has been pronounced dead so frequently the announcement has lost its ability to amuse, as it has been stripped of its capacity to convince' (226).

²¹ Although, as previously noted, practically no attention has been brought to Boullosa's work in relationship with surrealism, there are some critics which have mentioned it in passing when commenting upon some of her novels. For example, Eva Gundermann, in her monographic study of *Mejor Desaparece*, comments how the novel consists of 'una serie de episodios, viñetas o esbozos surrealistas de la vida familiar de los Ciarrosa' (36). Barbara Fick has similarly described the novel's structure as 'a series of short, discontinuous, impressionistic and almost surreal memories from the childhood of the narrator' (19).

The reason for choosing to include both visual and textual material also stems from a belief that a wider comprehension of the ideas presented in this thesis can be provided by connecting different expressions and areas of cultural experience. On the one hand, it provides a new insight, a different angle from which to comprehend the transcendence of surrealism in the ambit of Mexican culture from a gender perspective, amplifying the already existing critical work on the field. On the other, it provides a new lens through which to understand and read the specific work of Remedios Varo, Elena Garro and Carmen Boulosa while discerning common responsive strategies among them.

THE STRUCTURE

To proceed to the outlined study, this thesis is divided into four chapters organised in chronological order. This ordering is aimed at showing an evolution in the strategies of response from the person who was closest to surrealism and took its ideas most seriously, Remedios Varo, to the citational and parodic practices visible in the work of Carmen Boulosa. Elena Garro thus stands as the bridge between them. The first chapter looks at surrealism and Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano* in an effort to understand both theoretical approaches. Although being perfectly aware that many answers have already been provided to the debate around surrealism and *lo real maravilloso americano*, I nonetheless need to analyse them as a point of departure to show how there may remain traces from both in the work of Varo, Garro and Boulosa. Perhaps more importantly, to suggest their new mode of envisioning them. Throughout this chapter, I examine to what extent Breton and Carpentier's discourses signify, in their essence, an analogous phenomenological experience of perception, even if referring to different cultural phenomena that present distinct aesthetic results. I also explore whether both discourses present similarities as regards their representation of woman as the key to personal transformation, as an entrance into a truer and deeper reality and, if so, the problems this might constitute for the woman artist, writer or spectator.

The second chapter, divided into three sections, presents the analysis of the pictorial work of Remedios Varo. In the first section, I examine the controversies and usefulness of understanding her art as narrative painting and provide a structural analysis of several canvases to show how they function narratively. Simultaneously, the section considers whether these narrative patterns can, in their employment of theme, composition, perspective and colour, be related to the

literature of *lo real maravilloso americano*. In the second section, I analyse Varo's images of women and love. After evaluating her response towards these as conceived by the surrealists and in tandem with some images from Latin American novels that show a surrealist conception of woman and love; in a third section I look into Varo's revisiting of surrealist archetypical natural, hermetic, occult, and spiritual metaphors as well as at her enrichment of surrealism with an imagery whose narrative quality is nurtured in a Latin American ambience. By setting her 'quest symbology' in opposition to and in connection with surrealism and the literature of *lo real maravilloso americano*, it will be observed how Varo reformulates the woman artist's relationship to the process of creation at the same time as (re)vindicating her spiritual and visionary powers.

The third chapter, divided into two sections, examines the narratives of Elena Garro. The first section constitutes an analysis of two of Garro's short stories from the collection *La semana de colores*. These are 'La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas' and 'Era Mercurio'. My analysis includes an examination of love and the role woman is to play within it in 'Era Mercurio' in oppositional terms with those presented in 'La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas'. Through this comparison, I question to what extent Garro transformed the mainstream surrealist representation of the marvellous (anchored on woman's love) through a new conception which, strategically employing *lo real maravilloso americano*, is interlaced with several aspects of Mexican history and culture. The third section on Garro deals with the novel *La casa junto al río*, where I approach the text from the point of view of an existential quest towards self-knowledge. Concretely, I examine how the desire of expanding one's mode of existence and surroundings is sought in the novel through a mythical pattern that responds, in terms of female agency, to the mythical quests found in the novels of her Latin American male counterparts as well as to surrealist envisionings of the search for wholeness.

The fourth chapter deals with the narratives of Carmen Boullosa and presupposes a different kind of analysis in as far as her narratives are understood as a parodic collage of both surrealism and *lo real maravilloso americano*. The first section examines her novel *Llanto: novelas imposibles* by looking into the novel's illustration of a dual experience of history. This duality emerges through Boullosa's employment of an experience that has its roots in the surrealist *rencontre* but which opens up a fictional world characterised by the cultural, historical and temporal

disjunctions characteristic of *lo real maravilloso americano*. In a second reading, I analyse Boulosa's novel in its capacity to display 'herstories' within Mexican records, performing a revisionist perspective on the Mexican past. The second section is devoted to her novel *Duerme*, where I focus on the problem of identity politics as the result of the creation of a mythical body that draws from both surrealist experiences and the vocabulary of *lo real maravilloso americano* to construct itself. *Duerme* dialogues with Carpentier's concept while showing how indigenous modes of knowledge might have been appealing to the surrealists. Both surrealist experiences and previous Latin American representations of *lo real maravilloso americano* are parodied and reworked in order to explore Mexican history and modern love relationships by examining gender and racial identity as cultural inscriptions.

In the conclusion, I go back to some of the literary and visual images that have been analysed throughout the whole study underscoring the similar strategies that the three figures have adopted, concretely in relationship to the representation of woman, love, creativity and the conceptualisation of a marvellous reality. Uniting the three case studies in the conclusion enables us to see how they indeed have created a counter aesthetic of 'revisionist mythmaking' that genders the entrance into what surrealism and Carpentier have named the marvellous realm.

CHAPTER ONE: SURREALISM AND *LO REAL MARAVILLOSO AMERICANO*: THE MUSE, THE SORCERESS AND THE EARTH WOMAN.

The present chapter examines the two aesthetic approaches that in subsequent chapters are compared and explored through the practical analysis of Varo's art and Garro and Boullosa's narratives: surrealism, mainly viewed through Breton's writings, and Carpentier's envisioning of *lo real maravilloso americano*. Despite this term having been used for a long time now, its meaning and scope is only entirely apposite for the practical work of this thesis if one takes as a point of departure the understanding of Carpentier's term as reformulating and complementing prior surrealist theoretical suggestions (see Chiampi 43).¹ I am aware that the relationship between Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano* and surrealism is problematic and has been largely misunderstood, as well as of the fact that a vast amount of critical studies have been devoted to analysing the relationship of both aesthetic approaches with magical realism or the fantastic within contemporary Latin American literature.² This chapter does not constitute an attempt to resolve the difficulties between Carpentier and the culture of surrealism within Latin America. Rather, it comprises a theoretical introduction to an already well-known field of knowledge that aims to illustrate first, how in spite of the gulf that separates surrealism and *lo real maravilloso americano*, they are, in their fundamental nature, referring to an analogous phenomenological experience of perception. Second, to suggest that when the image of woman is used as a symbol for *lo real maravilloso americano*, it relegates woman to the same position of cultural or discourse category as surrealism does, and therefore to suggest how she is as far away from any tangible reality as the European, surrealist mythical woman was.

¹ Chiampi has pointed out how 'La afirmación de lo real maravilloso como signo de nuestra cultura fue motivada por la disidencia de Carpentier por el surrealismo, pero las tesis expuestas en el prólogo revelan la doble postura de aceptación de los postulados surrealistas (los aspectos mágicos e irracionales de lo real) y de rechazo de mecanismos de búsqueda de la sobrenaturalidad en la literatura' (44).

² According to Gerald Martin, 'lo real maravilloso [...] was effectively the manifesto of what, many years later, would be known as Magical Realism' (190). Angel Flores's 1955 article 'Magic Realism in Spanish American Fiction' is one of the first attempts to address this debate, followed in 1967 by Leal's 'El realismo mágico en la literatura Hispanoamericana'. After these first studies on the topic came many others such as Carlos Santander 'El tiempo maravilloso en la obra de Ajejo Carpentier' (1968), Ángel Balbuena Briones, 'Una cala en el realismo mágico' (1969), Fernando Alegría 'Alejo Carpentier: realismo mágico' (1970) or Graziella Macías de Cartaya 'Lo real maravilloso en *El siglo de la luz*' (1971). Perhaps the two most detailed analyses which attempted to create a theoretical method for *lo real maravilloso americano* are Irleamar Chiampi's *El realismo maravilloso* and Graciela N. Ricci Della Grisa's *Realismo mágico y conciencia mítica en América Latina*.

Now, the search at the centre of both surrealism and Carpentier's discourse is obviously not exclusive to them. Rather, they are both looking for that instant in which one can 'touch' or experience the essence of the world itself. This experience finds analogies in other areas of knowledge and indeed can be said to relate to a central problem at the very basis of modern thought. That is, it has been called the 'thing in itself' in philosophy or the 'scientific truth' in sciences. However, while philosophy or science search for such experience through a closer observation of the world at hand and through logical processes of thought which constitute the very basis of Western rationality, both surrealism and *lo real maravilloso* aim to reach such an absolute moment precisely by a distortion of what we (westerners) take to be the real appearance of things, be that an object or an experience. It is thus through the rejection of an overtotalising Western rationality that surrealism and *lo real maravilloso* seek to touch, see or attain the 'true reality', the 'thing in itself'. Their descriptions do not necessarily coincide with the world we usually perceive, but they are nonetheless powerful and profound. It is therefore this mode of 'seeking' which intimately unites these two discourses while simultaneously separating them from others.

In order to illustrate the two aforementioned points, I will first analyse Breton's surrealist discourse, focusing particularly on surrealist experiences and on how these have signified the main access to the surrealist marvellous. Then I will move on to explore how *amour fou* constituted the most significant of these experiences and how the mythical woman turned into the means to both access and represent surreality. Secondly, I will look into what Carpentier conceived of as *lo real maravilloso americano* by examining first, the conception of reality that it departs from and next, how this reality was organised into a concrete type of literature and language through the writer's employment of that reality as a source of inspiration. Afterwards, with examples taken from Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*, Octavio Paz's poetry, Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* and Miguel Ángel Asturias' *Mulata de Tal*, I will show how the representation of the mythical woman emerges in their literary work as the main point of intersection between the two differing approaches. Although Cortázar's *Rayuela* and Octavio Paz's poetry are not particular examples of *lo real maravilloso americano*, they both present notable affinities with surrealism and constitute examples of the repercussion the movement had within Latin American culture. In the case of *Rayuela*, the reconsideration of surrealism, the Paris connection and the Europeanised alienated hero present obvious similarities with

Los pasos perdidos. That is, both Carpentier and Cortázar deal in the aforementioned novels with the 'superimposition of their enlarged, partly Europeanised, consciousness on Latin American reality' (Martin 148). Perhaps more importantly, Paz and Cortázar have been chosen because their representation of woman as sorceress, *femme enfant*, 'door to the infinite' or 'the one who lets man see through her eyes' (Paz, *Libertad bajo Palabra* 187) is most apt to understand how woman's characterisation presupposes one of the main points of intersections between modern Latin American literature and surrealism.

The conceptualisation of woman as 'the marvellous' in both aesthetic approaches emerges through two main elements. Firstly, Carpentier stresses the need for universality within the language of *lo real maravilloso americano* so that Latin American culture can speak openly to a wide range of readers, and within a vast amount of fictional works, this universality is achieved by means of the notion of love and the mythical woman.³ Secondly, Carpentier blames surrealism for searching for the marvellous through artificial objects seemingly forgetting that, as Simone de Beauvoir has pointed out, 'woman is unequivocally a being of flesh and blood. One comes across her, not in a half-dream, but wide awake, on a commonplace day that has its date like all the other days in the calendar' (262). If the surrealist quest for the marvellous was carried out through woman, this means that, even if ignored by surrealism, this woman is a tangible, cultural, historical, social and biological entity, as real as the surrounding reality of the Latin American continent Carpentier was concerned with. A different matter is what specific elements constitute in each case the appeal to culturally different women or whether Carpentier considered European women less 'authentic', as certainly expressed in *Los pasos perdidos*.

It is necessary to compare the various complementary and contradictory aspects of Breton and Carpentier in order to understand Varo, Garro and Boullosa's ambivalent dialogues with both approaches towards reality, art and literature, as well as to understand how their strategy of response might be carried out. To explain the common basis of Carpentier and Breton's aesthetic concepts is essential for understanding the significance that Varo, Garro and Boullosa bestow on magical and surreal experiences vis-à-vis the process of creation. An examination of how

³ Some of these works are, besides the ones already mentioned, Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* or *El amor en los tiempos del Cólera*, Carlos Fuentes' *Cantar de ciegos*, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and *Diana o la cazadora solitaria*. Miguel Ángel Asturias' *Leyendas de Guatemala* or *Hombres de Maíz*.

both notions of the marvellous converge in their representation of woman is necessary for comprehending how both aesthetic approaches towards reality might present specific problems for the female creator and spectator/reader, as it is precisely this element which turns into the main point of contestation in the three women's work. Hence, there is a need to embed their responsive strategies in opposition to Breton and Carpentier's theorizations, as it is basic to understand what came before in order to see how the two can coexist in their work. Perhaps more importantly, this stage is important because their art and literature do not present themselves autonomously as a new apparatus of representation, but rather they clearly acknowledge that they have first understood and assimilated what was already there in order to go beyond it.

THE WORD MARVELLOUS

Carpentier noted how 'La palabra maravilloso ha perdido con el tiempo y con el uso su verdadero sentido [...] hasta tal punto, que se produce, con la palabra "maravilloso", lo "maravilloso", una confusión de tipo conceptual tan grande, como la que se forma con la palabra "barroco"' (*Ensayos* 143). It is not my intention to engage in a discussion of the etymological confusion created by the word marvellous, although it is necessary to clarify one specific position. The marvellous is not a fixed expression belonging to a concrete language or culture, but quite the contrary. It is a constituent of the narratives of all cultures and times that serves to account for the inclusion of supernatural beings and extraordinary events ranging from the gods of Classical mythology to the dragons of Chinese folklore (see Mabile 18-23). Therefore, the term does not necessarily include the beautiful, but the extraordinary and unexpected.⁴ The marvellous has been used since Aristotle's *Poetics* to refer to the irrational elements included in the epic, and later on employed throughout Golden Age literature to refer to the 'aesthetics of admiratio' of the novel, named indeed 'maravillas' by Spanish writers such as María de Zayas (Olivares 52). However, it is only in the twentieth century that we find a definition of its formal characteristics in the works of Vladimir Propp, Irene Bessièrè, Louis Vax, Roger Caillois and Tzvetan Todorov. Since Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*,

⁴ 'Lo extraordinario no es bello ni hermoso por fuerza. Ni es bello ni es feo; es más que nada asombroso por lo insólito. Todo lo insólito, todo lo asombroso, todo lo que se sale de las normas establecidas es maravilloso' (Carpentier *Ensayos* 143). It is worth mentioning one of Carpentier's comments in this respect: 'No debemos olvidar que el surrealismo (y Breton lo decía en su manifiesto: todo lo maravilloso es bello, sólo lo maravilloso es bello) perseguía lo maravilloso a través de las cosas prefabricadas. Pero hay que recordar también que Breton, al igual que Perrault, cuando hablaba de lo maravilloso no consideraba que lo maravilloso fuese admirable por bello sino por insólito' (*Ensayos* 146).

the marvellous came to be understood as a specific type of narrative with a concrete structure, which is perhaps best exemplified by references to the tales written by Perrault or other tales and legends in which elves, fairies, demons or witches abound. Irlemar Chiampi provides a useful differentiation. She says that on the one hand the marvellous

es lo "extraordinario" lo insólito, lo que escapa al curso diario de las cosas y de lo humano. Maravilloso es lo que contiene la maravilla, del latín *mirabilia*, o sea, cosas 'admirables' (bellas o execrables, buenas u horribles) opuestas a los *naturalia*. En *mirabilia* está presente el mirar: "mirar con intensidad", "ver con atención", o incluso, "ver a través de" (54, my emphasis).

In this sense of the term, the marvellous expresses a quantitative difference with the human, that is, it becomes an exaggeration or an unusual aspect of the human and therefore preserves some of its essence (Chiampi 54). On the other hand she argues that the marvellous differs radically from the human, 'se trata de la misma naturaleza de los hechos y objetos. Pertenecen a otra esfera [...] no tienen explicación racional' (54).

While these studies were mostly interested in defining a literary genre by seeking several structural features operating in a diversity of literary works with the aim of distinguishing between different narrative forms, both the surrealists and Carpentier were concerned with something quite different. Even if the term was borrowed from this old tradition, they employed it to refer to the effects that everyday reality could exert upon the emotional/intellectual realm as well as to refer to the nature of that reality *per se*. Namely, they were concerned with expressing an 'ontology' of the real: 'En algún momento privilegiado, la realidad escondida se levanta de su tumba de lugares comunes y coincide con el hombre. En ese momento paradisíaco, por primera y única vez, un instante y para siempre, somos de verdad' (Paz, *Búsqueda* 13). Explicitly, they were interested with the potential that a specific object (in the case of the surrealists) and the historical, social and natural reality of Latin America (in the case of Carpentier), possessed for generating an inner experience that could lead to the perception of an enlarged and more meaningful reality that would reveal some sort of 'truth' within the being, and in turn, the potential value of this new perception for literary or artistic inspiration. Both the surrealist marvellous and Carpentier's are therefore referring primarily to a human condition and a mode of perception rather than to the structural

characteristics that define a literary genre, even if that mode of perception is later on employed for literary and artistic purposes.

THE SURREALIST MARVELLOUS: EXPERIENCE

Hijo del deseo, nace el objeto surrealista (Paz, *Búsqueda* 12).

Throughout his writings, Breton refers to an unexpected, arbitrary situation where a collision between objective and subjective activity takes place with no conscious action on the subject's part. This is the surrealist experience par excellence and it is named the encounter or *rencontre*. There, the subject feels the engagement of the emotional realm as he/she perceives the event linked by continuity with others in her/his life, endowing it with significance and leading to the visualisation of an image, be this in the mind or in external reality. This is how the experience is integrating (within the self) as well as visionary. Breton bestows a figurative role on electricity and light in the description of such an image, arguing how 'it is, as it were, from the fortuitous juxtaposition of the two terms that a particular light has sprung, *the light of the image*, to which we are infinitely sensitive [...] reason's role being limited to taking note of, and appreciating, the luminous phenomenon' (*Manifestoes* 37, emphasis Breton's).

He then goes on to describe how the visionary experience has been translated into poetic expression by writers such as Louis Aragon, Philippe Soupault, Robert Vitrac or Max Morise. These examples of automatic writing serve overall to comprehend how the *rencontre* is explored in aesthetic terms and how it was the proposition of making direct contact with daily objects in a bold manner that supplied surrealism with a different approach to poetry and art.⁵ Through this contact, the aim is the dissolution of both object and subject. That is, there is no object as such, as this is now part of the subject. There is no creator, but only a poetic force that produces inexplicable images. Octavio Paz expressed the surrealist inspirational experience in the following terms:

Revelación exterior, la inspiración rompe el dédalo subjetivista. Es algo que nos asalta apenas la conciencia cabecea, algo que irrumpe por una puerta que sólo se abre cuando se cierran las de la vigilia. Revelación interior, hace tambalear nuestra creencia en la unidad e identidad de esa

⁵ Automatic writing as conceived of by Breton is characterised by what according to him is a 'main virtue' (*Manifestoes* 38). This is, that it is arbitrary to the highest degree, 'either because it contains an immense amount of seeming contradiction or because one of its terms is strangely concealed' (*Manifestoes* 38).

misma conciencia: no hay yo y dentro de cada uno de nosotros pelean varias voces (*Búsqueda* 59).

The *rencontre* thus signifies an intense experience that constitutes a pathway to poetic inspiration through the transformation of consciousness, the experience of the marvellous leading to the creation of an extraordinary image.⁶

Within the *rencontre*, the object found or *trouvaille* holds a special relevance and its main power resides in the strong influence it is able to exert upon the subject's mind. The objective component is the most powerful constituent of the experience, and the *trouvaille* itself is one specific entity of external reality (a glove, a person, a building) that magnetically draws the subject's attention. Now, if the *trouvaille* possesses such overwhelming effect this is solely because the subject already had an unconscious, pre-existing idea of it: 'this object, in its matter, in its form, I more or less predicted' (Breton, *Mad Love* 13). Although the found object differs slightly from what the subject had initially foreseen, it attracts her/him precisely because one is able to recognise in it her/his previous wish.⁷ It is thus in desire where the force of the *trouvaille* dwells, and throughout *Nadja* and *Mad Love*, Breton stresses how the *trouvaille's* power derives from its ability to embody his desires: 'what attracts me in such a manner of seeing is that, as far as the eye can see, it recreates desire' (*Mad Love* 15). This is not repressed desire in the strict psychoanalytic sense, but rather 'this is more or less conscious desire' (*Mad Love* 32). We find here one of the main surrealist innovations. Contrary to Freud, it is not the dormant significance of the object or dream that concerns Breton, but the certainty that these sudden desires are released by the visible content of the object itself. That is, the object, like the dream, becomes a self-contained source of knowledge and experience.

Even if the appeal of the *trouvaille* might work somewhat consciously, there are repressed forces framing the *rencontre* as a whole that do indeed refer back to Freud. Breton explains the uncertainty about how these forces operate through the key

⁶ In aesthetic representation, the image is often bestowed with a palpable and tactile quality so that besides appealing to logic and reason, it also appeals to the senses. For example, the sensorial appeal of Max Ernst's textures, achieved through frottage and decalcomania, Meret Oppenheim's *Breakfast in Fur Teacup* (1936) or May Ray's series of solarised pictures and rayographs.

⁷ 'What is delightful here is the dissimilarity which exists between the object wished for and the object found' (*Mad Love* 13, emphasis Breton's). Breton recalls how, walking around the Flea Market, he and Giacometti hit on a mask that persuaded them to think persistently about its existence. Afterwards, they both became conscious of how this mask was fortuitously related with the problems Giacometti was undergoing with his artistic research. The mask helped Giacometti to overcome some of his doubts and so Breton found it a good example to formulate his conviction about how 'the finding of an object serves exactly the same purpose as the dream'. He meant it 'in the sense that it frees the individual from paralysing affective scruples, comforts him and makes him understand that the obstacle he might have thought insurmountable is cleared' (*Mad Love* 32).

term of 'objective chance' (*hasard objectif*).⁸ In 'Surrealism Reappraised', Shattuck differentiates two types of human experience. The first is integrative insofar as all things and events are linked by a sense of continuity, provoking wonder and a reckoning with life. In this type of experience, we enter the world within our reach and everything acquires significance. This experience incorporates *destiny*: 'the idea of personal fulfilment or failure in an area of events in which one earns one's place' (Shattuck 18). The other is an experience of detachment, where a feeling of senselessness pervades, where things occur without seeming explanation, and where everything is devoid of significance or structure. One feels despair. This experience incorporates *chance*: the 'blind accident working as the minimal propulsive force between one instant and the next but never bestowing meaning on happenings thus touched off [sic.]' (Shattuck 18-9). Shattuck continues to explain how both experiences cannot be so easily separated, and how our modern notion of fate includes both: destiny determined by a game of chance (19).

This is very similar to what objective chance constitutes for Breton. He describes the mysterious character of particular events, yet these cannot be seen as mere coincidences, for as Shattuck has pointed, 'their anomalous randomness deprives them of meaning, yet their singularity fills them with heightened significance and even ominousness' (20). In *Mad Love*, Breton arrives at a seemingly conclusive definition of objective chance as the 'encounter of an external causality with an internal necessity' (21), a definition which coincides with Mabille's process of understanding the marvellous: 'the problem arises from reconciling human necessity which stems from our desires, with a natural necessity of implacable laws. These are the questions that allow us to reach an exact definition of the marvellous' (Mabille 7). On the one hand, chance is what provides a magical unity to the experience (magic circumstantial). On the other, the key to this 'magic' is that chance is working to the benefit of desire, so that its repressed forces are so strong that they alone can make the *rencontre* happen (*Mad Love* 24). In sum, it presupposes at once a conscious choice and an inexplicable predestination, and thus to live a life in which objective chance rules, would mean to attain surreality.

⁸ This is a difficult term. It was borrowed from Hegel to express a mix between destiny and causality but involving necessity. In *Communicating Vessels* Breton uses this concept as part of his modern materialism vocabulary, thus referring to it in Engel's terms as causality, that is, as a manifestation of necessity. In *Mad Love*, objective chance is understood as a manifestation of repressed desire: 'at the very heart of this hesitation which comes over the mind when it tries to define chance [...] this would leap up to its definition by the modern materialists, according to whom chance is the form making manifest the exterior necessity which traces its path in the human unconscious (boldly trying to interpret and reconcile Engels and Freud at this point)' (21).

At the beginning of *Nadja*, Breton describes his novel as a narration of the most decisive episodes of his life. These are conceived 'only insofar as the mercy of chance [...] temporarily escaping my control, admitting me to an almost forbidden world of parallels, petrifying coincidences, and reflexes peculiar to each individual [...] casts flashes of light that would make you see' (19). What he means by 'see' is clairvoyance, the gaining of knowledge through an integrating experience, the possibility this gives the subject of perceiving the world with completely new eyes and the prospect of using such vision as a source of artistic or poetic inspiration. The issue at stake here is the surrealist conviction that those experiences lead to new associations that could not possibly have occurred to the subject otherwise. This is due to their 'absolutely unexpected, violently fortuitous character, and the kind of suspect ideas they provoke- a way of transforming gossamer into spider web' (*Nadja* 19). The fortuitous character provided by objective chance brings a disquieting nature to the found object. This comes from the fact that even though the found object appears in a different form than the one expected, the subject is able to distinguish it from the rest, where the *trouvaille* appears 'unique, doubtless, among so many other fabricated objects' (*Mad Love* 13). The surprise factor of finding what one wanted in a different form from that imagined, while at the same time being able to recognise that it is exactly *that thing*, endows the found object with an uncanny quality denominated *le trouble*. Thus, Breton argues how 'this unrest [*le trouble*] quite probably bears witness to the paroxysmal disturbance current in logical thought when it has to explain the fact that the order, the goals, and so on of nature do not coincide objectively with what they are in the mind of man' (*Mad Love* 21).

To summarise, in surrealist experiences 'natural necessity may agree with human necessity in such an extraordinary and exciting way that the two determinations are indiscernible' (Breton, *Mad Love* 21). When the problem is presented and its contradictions overcome, it allows us to reach an exact definition of the marvellous (Mabille 7). The moment of synthesis that the *rencontre* brings about in the subject's mind is the surrealist moment par excellence: 'We have attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, of finally becoming one. This final unification is the supreme aim of surrealism' (Breton, *What is surrealism?* 116). The idea is that this state of contradiction between external and internal reality is the cause of man's current

unhappiness and thus in the synthetic surrealist project, consciousness will be transformed and a renewed contact with the world will be available for man. In a similar way, the artist, once his consciousness has been challenged by this inspirational moment, is ready to proceed to the creation of the image. Hence, the surrealist marvellous possesses two levels of definition: the 'trance' experience of revelation and its subsequent conversion into art.⁹ It is therefore both internal and external to the subject: as a human condition and as an aesthetic representation. Only understanding this can we comprehend the common statement that surrealism, as an order coming out of DADA disorder, was not meant as a literary or artistic movement but as an attitude towards the human spirit and the mind, and as a certain conception of the world: 'the movement was envisaged by its founders not as a new artistic school, but as a means of knowledge' (Nadeau 86), a revolutionary enterprise willing to transform man as well as his reality.

It was particularly in this concern for the transformation of man's spirit and his reality that the first serious problem emerged within the movement. If one wanted to wholly emancipate man's spirit, was it not necessary to previously free the society in which man lived? : 'the liberation of the mind, the express aim of surrealism, demands as a primary condition [...] the liberation of man [...]. The surrealists rely entirely, for the bringing about of human liberation, on the proletarian revolution' (Breton, *What is Surrealism?* 115). It has often been said that surrealism formed 'the first important group of artists since the Romantics to attempt political action in order to improve society' (Shattuck 15), but this political action has not been without great controversy. In 'Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of European Intelligentsia', Benjamin highlights the materialist content of the *rencontre*, a gesture that aims to reconcile surrealism's revolutionary political agenda with his own. Wolin assesses Benjamin's essay as an attempt to clarify a 'debate which had begun to rage in surrealist circles at the time over whether surrealism should place itself directly in the service of revolution [...] or should instead work towards preserving the autonomy of spirit in defiance of the party in matters concerning art and literature' (127-8). Benjamin's essay brings to light a new type of experience within his philosophy, *profane illumination*. He argues how 'it is a cardinal error to believe that, of "surrealist experiences" we know only the religious ecstasies or the ecstasies of drugs', affirming that 'the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination [...] resides in profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological

⁹ A conversion that will ideally help towards the transformation of consciousness and society.

inspiration' (*Reflections* 179).¹⁰ In Benjamin's terms, this experience is violent and troublesome but works therapeutically, enabling a new manner of seeing as well as allowing the subject to achieve direct and true contact with the external world.

According to Wolin 'like religious illumination, *profane illumination* captures the power of spiritual intoxication in order to produce a revelation, a vision or insight which transcends the prosaic state of empirical reality' (132). Therefore, Benjamin saw in the surrealist integrative experience a pathway for clairvoyance and a model for poetic praxis. This was because, through the incorporation of ordinary objects into aesthetic exploration, the surrealists were both transgressing the dichotomy between art and life as well as reshaping the previous concepts that ruled art itself, and this was precisely 'the posture that the arts must assume if they are to cease becoming a matter of indifference' (Wolin 132). However, Benjamin's idea of transcendence cannot be embodied in the pretensions of art for art's sake, but rather in that which is tangible, that has a history, 'for histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further. We penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognise in it the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday' (*Reflections* 190). Benjamin criticises the surrealist emphasis on a romanticised and abstract notion of the mystery arguing that this leads to images of aesthetic consolation rather than to revolutionary images: 'the aesthetic of the painter, of the poet, in *état de surprise*, of art as the reaction of one surprised, is enmeshed in a number of pernicious romantic prejudices' (*Reflections* 189).¹¹

In *What is Literature?* Jean Paul Sartre realises a different critique yet arrives at a very similar conclusion. Sartre talks about 'surrealism's quietism' (139) to refer to the fact that the surrealist annihilation of all contradictions renders man's individual action impossible. For him, the surrealist man's attempt to reconcile himself with the proletariat 'remains utopian because he is not seeking a public but an ally' (142). Like Benjamin, he sees that surrealism's connection with revolution remains purely formal as their indignation and hatred are expressed abstractly by a conception of

¹⁰ This is an 'experience of intoxication' (Schweppenhäuser 36), and the intoxicating powers can come from poetry, dreams, drugs, hypnosis or objects among other things.

¹¹ This surprise state was part of the new spirit championed by Apollinaire which the surrealist group claimed to be representing: 'Surprise is our greatest new resource. It is by surprise, by the rank it accords surprise, that the new spirit is distinguished from all previous artistic and literary movements [...]. There is no need, in making a discovery, to select by rules, even rules approved with taste, a subject classified as sublime. One can start with an everyday subject: for the poet a falling handkerchief can be the lever with which he will raise a whole universe' (Apollinaire, *L'esprit nouveau* in Nadeau 56).

radical negation which 'remains outside history, in the moment and in the eternal simultaneously' (Sartre, *What is Literature?* 142). This metaphysical expression of their revolt is for Sartre the one which precisely leaves the world intact, seeing it as an ideal, for 'the total abolition surrealism dreams of does not harm anybody precisely because it is total. It is an absolute located outside history, a poetic fiction' (Sartre, *What is Literature?* 140). It is however fair to say that Breton himself was aware of this impossibility of synthesis between the position of historical materialism and the aims of surrealism, and as Paz has commented, 'la imposibilidad de participar directamente en la lucha social fue, y es, una herida para el surrealismo' (*Búsqueda* 19).¹²

The surrealists found themselves with one foot in the political terrain and with the other in that of dreams, love and desire. It seems that (at least for those who remained within Breton's circle) they finally chose to move straight into preoccupations concerned with the fulfilment of one's own life desires rather than remaining content within the sphere of the politicians who promised but did not take action.¹³ Surrealism's revolutionary forces thus centred on love, and the image of woman became an emblem of their revolution (Raaberg 4). As a means of introducing the examination of her representation, it is worth mentioning one final point. By the 1930s, love claims a central role in surrealism. It becomes the 'problem of problems' as it incarnates objective chance in the world of everyday reality: 'El azar objetivo es una forma paradójica de la necesidad, la forma por excelencia del amor: conjunción de la doble soberanía de libertad y destino' (Paz, *Búsqueda* 21). The *rencontre* is not only restrained to objects, but people can, and often do, take the position of the object. The person literally becomes a *trouvaille*, leading to the key experience of *amour fou*: 'Este encuentro capital, decisivo [...] se llama amor, persona amada' (Paz, *Búsqueda* 21). Now, the *trouvaille* or loved person that one encounters conveys 'convulsive beauty' (Breton, *Mad Love* 12). 'The *trouvaille*, whether it be artistic, scientific, philosophic or as useless as anything, is enough to undo the beauty of everything beside it' (*Mad Love* 13) and furthermore 'convulsive beauty will be veiled-erotic, fixed-explosive, magic-circumstantial, or it will not be' (*Mad*

¹² It is interesting that Paz does not attribute the failure to surrealism itself, but rather to the radical and authoritative position Communism was acquiring: 'los revolucionarios políticos no mostraron mucha simpatía por servidores tan independientes [...]. Sin duda el carácter cada vez más autoritario y antidemocrático del comunismo estalinista, la estrechez y rigidez de sus doctrinas estético-políticas, y sobre todo, la represión de la que fueron síntoma, entre otros, los procesos de Moscú, contribuyeron a hacer irreparable la ruptura' (*Búsqueda* 19).

¹³ Nadeau mentions how 'the moment they observed that the 'new man' being created in the USSR did not differ essentially from the man they know, they broke with the communists who passed for the authentic representatives of the political and social revolution' (240).

Love 19).¹⁴ Indeed, 'the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact, only the marvelous is beautiful' (*Manifestoes* 14).

The idea of beauty is key for understanding the surrealist marvellous. This beauty is indeed the marvellous itself. As has been previously noted, one should remember that Breton mainly meant the marvellous in the sense of the extraordinary and the unexpected. This is in fact the beauty the quotidian can achieve through its strangeness and singularity. Yet, strictly speaking, the beauty of nature or daily objects can never be marvellous insofar as it is precisely ordinary, we see them everyday, they are familiar to us and therefore do not presuppose any extraordinary quality. Therein lies the key to understand Breton's idea, that is, marvellous beauty is an ideal concept, it does not reside in things themselves but rather within the heightened sensibility and spirit of the one that contemplates or discovers them. It resides in the privileged vision of the subject, and it is bounded to time and history: 'the marvelous [...] partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us: they are the romantic ruins, the modern mannequin, or any other symbol capable of affecting the human sensibility for a period of time' (Breton, *Manifestoes* 16).

Abstract and ideal as this marvellous beauty is, it is contradictorily used to refer to something very concrete and real, the body of a woman. Indeed, her status acquires one of the significances given to the term marvellous as she partakes of its meaning as 'ver a través de' (Chiampi 54), for it is the beauty of 'woman' (as a universal or mythical entity) which can open man's eyes, making him *see through* the ordinary, letting him appreciate all the connections among the elements of the adjacent world. In this respect Beauvoir argues how 'beauty for Breton is not a contemplated idea but a reality that is revealed -hence exists- only through passion; there is no beauty in the world except through woman' (264). Thus, if only the marvellous is beautiful and if the only beauty in the world is that revealed through passion for a woman, it is clear that the marvellous resides in 'this frail and imaginary body of a woman that we admire today' (*Mad Love* 32).

¹⁴ The same applies to the *rencontre* in general: 'the value of the image depends upon the beauty of the spark obtained' (Breton, *Manifestoes* 37), and it is in such beauty that 'we recognize the marvelous precipitate of desire' (Breton, *Mad Love* 14).

WOMEN'S LOST STEPS

'Woman is the being who projects the greatest shadow or the greatest light into our dreams' (Baudelaire, *Révolution* 132).

Nowadays, a vast amount of studies on women and surrealism have shown the conflictive position of women within the movement. Since Xavière Gauthier's pioneering study *Surréalisme et Sexualité*,¹⁵ many art historians and feminist critics have elucidated who these women were as well as analysing their work with the critical specificity they deserve.¹⁶ Of these studies, it is worth noting Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* as one of the best 'recuperative' endeavours in the field. The literature on women and surrealism is exhaustive and extensive, often placing an emphasis on their objectified position within the movement. However, what specifically concerns us here is to enumerate and illustrate the characteristics that made woman the mythical figure and embodiment of the marvellous, in order to then see how these characteristics constitute the main point of connection with Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano* and the main element of contestation in the work of Varo, Garro and Boullosa.

Let us start by taking into account Louis Aragon's documentation of the following surrealist experiment:

We hung a woman on the ceiling of an empty room, and everyday receive visits from anxious men bearing heavy secrets [...]. The visitors [...] are helping to elaborate this formidable machine for killing what is in order to accomplish and what is not [sic]. At number 15, Rue de Grenelle, we have opened a romantic Inn for unclassifiable ideas and continuing revolt. All that still remains of hope in this despairing universe will turn its last, raving glances toward our pathetic stall. It is a question of formulating a new declaration of the rights of man (in Nadeau 97).

The hope was here placed in the body of woman as the key object that enabled a clairvoyant experience through romantic associations, resulting in her unveiling of particular truths to the men who contemplated her. She is therefore the component of the objective world (*trouvaille*) provoking the exaltation of consciousness, making the subject 'see', leading to the emergence of 'unclassifiable ideas' and to the reach of

¹⁵ Throughout her study, Gauthier contrasts in psychoanalytic terms the image of woman in surrealist poetry and photography. She concludes that while woman was idealised as muse and goddess in poetry, her body was dismembered and attacked in photography.

¹⁶ Between 1924 and 1933, the most dynamic period of surrealism, not a single woman was included as an official member, although they started to be active in exhibitions after 1929. After 1935, Leonor Fini, Meret Oppenheim and Leonora Carrington were included within the male group. In the 1940s and 1950s the presence of Remedios Varo, Lee Miller, Annie Le Brun, Kay Sage, Dorothea Tanning and others became more influential and considered (see Chadwick, *Women*, Chapter One).

surreality. As Beauvoir puts it, 'she is like the spoon-shoe, the table-wolf, the marble-sugar that the poet finds at the flea market or invents in a dream; she shares in the secret of familiar objects suddenly revealed in their true nature' (264). The work of art or the object found, all submitting to the surrealist criteria based on the object's susceptibility to provoke a significant change in those who encounter it, is likened to the same affective response that is evoked by desire towards the woman one loves. The force she exerts upon men, partly triggered by her beauty, partly by the love or desire she can make man feel, is according to Aragon what can lead towards a new declaration of the rights of man. Namely, towards revolution.

There are other metaphors of the sight of the marvellous that do not relate specifically to the female body: melting watches, a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table or a wardrobe filled with clouds. Yet, as love turned into the sole medium that could reconcile man with life, the body of woman became the dominant metaphor to express such synthesis.¹⁷ Nadeau seems to take for granted that, after being acquainted with Breton and Éluard, men could not possibly love as they used to do: 'the woman whom they have magnified more than any other poets has become the living bread of every day [...] the alpha and omega of every search' (243). Chadwick comments how women like Eileen Agar, Frida Kahlo, Meret Oppenheim or Kay Sage were 'surrealist discoveries', living proof of 'the efficacy of the chance encounter and the eruption of the marvellous into the world of everyday reality' (*Women* 9). 'Woman' is represented by Éluard, Breton, Aragon or Péret as muse, *femme-enfant*, *corps exquis*, mysterious, gifted, sorceress, nocturnal, yet radiant.

Breton's 'A Letter to Seers' reveals that young women are:

The only tributaries and the only guardians of the Secret. I am speaking of the great Secret, of the Unrevealable [...] It is your role, Mesdames, to make us confuse the accomplishable fact and the accomplished fact [...] because there is not one among you who could not render us this immense service [...]. Give us brilliant stones [...] Here is love now, here are the soldiers of the past! (*Manifestoes* 197-203).

This letter shows how the woman who entered the mind of Breton and other surrealists was the only being capable of expressing the flickering reality lying beyond consciousness. She was the correspondence that could reveal the great secret, a mode of poetic knowledge, the primary element of the imagination, the one able to inspire images in which opposites will meet, leading to the sight of the

¹⁷ 'L'idée de l'amour est le seule capable de réconcilier tout homme momentanément ou non, avec l'idée de vie' (Breton, *Révolution* 65).

cosmic analogy and provoking an inner transformation of sorts. This only happens, however, as far as 'woman' remains 'metaphor', poetry or allegory, as long as she continues to open the door for man's encounters with the irrational. A mythical conception of woman can be appreciated throughout surrealist poetry, prose and art: she is Mélusine, Gradiva, Venus. Thus for Éluard, 'all poetic expression rested on Eros, and it was woman who gave form and definition to an erotically charged universe' (in Chadwick, *Women* 25). In *Paris Peasant*, Aragon places woman at the centre and goal of his quest: 'the labyrinth without a minotaur where, transfigured like the virgin, radium-fingered Error reappears, my signifying mistress, my pathetic shadow' (133-4). Paintings such as Salvador Dalí's *La Madonna de Port Lligat* (1950), René Magritte's *Collective Invention* (1934), André Masson's *Gradiva (Metamorphoses of Gradiva)* (1939), several of Man Ray's photographs and practically all of Paul Delvaux's paintings reveal the same expectations and metaphors. In sum, for surrealism, 'woman is the most marvelous and disturbing problem there is in the world' (Breton, *Manifestoes* 180), a mythical, larger than life figure invested with different meanings.

Marvellous as she might be, woman has also been in surrealist prose, painting and photography mistreated, killed or abused.¹⁸ Together with Freud and Isidore Ducasse, when surrealism proclaims the omnipotence of desire, the Marquis de Sade turns into the central figure of its pantheon. In theatre plays like Breton and Soupault's *If you Please*, the female protagonist is treated like a prostitute and ends up being shot by her lover. In Aragon's *The Mirror-Wardrobe, One Fine Evening* the husband of the heroine amuses himself by gnawing at her shoulders, making her bleed and throwing a hammer at her head. In Robert Desnos's *Place de L'Etoile* she is constantly under attack, the climatic moment being that when he throws her out of the window (see Orenstein 105-7).¹⁹ In Man Ray's photographs, we often find isolated images of eyes, lips or breasts but rarely her full body. In Hans Bellmer's she is violently mutilated, in Max Ernst's drawings, savagely pierced. These images are in contrast with the image of the sorceress and gifted being, that for many female artists constituted the only mythical image to offer a fruitful role to adopt.²⁰

¹⁸ This problem first noticed by Gauthier, has also been a major area of concern in Rosalind Krauss *L'amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* and Sara Suleiman's *Subversive Intent*.

¹⁹ All these translations are included in *Modern French Theatre: The avant-garde, Dada and Surrealism: an Anthology*, by Michael Benedikt

²⁰ Surrealism also offered women a way out of the archetypal house-wife and motherly duties, offering them the possibility of starting independent artistic careers, as is the case of Remedios Varo or Leonora Carrington among many others, who left the constrictive atmospheres of their respective countries to join the avant-garde community in France.

Yet, it is also true that she was always seen as being controlled by those powers rather than as using them for her creative potential, an issue that we will see as one of the main points of contestation in Varo's work.

The exaltation of the mythical woman and her simultaneous mutilation, establishes the ambiguous and difficult position of women within surrealism so much explored by critics.²¹ It also provoked in some women artists the need to consciously distance themselves from the male group: 'Nunca me consideré una *femme-enfant* como Breton quería ver a las mujeres. Ni quería que me tuviesen por una ni traté de cambiar al resto. Sencillamente aterricé en el Surrealismo. Nunca pregunté si tenía derecho a entrar' (Carrington *Universo* n.p.). While a surrealist aesthetic can be appreciated in several female artists' choice of sources such as alchemy, reverie, occultism, witchcraft, imaginary voyages and marvels in their canvases, photographs and prose, they altogether imply, as will be seen throughout Varo's chapter, a strong rejection of the surrealist theoretical approaches towards love, female psychology and woman's role within the creative process. Artistic and literary work by surrealist women suggest that the theory is not simply reversed and that the 'quest for the marvellous' as expressed in the works of Leonora Carrington, Dora Maar, Dorothea Tanning, Remedios Varo or Leonor Fini is rarely found in a metaphor of 'man', in the workings of desire or in erotic images. As we shall see in the practical analysis of paintings and texts in the succeeding chapters, their work suggests that something more elaborate is being cooked up, that a new mythology is being established.²² Another aspect that needs to be taken into account is that the women that entered the surrealist movement were much younger than the male group, and that, as Raaberg has pointed, they 'often produced their most mature work after their relationships with the male surrealists and the movement had ended' (2). Thus, when they started seriously producing we can perhaps talk about surrealism after surrealism; where a change of expression is doubly likely to have taken place, in terms of gender as well as of chronology.

According to Sara Suleiman, 'woman has to invent her own position as subject and elaborate her own set of images, different from the image of the exposed female

²¹ See Belton's *Beribboned Bomb*, Chadwick's *Mirror Images*, Krauss' *Surrealism and Photography* and Gauthier's *Surrealisme* among others.

²² In fact, the metaphor of cooking became, particularly among Carrington and Varo, a powerful metaphor and symbol to express their creative quests. This has been shared by various Mexican female writers, even if not associated with surrealism at all. Most famously by Sor Juana, but also by contemporary writers such as Laura Esquivel and Elena Garro.

body, yet as empowering as that image is' (26). More specifically, those images will have to encompass a different approach to the marvellous and a different image altogether, for the mere adoption of male surrealist postulates will indicate that women did not have an aesthetic judgement of experience in artistic creativity, a statement that their work obviously proves untrue. The woman artist has to find what, in accordance with her social, cultural, historical and psychological approach to reality, can serve to express her visionary experiences, resulting in the translation of those visions into poetic or artistic images. In the next chapter, we will see Remedios Varó's choice of new images and mythology, but it is in direct relation with this choice that we will also need to introduce Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano*.

LO REAL MARAVILLOSO AMERICANO: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE REAL.

El mundo era tan reciente, que muchas cosas carecían de nombre, y para mencionarlas, había que señalarlas con el dedo (García Márquez, *Cien años de soledad* 7).

In the prologue to his 1945 novel *El reino de este mundo*, Alejo Carpentier identified a Latin American phenomenon which was independent from art and literature but that he sought to relate to literary activity. In an account of his visit to Haiti, he mentions how 'mi encuentro con Paulina Bonaparte, ahí, tan lejos de Córcega, fue, para mí como una revelación. Vi la posibilidad de establecer ciertos sincronismos posibles, americanos, recurrentes, por encima del tiempo' (*Ensayos* 115). Carpentier's definition of *lo real maravilloso* emerged out of this Haitian revelation, and it was in Haiti that this marvellous reality made itself visible. To define his term Carpentier follows two strategies. First, he embeds it within a discourse of Americanism.²³ Second, he places it in opposition to surrealism. In contrast to the surrealist marvellous, which Carpentier saw as determined by the fantasies and fabrications of the artist or author and which was 'perseguido [...] a través de las cosas prefabricadas' (*Ensayos* 146), he first and foremost meant his notion as a series of real situations and socio-historical events that took place in

²³ Its beginnings are marked by the discovery and conquest of America, with which the chronicles of the 'new world' start the concept of 'maravilla', signifying the continent as a land of wonders. In the 1920s, there was an intensification of this discourse by writers such as José Lezama Lima, José Vasconcelos or Jose Eustaquio Rivera, a discourse that, while embedded in a rehabilitation of a classic tradition, also includes the differentiation of Latin American culture in opposition to other cultural modes of knowledge. This formation of the idea of America was triggered by two main events: the new analysis of European culture and critique of the Anglo Saxon model, as well as the exaltation of indigenous cultures: 'ambas proceden de dos hechos, el auge del capitalismo norteamericano y el ejemplo del nacionalismo revolucionario mexicano' (Chiampi 143). In its second phase, the 1930s and 1940s, the emphasis was placed upon an exploration of the national character and, in the desire to decolonize each national culture, the discourse evolved towards a positive concept of *mestizaje*. Thus 'el fenómeno del mestizaje, en cuanto patrón diferenciador, funciona como soporte de la reivindicación de una identidad para el hombre latinoamericano en el contexto occidental' (Chiampi 154).

Latin America. That is, the complexity and characteristics of its landscapes, its history of political instability and extraordinary discovery, its racial and cultural *mestizaje*, the cohabitation of modern societies with ancient ones or the survival of indigenous tribal beliefs alongside occidental religions. Therefore, *lo real maravilloso* also possesses two levels of definition. The first is the marvellous as reality itself.²⁴ The second is the author's description of that marvellous reality in his narratives, or rather, how that reality has enriched his literary production.

Yet, within the first level of definition, 'the marvellous as reality', one should not ignore a crucial factor. Namely, the fact that the viewer needs a special understanding, a heightened sensibility and (poetic) approach towards the world in order to conceive of one's surroundings as marvellous, for surely this reality was perceived as commonplace by the Haitian people.²⁵ This is similar to Breton's conception of the marvellous beauty, that is, a beauty that emerges as extraordinary due to the heightened state of the beholder. Carpentier's poetic and privileged understanding of reality is best exemplified with his own words: 'Llego a preguntarme a veces si las formas superiores de la emoción estética no consistirán, simplemente, en un supremo entendimiento de lo creado. Un día, los hombres descubrirán un alfabeto en los ojos de las calcedonias [...] y entonces se sabrá con asombro que cada caracol manchado era, desde siempre, un poema' (*Los pasos perdidos* 214). Carpentier's marvellous, like Breton's, therefore also presupposes a privileged experience of perception in which one feels integrated, everything acquires sense through the impression of a continuity which links all things, and which lends the surrounding reality a significance that provokes one's wonder.

Like Breton's, his concept implies first an aesthetic perception and later its translation into art, since a special view of reality is the first step of any creative process. The main difference resides in the source and the medium that triggers the experience, a fabricated object, desire, or a literary text in the case of surrealism and the Latin American socio-historical reality and natural world for Carpentier. When Breton refers to the marvellous image and exemplifies it with lines from several

²⁴ That is, as 'las vidas de los hombres que inscribieron fechas en la historia del continente y dejaron apellidos aún llevados: desde los buscadores de la fuente de la eternal juventud, de la áurea ciudad de Manoa, hasta [...] ciertos héroes modernos de nuestras guerras de independencia de tan mitológica traza' (*Ensayos* 120).

²⁵ Only those who see with a poet's eyes can appreciate how their beloved has pearls instead of teeth or how a natural and historical reality can be extraordinary. On the one hand, Carpentier somehow falls into a reverse notion of Orientalism. On the other there might be some naivety in the exaltation of his land, for he first saw the marvellous in Haiti, a place he had never seen before and thus his experience can be equated with that of any traveller seeing an exotic and different landscape for the first time.

poets, he gives emphasis to the artist's aesthetic modification of reality. When Carpentier talks about *lo real maravilloso americano*, he does not highlight the aesthetic creation, but Latin American reality itself and the heightened state the observer attains through the perception of that reality, thus placing the emphasis on his belief that the Latin American continent is marvellous *per se*. Like Carpentier, Breton is concerned with ordinary objects and 'daylight reality', but the surrealist's objects infused with the mysterious are, except woman, already human constructions (masks, buildings or sentences) and this is what Carpentier implies when saying that surrealism evokes the marvellous through 'trucos de prestidigitación' (*Ensayos* 116).²⁶ For him, these objects of experience refer to the tribal societies and cultures of the Latin American people, its wild nature, their mythologized (hi)stories, the cosmogonies and temporality embedded within a discourse of Americanism.

Within this discourse, Carpentier sought to explain how all those impossible syntheses and contradictions that surrealism created through arbitrary juxtapositions were living realities in his continent, appreciated in all aspects of daily life. A perfect example of these syntheses noted by Celorio (71) is the peculiar angel playing maracas that the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* discovers in the top of a church. It makes a perfect surrealist image insofar as it shows how 'the marvelous is the eruption of contradiction within the real' (Aragon, *Paris Peasant* 22) yet it has nothing to do with surrealism: 'un ángel y una maraca no eran cosas nuevas en sí. Pero un ángel maraquero esculpido en el tímpano de una iglesia era algo que no había visto en otras partes' (*Los pasos perdidos* 122). The same can be said of Ti-Noël's astonishment (in *El reino de este mundo*) at the sight of a black Immaculate Conception, which stands as the contradictory synthesis of how the black Africans, practitioners of Voodoo, have adopted Catholicism. These examples reveal that the key to *lo real maravilloso americano* resides in how the combination of dissimilar elements composed by a heterogeneous and often contradictory source of cultures configures an unexpected new social and cultural reality (see Chiampi 35). Hence, if surrealist experiences were provoked by a relationship between desire and certain repressed forces, Carpentier's are triggered by a spontaneous reaction to the natural,

²⁶ This idea can be well understood through Prampolini's account of surrealist images: 'Esas imágenes [surrealistas] que se pretendía surgieran con mayor espontaneidad, fueron atrapadas por la razón y muy pronto se hicieron conscientes, literarias y en muchos casos descriptivas [...]. Rebuscada arbitrariedad, proceso que se logra, generalmente por la vía racional más que por la de la revelación poética. Se establece el funcionamiento de la lógica en el mundo del absurdo, se regulariza el caos, se sintetiza la fantasía. Las imágenes por más desconcertantes, rebuscadas o caprichosas que parezcan, están dirigidas por el poeta o artista. Son prefabricadas' (76).

cultural and historical reality that, when contrasted to western rationality, inevitably acquires extraordinary dimensions. This is also why Carpentier's marvellous incorporates the element of 'faith' which surrealism lacks and, as I will explain next, it is precisely through this 'faith' component that Carpentier's term avoids falling into the surrealist aspect criticised by Benjamin and Sartre.

When Breton referred to the magic quality of the experience that gives way to surreality, we have seen how this 'magic' was provided by objective chance, which worked to the benefit of desire. The repressed forces of desire are so forceful that they alone can make the *rencontre* happen (*Mad Love* 24), presenting the situation as 'magic-circumstantial' due to the agreement between the subject's desires and their materialization in external reality (*Mad Love* 25). For Carpentier, it is collective faith, what the community believes as real, that produces the magical circumstance: 'millares de hombres ansiosos de libertad creyeron en los poderes licantrópicos de Mackandal, a punto de que esa fe colectiva produjera un milagro el día de su ejecución' (*Ensayos* 119). Both notions of the marvellous include a component that sets off the situation and gives it a magic unity even though the event is real in essence, and thus Carpentier gives to 'faith' the same value as Breton gives to 'objective chance'. However, it is here that a main difference in terms of effect upon the subject is to be found. Namely, while the power of the surrealist marvellous resides in the shock/surprise that this 'magic-circumstantial' quality provokes in the subject by making the event appear extraordinary, *lo real maravilloso* presupposes faith and therefore no surprise or unsettlement is produced, because the nature of the extraordinary event is not rationalised, but simply accepted and even expected.

Benjamin mentioned how 'art as the reaction of one surprised, is enmeshed in a number of pernicious romantic prejudices' (*Reflections* 189) and so the difference between objective chance and faith, the latter located in a collective cultural and historical sense of ritual, also takes us to a key discordant point between Carpentier and Breton in terms of effect upon society. Benjamin and Sartre criticised surrealism insofar as its revolutionary potential seemed to slip back into images that, due to their emphasis on a romantic and abstract notion of the mystery, remained outside history and could not lead to poetic praxis. Interestingly, Carpentier's literary representation of *lo real maravilloso* in *El reino de este mundo*, by alluding to the changes of the social and political situation which lead to the Haitian Revolution,

contains the exact component Benjamin wanted to include in his reformulation of surrealist experiences through *profane illumination*. That is, Carpentier's description of experience is collectively identified in something tangible, which belongs to a history, the history of Haiti. Mackandal uses his 'magical' knowledge to poison the water, food, animals and plants of the white people. As the white community is intoxicated the black one starts dissenting, and therefore it is Mackandal's extraordinary 'intoxicating powers' that literally launch the Haitian slave revolt. Mackandal is employing exactly the same forces that Benjamin asked of surrealist experiences: 'to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution' (*Reflections* 190). *Profane illumination* presupposed the overcoming of religious illumination, and Carpentier's representation is based on a mythical-magical, religious faith, yet completely profane for western religious knowledge. He moves away from the non-figurative and places the marvellous where Benjamin wanted it, in a tangible history, time and culture. The resulting effect of Mackandal's action is very similar in its spirit to the revolutionary potential of surrealist experiences that Breton conveyed in his manifestoes, but that surrealism as a movement failed to achieve.

Carpentier seems to be considering that one cannot uniquely represent the abstract side of the extraordinary, since then literature and art lose their historical effect and language is less efficient in as far as readers cannot feel fully identified with what they are reading. His 'realist' account of collective magical experiences illustrates this idea better:

Ti-Noël creyó comprender que algo había ocurrido en Francia y que unos señores muy influyentes habían declarado que debía darse la libertad a los negros [...] Bouckman dejó caer la lluvia sobre los árboles durante algunos segundos, como para esperar un rayo que se abrió sobre el mar [...]. Cuando hubo pasado el retumbo declaró que un pacto se había sellado entre los iniciados de acá y los grandes loas del África, para que la guerra se iniciara bajo los signos propicios (78).

After explaining the political and historical reality ongoing in France, Carpentier goes back to recount in magical terms what sets out the next Haitian revolt. Both explanations complement each other to amplify reality. This is achieved by Carpentier's fusion of the extraordinary and the historically specific, the magical tribal knowledge with the real and historical Declaration of Human Rights, and thus his story attains concreteness and credibility, allowing the reader to get in direct contact with the political reality presented. In this way, *lo real maravilloso americano* is defined narratively by an insertion of the mythical and the magical into real history, an intersection that is ever present in the chosen narratives of Garro and Boullosa,

and the point which Sartre and Benjamin considered was lacking for surrealism's revolutionary potential. While surrealism lets objective reality destroy itself through its aesthetic objects, Carpentier's aesthetic apprehension of reality leads us to a direct knowledge of it, and it is in the surrealist failure to achieve this effect that Benjamin and Sartre saw the incapability of surrealism to engage with politics.²⁷

Summarising, *lo real maravilloso* was meant to explain how Latin America's natural, political, social and historical processes surpass, in their extraordinary character, certain aspects of the European imagination. Carpentier asked his contemporaries to search for an appropriate and common vocabulary to verbalise and translate the Latin American reality fecund in marvels. According to him, such vocabulary will belong to the literature of *lo real maravilloso americano*, which is directly connected with the Baroque style he sees as characteristic of Latin America:

Hoy conocemos los nombres de las cosas [...] nos hemos forjado un lenguaje apto para expresar nuestras realidades, y el acontecimiento que nos venga al encuentro hallará en nosotros, novelistas de América Latina, los testigos, cronistas e intérpretes de nuestra gran realidad latinoamericana [...]. Seremos los clásicos de un enorme mundo barroco que aún nos reserva [...] las más extraordinarias sorpresas (*Ensayos* 154).²⁸

It is only in the commonality of this language that we can talk about a certain tendency towards describing the surrounding reality among Carpentier's contemporaries and the succeeding generations, although this will inevitably vary depending of the geographical and cultural context. Carpentier's words might be thus trying to resolve the critical void noticed by Octavio Paz,

carecemos de un cuerpo de doctrina o doctrinas, es decir, de ese mundo de ideas que al desplegarse, crea un espacio intelectual: el ámbito de una obra, la resonancia de que la prolonga o la contradice. Ese espacio es el lugar de encuentro con las otras obras, la posibilidad de diálogo entre ellas. La crítica es lo que constituye eso que llamamos literatura y que no es tanto la suma de las obras como el sistema de sus relaciones: un campo de afinidades y oposiciones (*Corriente* 39-40).

Perhaps the language of *lo real maravilloso americano*, concrete because it verbalises the historical realities of different Latin American countries, and 'Baroque' in its

²⁷ Benjamin's 'surrealist' motto can also be found in other Latin American novels that denounce corrupt dictatorships, social revolts, and political massacres. Significant allegories are the Colombian massacre fictionalised in *Cien años de soledad*, the critique of Pinochet's *coup d'état* in Roberto Bolaño's *La literatura nazi en América* and Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus*, the frivolity and inhumanity of an artificial Chilean high-class society in José Donoso's *Casa de campo*, the ridicule of Latin American dictatorships in Miguel Ángel Asturias' *El señor presidente*, or Gabriel García Márquez's *El otoño del patriarca*, the account of the bloodshed during the Cristero wars in Elena Garro's *Los Recuerdos del Porvenir* or the social catastrophes of the Mexican revolution in Juan Rulfo's *El llano en llamas*.

²⁸ Carpentier does not see the Baroque as the concrete artistic style of the XVII and XVIII centuries, but as a spirit that forms part of a permanent milieu: 'El barroquismo tiene que verse, de acuerdo con Eugenio D'Ors-y me parece que en esto su teoría es irrefutable- como una constante humana' (*Ensayos* 126)

mixture of elements and in the complexity of naming that which has not been named before, can constitute that space of dialogue between different literary works.

Therefore, the relatively 'new' modern conurbations, coexistence of different temporal frames, cultural and racial *mestizaje*, the forces of the jungle, the name of fruits and plants as well as the spirit of discovery, needed to be surmounted and made accessible to other cultures through a narrative incarnation. As Carpentier mentioned, 'no es pintando a un llanero venezolano, a un indio mexicano [...] como debe cumplir el novelista nuestro su tarea, sino mostrándonos lo que de universal, relacionado con el amplio mundo, pueda hallarse en las gentes nuestras' (*Ensayos* 203). In the search for these representative qualities that would endow their reality with a universal dimension, Latin American writers had to build up archetypical figures, and the way this has been realised in almost all cultures is through the use of myth. As Galvao has mentioned, mythic criticism is not only about myth, but as 'the starting point for investigating diverse aspects of social and cultural organization' (in Virgillo 6). Now, of these archetypical figures, woman has had a paramount importance, not only due to the special place she has always held in man's imagination, but also because her mythical persona is linked with one of the most universal of feelings, love.

It is relevant to remember at this stage that surrealism recovered an attitude towards love and woman that had long been lost. While love has been the great theme of all times, surrealism gave a complete new dimension to it. Love was therefore '*fou* in that it broke down all barriers within which society wanted to imprison it [...]; unique in that it makes the beloved, the "other", into the epitomized and living world in which it is henceforth [...] possible to lose oneself' (Nadeau 243). Most likely, the only precedent to this view of love and woman in Latin American literature is Ruben Darío. Earle's statements with regards to Darío's views on women recall the representation of woman in surrealist poetry: 'animated, sensual, exhilarating, or ethereal as his women usually were, they were a magic element of the atmosphere; they had greater significance as objects -nineteenth century art objects- than as subjects' (85).²⁹ Neither the preceding symbolists nor the succeeding existentialists turned to love as the possibility of communion between all minds and

²⁹ According to Earle, 'for Darío [...] the female phenomenon was his refuge from everyday space and time, a passive presence in human terms, but one that never failed to excite his sentiments and feelings, a bridge, as it were, that always led to the artistic vision' (86).

within forces outside us. Nor did they consider woman as the means to express the abstract idea of the mystery underlying life and existence or recover the image of the primordial couple linked with the idea of an Edenic time.³⁰ The originality of surrealism does not reside in making of love an idea, but in making of it an embodiment of the world itself. As Shattuck has commented, 'kindled in the house of love, [surrealism] brought back to poetry the long lost figure of woman as an embodiment of magic powers, creature of grace and promise, always close in her sensibility and behaviour to the two sacred worlds of childhood and madness' (25). The surrealist recovery of the woman as a sorceress, as a gifted yet irrational being, can be said to have taken hold of contemporary Latin American writers who, like Carpentier, wished to express the relationship between the culturally specific and the universal.

Paz commented that the surrealist approach towards love opened up for some writers of his continent, including himself, a new way of looking at modern poetry. He thus mentions how reading chapter five of *Mad Love*

me abrió las puertas a la poesía moderna. Fue un arte de amar no a la manera de Ovidio, sino como una iniciación a algo que después la vida y el Oriente me han corroborado: la analogía, o mejor dicho, la identidad entre la persona amada y la naturaleza. ¿El agua es femenina o la mujer es oleaje, río nocturno, playa del alba tatuada por el viento? 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 [...]. Contra viento y marea he procurado ser fiel a esta revelación; la palabra amor guarda intactos todos sus poderes sobre mí (*Búsqueda* 48).

Paz's revelation was not exclusive, and love as expressed in some of Carpentier's novels as well as in other novels by his contemporaries bestows an analogous central role on the female character and her capability for provoking the hero's love. In fact, as Gerald Martin has commented, the role women play in shaping man's imagination within Latin American literature was surprising even for the European or the North American reader (24). One of the means to explain this obsession with woman, he argues, is the particular architecture of what he calls 'the myth of Latin America' taking place 'in a world where the trauma of the original violation of native America persists, and where the mythical fertility and creativity of natural America continues to inspire writers' (Martin 24).

³⁰ Shattuck has commented how 'against the background of misogyny, homosexuality, don Juanism, and masculine confraternality that formed part of the heritage from decadence and symbolism, the surrealist group take on the status as modern troubadours' (24).

Therefore, if the mythical woman was within surrealism a method to understand man's condition as well as an emblem for revolution, an analogous idea of woman has become one of the means to express the universal character of the contemporary Latin American man. Even though she appears in connection with a rich and wide variety of cultural, mythical and 'magical' contexts, her image can be pinned down to four universal forms which have a doubling in surrealism: the irrational girl (*femme-enfant*), the mother (mystery of life), the beloved (*amour fou*) or the evil woman (*femme-fatale*). The main discrepancy is surely that woman has been represented with a different vocabulary that accounts for the cultural divergences between the women of the two continents. As Carpentier points out, one distinction seems to be that the surrealists find 'placer en violar los cadáveres de hermosas mujeres recién muertas' not realising that 'lo maravilloso estaría en violarlas vivas' (*Ensayos* 117). The quotation speaks for itself.³¹

MUJERES DE OJOS GRANDES

Si abres los ojos
Se abre la noche de puertas de musgo
Se abre el reino secreto del agua
Que mana del centro de la noche (Paz, *Libertad* 188).

Writers such as Margo Glantz (in *Criadas*) or Rosario Castellanos (in *Cultura*) among others have commented exhaustively about how 'La Malinche' occupies a central and highly delicate role in Mexican history as well as literature. The mysteriousness of her figure is partly due to the difficulties that her actions and behaviour presupposed for popular comprehension at the time of the Conquest, to the point that she has now become the paradigm of the Mexican Eve.³² Hence, what does the paradigm of the mythical Mexican woman consist of and how can we establish her as a universal linkage between surrealism and Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano*? Octavio Paz's words are helpful in this respect:

La mexicana [...] nunca es pregunta sino respuesta, materia fácil y vibrante que la imaginación y la sensualidad masculina esculpe [...]. Es un ídolo [...] dueña de fuerzas magnéticas, cuya eficacia y poder crecen a medida que el foco emisor es más pasivo y secreto. Analogía cósmica: la

³¹ Again, the difference that Carpentier seems to be pointing out refers to the artificiality of a corpse in comparison with the 'reality' of a living woman, claiming for the naturalness of his notion against the fabricated surrealists images. As the quote clearly reveals, woman does not cease to be an object of consumption for Carpentier, even if he chooses to 'consume' this object when it is 'alive'.

³² Next to Malinche, we find 'la Llorona', 'la Chingada' and 'la Virgen de Guadalupe', female figures that whether truly mythical or concretely historical have nonetheless been all transformed into myths that have permeated Mexican popular culture as well as its literature. Similar examples can also be found alongside different Latin American countries. 'The *locas* of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the Comadres in El Salvador, the women who danced *la cueca* partnerless in Chile, the members of the Housewives Committee in Bolivia, women like Rigoberta Menchú in the Guatemalan highland' (Debra Castillo 294).

mujer no busca, atrae. Y el centro de su atracción es su sexo, oculto, pasivo. Inmóvil sol secreto (*Laberinto* 173).

and

La mujer [...] es figura enigmática. Mejor dicho es el Enigma [...]. La mujer ¿esconde la muerte o la vida? ¿En qué piensa?, ¿piensa acaso?, ¿siente de veras?, ¿es igual a nosotros? [...]. La mujer no es solamente un instrumento de conocimiento, sino el conocimiento mismo. El conocimiento que no poseeremos nunca, la suma de nuestra definitiva ignorancia: el misterio supremo (*Laberinto* 203).

'¿Piensa acaso?' man asks thinking about her, and with this question she automatically falls into the category of the irrational, that which goes beyond man's understanding. '¿Es igual a nosotros?' The pronoun 'us' excludes her from the centre. She is ex-centric. From what? From 'man's' knowledge and therefore from 'universal reason'. Because she cannot be understood, she becomes the holder of 'the Secret'. Woman thus turns into an obstacle for the integration and communion between man and the external, because if man cannot know what woman is thinking about, his possibility for full understanding is truncated in her very presence. Woman becomes an encounter with an alterity and it is this incapability of understanding her that also reveals man's impossibility of fully representing what her thoughts are, limiting his knowledge. To acquire this knowledge man has to possess her, destroy what she is biologically, culturally and historically and make her poetry or muse. Only if she is made poetry she can be revealed as the great eye-opener, leading man towards 'the supreme mystery'. Because, 'to the extent that woman is simply identified as a human being, she will be as unable as male human beings to save this world in distress; it is femininity as such that introduces into civilization that other element which is the truth of life and of poetry and which alone can deliver humanity' (Beauvoir 267). Therefore, the main problem posed by woman is that, if man desires to understand the underlying mysteries of existence and the world (the procreation of the species), if man yearns for absolute knowledge, he knows his task will fail if he fails to understand woman.

As happens to the American writer who needs to translate the sight of *lo real maravilloso* with an appropriate vocabulary, a new language is needed in order to verbalise woman's enigma, and it is thus that she becomes 'un ídolo'. Like the surrealist key holder, the Mexican woman contains the mysteries of existence, life and death, becoming the medium to access 'el conocimiento mismo' and therefore implying that man needs to possess her to attain the great revelation, to possess her so that she can be an 'instrumento de conocimiento'. Like the surrealist mythical

woman, the Mexican woman's magnetic forces are a consequence of her sex, 'oculto, pasivo. Inmóvil sol secreto' and therefore, the same situation provoked by Aragon's description of the surrealist experiment results from here: her main attraction resides in erotic desire and the romantic associations she is able to conjure up for men, which will be able to change his consciousness by her capability of amplifying man's knowledge.

While Paz disapproves of this view in *El Laberinto...* his poetry discloses a representation of woman that seems actually no different from the notion he condemns. In 'Cuerpo a la vista', Paz pictures female sexuality with the same metaphors and qualities as the ones censured above: 'Entre tus piernas hay un pozo de agua dormida, [...] cueva al pie de la montaña que esconde un tesoro [...] sonrientes labios entreabiertos y atroces, /nupcias de la luz y la sombra, de lo visible y lo invisible/ Patria de sangre [...] única patria en la que creo /única puerta al infinito' (*Libertad* 187). The female sex is water, a symbol evoking fertility and purity which simultaneously hides the treasure of life and therefore the secret of existence. It encapsulates the lights and the shadows, the visible and the invisible, and her power lies in her sex's force to reconcile contradictions, in being an enactment of the marvellous itself. It is also a metaphor for the poet's land and nation, for the earth, the stable basis of life. Her sex is, in sum, that door which reaches to the infinite by leading man to his ideal, to his communion with humanity.

Largely influenced by, and a declared sympathiser of surrealism, Paz wrote poetry which illustrates woman in relationship with the love and desire she is able to exert upon the masculine mind, and he did it with a set of images and concepts that look back to surrealist love. 'El poema, como el amor, es un acto en el que nacer y morir, esos dos extremos contradictorios que nos desgarran y hacen de tal modo precaria la condición humana, pactan y se funden. Amar es morir, han dicho nuestros místicos; pero también, y por eso mismo, es nacer' (*Búsqueda* 23). Yet, in Paz's poetry woman simultaneously represents very specific aspects of Mexican culture and history, specially through her associations with Aztec mythology and indigenous modes of knowledge: 'la "vida interior" regresa: es una mujer, la morada terrestre del hombre [...] es Xochiquetzal, la de la falda de las hojas de maíz y fuego, la de la falda de bruma, cuerpo de centella en la tormenta' (*Búsqueda* 24). Here, woman is described through a set of associations that refer back to a reality

belonging to the common vocabulary Carpentier asked for, and yet Paz succeeds in connecting her with the universal, with *amour fou* and the interior life of man.

On the one hand, his poetry reflects the surrealist view on woman. As Remley-Rambo has commented, 'she seems to be the focal point of both his philosophy of life and his poetry' (94). Like in surrealism, her force lies in her sex, and thus in desire and eroticism, she brings opposites together, her presence is seen between waking and sleep, she comprises an access to knowledge and a key to the absolute. On the other, her beauty refers to Aztec mythology ('Diosa Azteca: los cuatro puntos cardinales/regresan a tu ombligo'. *Libertad* 215) natural cycles and indigenous cosmogonies ('Bello astro de pausados movimientos de tigre'. *Libertad* 203). She is located within concrete geographical places ('en Morelia, bajo los arcos rosados del antiguo acueducto/ Ni desdeñosa ni entregada, centelleas'. *Libertad* 204), or associated with other cultural units from primitive modes of knowledge, ('tu falda de maíz ondula y canta/tu falda de cristal, tu falda de agua' *Piedra de sol* 57). Through the association of woman's body and presence with a discourse of *Mexicanidad*, Paz employs what according to Carpentier was the 'Baroque' language of Latin American writers who needed to communicate the universality of the unexplored, unique and largely unknown elements of the 'new world'. Hence, she acquires a different aesthetic representation to that of the surrealist woman, she is explained through the language of *lo real maravilloso americano*, yet as we have seen before, Paz's representation corresponds to the surrealist treatment of woman as muse and giver of unique love, and therefore his images on women can be seen as constituting an epitome of the fusion between both concepts of the marvellous.

Another example of this convergence can be found in Carpentier's characterisation of the indigenous woman -Rosario- in *Los pasos perdidos*. The French woman, Mouche's, intellectual pretensions, affinity towards avant-garde movements and extra-marital relationships present her as an independent, cultured and sexually liberated being whom the narrator used to admire. However, once he encounters Rosario, he starts to devalue and abhor her French ideology and looks. Rosario's discovery parallels the revelation Carpentier experienced in Haiti, for it is only after seeing her, that the narrator starts to consider Mouche as artificial, fabricated and boring as he considered surrealism to be after *lo real maravilloso americano* was revealed to him in his land. Both Carpentier and his narrator turn towards the 'authentic' and the 'real', Haiti in his famous prologue and thus in the

theory, and Rosario in the practice, that is in the novel which perhaps is his best literary expression of *lo real maravilloso*. Both choose that which comprises 'lo real maravilloso [...] que encontramos al estado bruto' (*Ensayos* 148), in contrast with the fabricated (surrealist) mysteries represented by Mouche or surrealist Paris.

Langowski has commented how the two women stand for opposite cultural values; Mouche believes in astrology, alchemy and intellectual conversation, representing all that is false. Meanwhile Rosario 'encarna todo lo que es inocencia, bondad y pureza' (213). While Langowski is correct in his statement, the two women can equally be seen as the literary examples of the two aesthetic concepts Carpentier was confronting in his prologue. Mouche's mysteries are false because they exactly match the same type of interests, cultural background and methods through which the Parisian group will search for surreality: alchemy, the occult, literary texts, ready made artistic objects. On the contrary, Rosario encompasses Carpentier's vision of the extraordinary through her communion with the environment, her mix of races and cultures, her tribal and natural knowledge.

However, if Carpentier aims to distinguish between two cultural modes of knowledge that can simultaneously serve as representative of two opposed aesthetic concepts, he fails to do so the moment he creates Rosario as a metaphor for *lo real maravilloso americano*. We know from Breton that it is children, women and lunatics who incarnate the perfect embodiment of the marvellous, and Rosario, in her innocence and servility can be seen as an Amazonian *femme-enfant*, running like a child at the narrator's orders. He comments how Rosario 'de la mañana a la noche se hacía más auténtica, más verdadera [...] entre su carne y la tierra que pisaba se establecían relaciones escritas en las pieles ensombrecidas por la luz [...]. Una factura común de obra salida de un mismo entorno' (109). Her appeal relates to her 'authentic' and natural qualities, comparable to the mythical sorceress Breton saw in Nadja, who shared in 'the secret of familiar objects suddenly revealed in their true nature, and in the secret of plants and stones' (Beauvoir 264). Like Nadja, her behaviour is oracular, guiding her life in an organic manner that relies upon nature as well intuition, always in contact with the mysterious: 'Eran creencias de ella, costumbres, supersticiones, nociones, que yo desconocía' (*Los pasos perdidos* 110).

Los pasos perdidos constitutes on the one hand the effort to find the marvellous in the Latin American continent by recovering the primitive innocence of man which

will lead him to an experience of complete communion with his existence and the world, and on the other, the attempt to make of the natural reality a powerful aesthetic source (Langowski 211). However, the emphasis is placed on the narrator's search, his quest for the 'golden fleece', for a true and authentic existence, the discovery of a new, improved self within that other level of reality. This is also, in essence, Breton's quest in *Nadja* and Aragon's quest in *Paris Peasant*, even if their quest for the marvellous is developed in a very different setting and sought through Parisian streets, French women, ready made objects and mysterious buildings. Breton's chance encounters with Nadja lead him to the exploration of his identity, realising the intense significance these encounters had for his life and allowing him to enter into another level of reality in which his consciousness is transformed. Although the setting in which these quests take place cannot be more different, the role played by Rosario is analogous to that of Nadja. That is, the narrator discovers in Rosario his 'real' or 'familiar' spirit, a medium with whom he identifies himself and allows him to explore his identity and the jungle's in consonance with her own. She reveals to him, as Nadja does for Breton through the Parisian streets, the existence of a second level of reality in which he feels all contradictions to be reconciled, feeling thus more 'authentic'.

Undoubtedly, Rosario is culturally and racially different from the 'surrealist discovery', but in his aim to express his concept through her, Carpentier falls into the same assumptions the surrealists did. Her magnetic forces reside partly in her sex and partly in the inability of the narrator to fully understand her: 'su misterio era emanación de un mundo remoto, cuya luz y cuyo tiempo no me eran conocidos' (176). Rosario talks to the protagonist through the signs of a different language, which reveals for him a whole range of contradictory images and significances. She is thus the means to resolve these contradictions into a unique and ultimate sense and so it is through her that nature can 'speak' to him: 'se refería a las yerbas como si se tratara de seres siempre despiertos en un reino cercano aunque misterioso, guardado por inquietantes dignatarios. Por su boca las plantas se ponían a hablar y pregonaban sus propios poderes' (86). The 'earth-woman' embodies a new instrument of knowledge and artistic inspiration, the access to the wonders of the jungle and for that very reason she appears no different from Breton's Sphinx, from the surrealist natural woman or sorceress that triggers man's desire for possession. Indeed, Carpentier also falls into the trap of desire: 'el deseo me arroja sobre ella, con una voluntad ajena a todo lo que no sea el gesto de la posesión' (154).

The key is that we only see Rosario, (or for that matter Mouche), in the light of the narrator's state of mind, as a creation developed according to the atmosphere that surrounds him. That is, encompassing Rosario as *lo real maravilloso*, the narrator does not point towards a real referent, the woman, but rather towards a mythical idea about indigenous women. Her biological, historical and social realities are represented in such a way that she ceases to be a real woman to become an earth woman representative of what we have seen above Martin named 'the mythical fertility and creativity of natural America' (24).³³ The reader's approximation to Rosario is only through the narrator's phenomenological perception, transforming her into a cultural concept, *lo real maravilloso americano*. She is thus inserted in a discourse of Latin American cultural conventions that, as happens with Breton's Parisian and with Paz's Mexican women, imply a reductionist identification of the women with the cultural object in question. Here too she is myth: sorceress, beloved and earth woman.

A halfway figure between Rosario and Nadja is Cortázar's La Maga in *Rayuela*. While being an occasionally nurturing mother, she also possesses an organic manner of entering into contact with the world and a secret language with cats and with the 'natural', an intuitive and innocent attitude that makes her behaviour irrational in front of French people. She is both the irrational *femme-enfant* and most notoriously, and as her nickname indicates, the sorceress.³⁴ While Oliveira belongs to the world of the rational, La Maga belongs to a different realm to which he has no access:

Hay ríos metafísicos, ella los nada como esa golondrina está nadando en el aire [...]. Yo describo y defino y deseo esos ríos, ella los nada. Yo los busco, los encuentro, los miro desde el puente, ella los nada [...]. Ese desorden que es su orden misterioso, esa bohemia del cuerpo y el alma que le abre de par en par las verdaderas puertas [...] Ah, dejame entrar, dejame ver algún día como ven tus ojos (108).

In her characterisation as the sorceress who will allow man to 'see through', as a being belonging to the world of metaphysical intuition who can -through her love and her presence- change Oliveira's eyes that watch without seeing and improve his

³³ According to Chanady, 'Carpentier's depiction of the indigenous female protagonist in *The Lost Steps* as a spontaneous, natural woman living in a community untouched by the corruption of modern society involves a nostalgia utopian recreation of an idealised past indubitably influenced by the European pastoral mode, exoticism and disenchantment with modern society' (137).

³⁴ Castro-Klarén has mentioned how 'she freely lives a sort of mysticism without religion. In her irrational way, La Maga pays no heed to "the frontiers of logical reality" and so reveals to them the "infinite possibilities within the scope of the concrete world" (226-7).

perception of the world anchored in extreme rationality, La Maga bears more resemblance to the protagonist of Breton's novel than to that of Carpentier. As Castro-Klarén among many others has commented: 'La Maga is, like Nadja, a surrealist creature who has surely never heard of the philosophy of surrealism or "pataphysics"' (226).³⁵ Equally, Cortázar's mode of extracting a 'magical' meaning from fortuitous events happening in Parisian streets and based on objective chance, bears more resemblance to Breton's *Nadja* (see Castro-Klarén 221) than to Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*. Nonetheless, La Maga can be seen as a fusion of both modes of cultural knowledge. Even though she lives in Paris and is inevitably influenced by its atmosphere, she is essentially different from everything belonging to the French world, which is represented as being a consequence of her Uruguayan origins. Like Nadja, for La Maga, the sensory evidence of the outer world and 'the psychic reality experienced by the mind are one single event of an unquestionable inherent unity. Her conversations, but above all her irrational and 'unreasonable' behaviour, are well within Breton's hope[s] for surrealism' (Castro-Klarén 227). Yet unlike Nadja, all these qualities are owing to or explained through her Latin American culture: ' Y Montevideo es el volumen [...]. A mi todo lo que me ha sucedido me ha sucedido ayer, anoche a más tardar [...]. En Montevideo no había tiempo, entonces-dijo La Maga-. Vivíamos muy cerca del río, en una casa grandísima con un patio. Yo tenía siempre trece años' (70).

In fact, her lack of intellectualism and her ignorance of French literature, art and philosophy, as well as her innocence and 'cat like' beauty is what, as happens to Carpentier's narrator with Rosario, marvels and attracts Oliveira. Her spontaneous reactions, her intuition and the 'beauty' residing within her, in contrast with the rational, intellectual, musical, artistic and literary French circles, is precisely what activates Oliveira's love: 'te quiero porque no sos mía, porque estás del otro lado, ahí donde me invitás a saltar y no puedo dar el salto [...] amor pasaporte, amor pasamontañas, amor llave [...] amor que le dé los mil ojos del Argos, la ubicuidad' (448). The love he feels for her, not only matches *amour fou* in the sense that it is a key to another dimension, but in its intensity as well: 'si la Maga hubiera podido comprender cómo de pronto la obediencia al deseo lo exasperaba [...] "un amor como el fuego, arder eternamente en la contemplación del Todo"' (*Rayuela* 46).

³⁵ Cortázar uses the term 'figuras' to describe a similar notion to Breton's: 'It's the notion of what I call figures. It's the feeling [...] that aside from our individual destinies we are part of figures unknown to us[...] I continually sense the possibility of connections, of circuits that may close and make us interdependent, outside all rational explanation or normal human relationships' (in Earle 87).

While she possesses an attitude that makes Latin Americans psychologically and culturally different from Europeans, she simultaneously possesses those attributes that characterize the 'transmitters' of the surrealist marvellous.³⁶ La Maga fuses the Americanist and surrealist approaches insofar as she is able to encompass both the embodiment of the 'intuitive', 'natural' and 'arational' Latin American culture as well as be the innocent, sometimes objectified, sometimes lunatic, and always mythical provoker of surrealist love: 'vejó a la Maga en una larga noche de la que poco hablaron luego, la hizo Parsifae, la dobló y la usó como un adolescente, la conoció y le exigió las servidumbres de la más triste puta, la magnificó a constelación' (*Rayuela* 39).

In contrast with Rosario and La Maga we find Miguel Ángel Asturias' characterisation of 'la mulata de tal' in his novel of the same name. If Rosario embodies the wonders of the Amazon forest, la mulata incarnates the cultural traces of Guatemala, characterised by *mestizaje*, folklore, black magic and natural disasters. La mulata is in strong opposition to the girl, the mother and the beloved, yet she is the mythical woman par excellence, the destructive goddess. She represents an evil contrary to man and to humanity itself. At her return from the cave to Quiviacús, she provokes an earthquake and as the earth breaks, a volcano emerges that leaves the town completely devastated. She thus provokes the economic ruin of the male protagonist, Yumí. The meteorological changes and catastrophes cannot be explained scientifically, but the community attributes them to her magical powers and her relationship with superior forces. La mulata's actions are the perfect embodiment of that collective faith which according to Carpentier was an inherent characteristic of *lo real maravilloso*. As happened with the Haitian revolution and with the day of the death of Mackandal, her metamorphoses, powers and re-union of her body are collectively accepted without surprise and the extraordinary phenomena she provokes and performs are assimilated as real. Nonetheless, these are not redeeming like Mackandal's, but these are poisonous magical powers leading to chaos and devastation. She is not the bringer of freedom and revolution, but the destroyer of the land, the carrier of death, inextricably linked with her devouring sexual desire.

³⁶ 'Los niños, la mujeres, los enamorados, los inspirados y aun los locos son la encarnación de lo maravilloso [...]. No saben lo que hacen. Son irresponsables, inocentes. Imanes pararrayos, cables de alta tensión: sus palabras y sus actos son insensatos y no obstante poseen un sentido' (Paz, *Búsqueda* 46).

While the novel encompasses a perfect enactment of Guatemalan autochthonous vocabulary and mythology and therefore of *lo real maravilloso americano*, la Mulata, like Rosario or La Maga, becomes an emblem for them, and thus her mythical persona poses the same problems of understanding as those posed to the surrealist men. This destructive moon goddess who incarnates *lo real maravilloso americano*, is analogous to the surrealist mythical woman in so far as she becomes another discursive category removed from women's reality. The emphasis on her beauty is based on desire throughout: 'eran pedazos de hombre los que la seguían, mientras ella, eléctrica, atmosférica, bailaba igual que una luz fatua [...] en redor de su cintura [...] bananas doradas, en movimiento al compás de sus caderas, de sus glúteos [...] mientras [...] los hombres [...] prestos al asalto, a envestirla brutalmente' (55). Those who have seen her naked are unable to place her in any cultural category or gender identity, remaining an incomprehensible, mythical construct: 'no sé lo que es, pero no es hombre ni tampoco es mujer. Para hombre le falta tantito tantote y para mujer le sobra tantote tantito' (65). Her lack of a real identity is expressed in her lack of a name and the emphasis on her mythical quality is given by her constant associations with the moon, which is simultaneously what provokes her schizophrenic, hysterical behaviour so much praised by Breton. Once again, the centre of her attraction is her sex and this is the epitome of her mystery, as she always keeps it hidden, turning her back to her sexual partner. As in surrealism, and as expressed by Paz, it is in her sex and in her lunacy that her magical powers reside and next to these are her Sadeian manners and desire for destruction, chaos and death. La mulata is described as a surrealistic nightmare, symbolising all physical and psychological fears, while she is simultaneously able to embody the collective subconscious of black and indigenous peoples which exists on a mythical and magical everyday life. She embodies that which threatens man's spirituality, economy and freedom. She is the real Mélusine, the snake woman.

TWO BRIEF CONCLUSIONS

Sitio de encuentro entre el hombre y lo otro, campo de elección de la otredad. Mujer, imagen, ley matemática o biológica, todas esas Américas brotan en mitad del océano, cuando buscamos otra cosa o cuando hemos cesado de buscar (Paz, *Búsqueda* 61).

Carpentier and Breton's different notions of the marvellous involved a common privileged perception of reality, a revelation or visionary experience that was *a posteriori* translated and reorganised into art or literature. Hence, when Carpentier says that

Lo maravilloso comienza a serlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una inesperada alteración de la realidad (el milagro), de una *revelación*

privilegiada de la realidad, de una *ampliación de las escalas* y categorías de la realidad percibidas en virtud de una *exaltación del espíritu* que lo conduce a un modo de “estado límite” (*Ensayos* 118, my emphasis).

his statement is not very different in essence from Breton’s definition:

The marvelous [...] is any other symbol capable of *affecting the human sensibility* for a period of time [...]. It exercises an *exalting effect* only upon that part of the mind which aspires to leave the earth [...] it partakes in some obscure way of a sort of *general revelation* only the fragments of which come down to us (*Manifestoes* 14-16, my emphasis).

Even though that which provokes Carpentier’s experience belongs to a different nature than that of the surrealists -and consequently its results when translating it are wholly distinct- one can say that both notions coincide in three basic elements. Firstly, in the affirmation of the existence of the marvellous within the world of everyday reality. Secondly, in the use of a privileged experience of perception as a source for inspiration, as a mode of nourishing literature and art. Thirdly, in the fact that, if the surrealist marvellous is the point of the human spirit ‘at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions’ (Breton, *Manifestoes* 125), this point is also the result obtained from *lo real maravilloso americano* as was seen in the paradoxical juxtaposition of religions and cultures that ceased to be perceived as contradictions in the figures of the ‘ángel maraquero’ or of the black Immaculate Conception.

Mabille’s definition of the marvellous accounts for the core of both notions. He conceptualises it according to two stages, commenting how: ‘because of the tension they produce, magical ceremonies, psychic exercises leading to concentration and ecstatic states, the freedom of mental automatism [...] are some of the means by which the normal faculties can be increased, resulting in clairvoyance. There lies the ways into the realm of the marvelous’ (16). The experience is in both cases being used as an inspirational force that permeates the work of the surrealists as well as Carpentier’s and other Latin American writers, leading to the artistic/literary creation of the marvellous (real) image. As Mabille pointed out, ‘the mind [...] wants to translate these visions [...] it takes on material form in writing, in the plastic arts, in the building of monuments’ (16). That is, both are first meant as a mode of perception, as an experience that functions like an internal search, improving the subject’s contact with the world and producing the transformation of consciousness. The conclusion in this respect presents no major novelty. According to Chiampi,

within *lo real maravilloso americano* 'los puntos de vista fenomenológico y ontológico son imbricados de tal manera que se resuelve la contradicción (aparente) entre el deformar y el mostrar [...]. No es difícil identificar en los meandros de esa definición aquella verdad esencial que los surrealistas hacían coincidir con lo maravilloso' (38). On the one hand, Carpentier opens up a new cultural compromise for the Latin American writer, a compromise controlled by reason and motivated by faith.³⁷ Yet on the other, when critics like Celorio, in an exaltation of Carpentier's postulates, conclude that 'el surrealismo [...] como una especie de Real Academia de Lo Maravilloso [...] intenta sistematizar, reducir a códigos estéticos -y esta es su contradicción profunda- el espíritu mágico que ha existido desde siempre [...] en la cultura del Viejo Mundo' (149), they enter into a cul-de-sac.

Celorio does not account for the fact that (even if unintentionally) Carpentier has created with his prologue an equivalent aesthetic code to that expressed in Breton's *Manifestoes*. Somehow blinded by the statement that Latin America is in no need of European artifices, Celorio does not account for Carpentier's reappropriation of a European cultural concept for the creation of a new theoretical approach towards Latin American reality and literature, and that therefore, as all theory, falls within the artificial. In fact, Carpentier's theoretical approach was going to change the contemporary attitude towards literature within the Latin American continent, leading to an exhaustive list of critical studies precisely devoted to understanding, defining and encapsulating such aesthetic codes.³⁸ As mentioned in the introduction, Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Chiampi pointed out how 'El texto del prólogo sería una especie de manifiesto de la nueva orientación de la ficción. Se haría incluso más famoso que la misma novela que lo había motivado y se convertiría [...] en 'prólogo a la nueva novela Latinoamericana' (in Chiampi 36). In this respect one can unproblematically conclude that, although the two approaches relate to different methods of searching for the marvellous and include distinct aesthetic expressions of it, they have since its beginnings and over the years continued to enrich and feed off each other in (post)surrealist art and prose, in Carpentier's narratives, and in succeeding Latin American generations of writers and artists.

³⁷ As Chiampi has noted, 'si la idea de una realidad maravillosa no es una creación teórica de Carpentier, su contribución a la etapa post-surrealista consiste en haber identificado concretamente una entidad cultural, cuyos rasgos de formación étnica e histórica son hasta tal punto extraños a los patrones racionales que se justifica predicar metafóricamente lo maravilloso de lo real' (40).

³⁸ In this respect, González-Echevarría has mentioned how Carpentier's essay 'tiene una contradicción insalvable que su escritura misma evidencia, porque disertar sobre lo real maravilloso americano excluye toda posible espontaneidad resultado de una fe [...]. Si lo real maravilloso se descubre sólo ante el creyente, ¿qué esperanzas puede tener un escritor de tan alto bagaje como Carpentier?' (227).

My second conclusion ties in directly with the convergence of both approaches in the work of Varo, Garro and Boullosa. Carpentier, as well as several other writers such as Paz, Cortázar or Asturias, while succeeding in the verbal portrayal of a particular Latin American reality as a historically and geographically specific phenomenon, autochthonous and singularly rich in its own myths, have nonetheless failed to provide a real distinctive representation of woman within their narratives and poetry. In essence, she remains identical to the European, surrealist woman, albeit with a different skin colour and associated with a specific set of Indigenous myths. The name and attributes are minor, she can be Gradiva or Malinche, she can be Venus or La Chingada, Coatlicue or Mélusine, La Virgen de Guadalupe or the Sphinx. In both approaches, her connotations run from the eternal victim, the earth-woman or the suffering innocent to the fundamentally evil, and in both approaches too, a special relevance is given to her connection with a magical realm, to her potential as sorceress, yet never using that power for herself, always giving her magic wand to the man who possesses her. The situation is that which has been exposed by feminist critic Alice A. Jardine when referring to the difference that existed between 'woman' as discursive entity or metaphor, and 'women' as biologically and culturally gendered beings (33-34). In this sense, both concepts subscribe to a temporally and ideologically restricted set of conventions regarding what woman is and how should she behave that anchor the parameters of meaning in spite of all their cultural differences.

Through different examples, I have shown that *lo real maravilloso*, when describing landscapes, societies or particular historical events provided by the overlapping of the historically specific and the magical-mythical, provoked a fusion that resulted in credibility and that allowed the reader to get in direct touch with the reality presented. However, when these same authors attempt to verbalise the reality of woman as a metaphor for this reality, *lo real maravilloso* fails to express her socio-historical, biological and psychological condition, and thus it also becomes a romanticised abstraction, a cultural unit, a discursive and theoretical category equally elaborated through 'trucos de prestidigitación' as Carpentier accused surrealism of being. Making of woman a figure larger than life, contemporary Latin American literature fails, as surrealism did, to represent women's biological, social and psychological reality. Thus these authors' attempt to present her as a culturally

distinct being, remains in fact purely theoretical, a false image created according to male desire or social archetypes that remains on the margins of her real persona.

Not only her subjectivity dissolves, but so does her objectivity, as she becomes as fabricated, as elusive and as imaginary as the surrealist objects were. Symbolic as the surrealist mythical woman was, she turns into the bridge between man and the natural world, into man-made language and into a revelation. Her representation enacts the same metaphysical materialism based on contemplation and enjoyment, and it is therefore in the representation of woman that both the language of the surrealist marvellous and that of *lo real maravilloso americano* can be seen to fully coincide. As Martin has pointed 'women have not been allowed to play a very visible part in the development of Latin American culture, although men have used them as the inspiration and even the measure of their own imagination and creativity' (23). As we have seen Paz commenting, 'la mujer no busca, atrae' (*Laberinto* 173). The following chapters will look into women playing those roles from which they have been historically excluded. That is, women who search, not attract, women who measure their own imagination and create their own art, starting with the work of Remedios Varo.

CHAPTER TWO: REMEDIOS VARO, ALCHEMY OF THE IMAGE

SECTION ONE: REMEDIOS VARO'S NARRATIVE PAINTING

Cuando termina el espacio comienza el tiempo. Donde comienza el espacio termina el tiempo. Donde hay espacio hay tiempo (Blanco 15).

The general critical approach to the work of Remedios Varo coincides in seeing her paintings as self-portraits where she depicts different facets of herself or different stages in her life, reading her pictorial production in autobiographical terms. Whilst agreeing that this possibility contributes to the understanding of her art, after Kaplan's detailed biography it might be too straightforward to read Varo's pictures as such, and possibly too constraining.¹ Undoubtedly, many of her paintings share the facial features of their creator, yet to read them merely as self-portraits is to miss a great deal of what they are conveying. Even if all paintings shared Varo's face complexion (by no means true) one could always read them similarly to more distinctive self-portraits such as those of Cindy Sherman, Claude Cahun or Frida Kahlo, which have not exclusively been read as autobiography, but also as a complex representation of sexuality and female identity. It can thus be suggested that none of these artists is revealing herself, but rather the many masks of an archetypal female self. Varo makes the viewer see a 'type of woman', of femininity perhaps, yet one that is inseparable from the literal representation of the image itself. Her characters assume various roles, using the potential of pictorial language for transformation. Therefore, she automatically fractures any sense of unitary self by proposing identity as a multiple projection of invented, fictional selves.

For the aforementioned reasons, I will avoid the relationship between Varo's work and life to focus on the certainty that in all her paintings, a tale is being told. This affirmation has no novelty and this is precisely owing to the vision of her work as autobiographical narratives. Junco has affirmed how 'su pintura es

¹ In this respect Lozano has also understood that 'como ha venido sucediendo con el estudio de otras mujeres artistas, la personalidad y aspectos biográficos han seducido al espectador o al lector, cayendo en el peligro de minimizar, o dejar en un segundo plano, la importancia del trabajo creativo de Remedios Varo' (44).

eminentemente literaria [...] por lo cual resulta natural compararla con las obras de ficción' (215). Vidaurre investigates several of Varo's paintings intertextual relations with a miscellaneous group of literary texts (n.p.). Mattessich explores the triptych relationship with ekphrastic narrative, concretely with Tomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (n.p.), and Colville also establishes similar comparisons with this novel ('Beyond' 47-54). Zanetta chooses a set of Varo's paintings to evoke pictorially the themes that Carmen Martín Gaité develops in her literature (279). In *Magical Tables* Parkinson-Zamora compares Varo's pictorial production to Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus*, applying a spatial model to a literary text (113-143).² However, the question of *what exactly* makes Varo's paintings narrative has been left unresolved. Namely, what is it about Varo's pictorial production that makes it so prone to analogies with literary texts? What techniques and pictorial conventions does she use in order to achieve such narrative effect? How can this be accounted for structurally?³ Taking into account the controversy of the term 'narrative painting' within history of art while answering these questions, it will be argued that there is not a unique narrative pattern that can account for all Varo's paintings in general. However, I will distinguish two main narrative procedures that are repeated in a major number of her paintings, seeing these as the most prominent ones. The first part of this section will therefore constitute a structural analysis that does not aim to interpret the paintings' semantics, or to rationalise their content, but merely to show their narrative functioning through their structure, graphical perspective and composition.

After understanding how her images work structurally, I will move on to examine to what type of literature, in terms of thematic and aesthetic, Varo's artwork can be related. In this second part, I will argue that Varo's surrealist affinity included a different iconography and mythology that presents similarities with literary images conveyed in Latin American novels that have been associated with *lo real maravilloso americano*. Although several critics have also seen Varo's pictorial work in relationship to Carpentier (Parkinson-Zamora, *Magical* 138-40, Sánchez 59 Junco 215), I am not seeking to explain Varo's visual narratives through *lo real*

² Although Parkinson-Zamora compares structurally the visual with the written, she applies a spatial model to Allende's text, rather than examining how the paintings' narrative dynamics work. Her main focus resides in elucidating the work of Varo in terms of Allende's and vice versa, as well as to comment upon their shared interest in the fantastic (*Magical* 114). There are various studies of this type: Zanetta's comparison with Carmen Martín Gaité, Everly's with Mercè Rodoreda, Santos-Phillip with Silvina Ocampo or Sánchez's with Carpentier.

³ Brad Epps, together with Parkinson-Zamora has come closer to investigating why Varo's paintings function as narratives, although Epps still does not provide us with a structural explanation of this functioning. Focusing on Varo's triptych, all he says in this respect is that Varo's paintings convey movement, and therefore that 'movement implies displacement if not succession, and thus a temporality crucial to narrative' (189-191).

maravilloso, but rather to point out the dialogue these visual narratives present between surrealism and Carpentier's concept, as well the way in which both are answered in gendered terms. That is, instead of examining Varo's art as an example of *lo real maravilloso* as these critics have done, I want to emphasize how within her mature process of creativity and through her contact with Mexican -and by extension Latin American culture-, she enriched her surrealist art with a different and personal vision. Like the aforementioned critics, I see this vision to be in consonance with several narratives that, by the 1960s, were going to be understood as belonging to *lo real maravilloso americano*, but I will not limit my analysis to this discourse.⁴ Therefore, placing Varo's paintings next to these literary images, I aim to investigate how, on the one hand her surrealist imagination was, as suggested in the introduction, partly fed by Mexican geographical, cultural and natural surroundings, making her a key representative figure of the dialogue between Paris and Mexico. On the other, to explore the extent to which a literary imagination that parallels the verbal imagery in contemporary Latin American literature can be appreciated in her work.

To undertake such analysis, I will focus exclusively on Remedios Varo's Mexican production (1953-63).⁵ The reasons for centring on her 'década mexicana' are various. They are the product of an extremely creative period in which Varo was finally able to develop her own pictorial language, released from the burdens of economic problems and with enough distance from the Parisian group to work autonomously (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 119). As seen in the previous chapter, the mythologized woman of surrealist inspiration took hold in the literary scene of the Latin American continent.⁶ Thus, as a Spanish painter included in a wider study on Mexican writing, this period is the most suitable one to reflect upon the connections between how women who found themselves within the channel of communication

⁴ It is also important to notice in this respect that she realised this artistic enterprise before many of the novels of the so-called 'Boom' came out.

⁵ According to the data available in the *Catalogue Raisonné*, she painted over a hundred artworks during this period. Due to restrictions of space, we will only choose those of her paintings which are representative of her main ideas, aesthetic and narrative structure while still trying to do justice to the richness of her vision. While critics seem to agree that 1953-63 was Varo's glorious Mexican decade, she moved to Mexico in 1945, and some of her paintings indeed date from 1949 (see *Catalogue* 309-381).

⁶ As a Spanish exile previously involved with the surrealist group in Paris, Varo was part of the surrealist spirit that permeated Mexican art in the 1950s. It was also in Mexico that her first individual exhibitions were shown, and even if not sharing any characteristics with the big artistic Mexican art movement of the times, the muralists, she became representative of the arts in her adopted country. See for example the section on Mexican art by Teresa del Conde in *Latin American Art on the Twentieth Century*, Ida Prampolini's *El surrealismo y arte fantástico de México* or Margory Agosin's *A Woman's Gaze, Latin American Women's Artists*.

between surrealist and Mexican tendencies, yet within different artistic disciplines, have responded to both aesthetic approaches.

NARRATIVE PAINTING

The debate around narrative in the visual arts has been long and complex. Renaissance perspective ceased the narrative quality of medieval panels, as high-art images were supposed to convey one single moment in time. Berger comments how 'in the medieval tradition the story was often illustrated, scene following scene as in a strip cartoon [...]. During the renaissance the narrative sequence disappeared, and the single moment depicted became the moment of shame' (*Ways of seeing* 48-9). In *Pictures of Romance*, Wendy Steiner similarly asserts how 'the Renaissance proscription against temporal disunity and narrative unfolding was so powerful [...] that the general art-historical use of the term narrative seems incomprehensible to literary scholars, for whom such limitations would be the undoing of conventional storytelling' (2). Today, there are various definitions of what narrative painting is. In the aforementioned book, Steiner enumerates three. The first is Sitwell's definition of narrative painting as the 'painting of anecdote'. This is faulty according to Steiner because it is applied to what is often called 'genre-painting', that is, typical scenes, homely incidents, perennial activities and so on. The second is Nancy Wall Moure's use of historical and mythological scenes understood as allegories. The third is a definition reached after a symposium on ancient art, which considered narrative painting as 'the rendering of specific events, whether mythological, legendary, historical, or fictional, involving recognizable personages (Steiner, *Pictures* 8). Now, due to the literary focus of this study as a whole, it is more appropriate to start considering what characterises narrative itself while simultaneously bearing in mind the possibilities painting has of enacting its key features.

During the last century, the amount of studies devoted to study narrative and its techniques highly increased, creating its own discipline known as 'narratology'. For Chatman, 'one of the most important observations to come out of narratology is that narrative itself is a deep structure quite independent from its medium' (121). This inevitably opened the door to study narrative in diverse specialities, rendering outdated the nineteenth century emphasis on distinction instigated by Lessing's *Laocoon*. Lessing's remarkable study on poetry and painting provides a systematic treatment of the space-time dichotomy, reducing the basic confines of the two arts to

this key difference. Thus he states how 'Painting, in its imitations, makes use of entirely different means and signs from those which Poetry employs; the former employing figures and colours in space, the later articulate sounds in time' (149). Lessing asserts that chronology is inherent in narrative (171) and narratology has not shattered this principle. That is, even though today films, plays, paintings, drawings, music or dance can suggest a story and albeit many of these representations connect with a temporal dimension, not all of them constitute narratives. As Gerald Prince puts it, 'narrative is a representation of *at least two* real or fictive events in a time sequence (49-50, emphasis his).⁷ Now, those two or more events need a 'cohesive device' to give them unity as a whole, constituting a sequence. Recurrent subjects performing an action are often the main means to provide cohesiveness: 'a narrative event means an action performed by or as a character' (Chatman 129). Finally, the sequence must follow a temporal order that channels the reader through it and this is why Chatman suggests that for narrative to be considered as such, it needs to be ruled by a double time structuring. Namely, the chronological order of events and the order in which these are narrated: 'all narratives, in whatever medium, combine the time sequence of plot events, the time of the *histoire* ("story-time") with the time of the presentation of those events in the text, which we call "discourse-time"' (Chatman 122). The two orderings must be independent from one another, so that the chronology of events does not necessarily have to match how they are being told.⁸

Now, a painting depicts a frozen image: 'visual art consists of forms displayed in space; and the perception of both medium and message is instantaneous, taking no appreciable time' (Mitchell, *Iconology* 99). This definition apparently misses the essential trait of narrative: a cluster feature (cohesiveness) between a previously distinguished sequence of events (discreteness) as well as double time ordering.⁹ It was on this failure to include and discern different ordered moments within a painting, that Lessing's aforementioned distinction was based. That is, even if one argues that a painting compels the viewer to look at it as a sequence of events, these would need to be clearly separated as well as temporally ordered to work as

⁷ He uses the following example: 'Although many things take time, at least some of their representations do not necessarily constitute a narrative [...]. There was a fight yesterday" nor "It was a beautiful trip" constitute narratives: they do not represent the fight or the trip as a series of events but as one event' (49).

⁸ This ordering also relates to Victor Shklovsky's distinction between 'story' and 'plot'. What Shklovsky labels 'story' is a temporal-causal sequence; specifically, events which are linked to each other in a cause-effect relationship. Contrarily, within the 'plot' the order of telling is distorted or defamiliarized as it does not show a cause-effect relationship but will rather give the effects without giving the causes by, for instance, starting the story in the middle (*Sterne* 25-29).

⁹ Cohesiveness and discreteness are the terms Chatman employs to differentiate those two narrative traits.

narratives. This is why Sitwell, when defining the genre, pointed out that within narrative painting, 'we must see hints or suggestions of the before and after of the story' (1). Therefore, although the time line of the story is stopped in the frozen image, if the artist is able to control the viewer's order of perceiving time, theoretically, our reading can continue. Wendy Steiner enumerates four conventions that provide painting both with discreteness as well as with the double time structuring characteristic of narrative. First, the division of the artwork's surface into separate registers with loose lines that link the figures in each event. Second, to orient the figures' gaze such that they are looking towards the next event in a series, as indeed the gaze of the viewer tends to move with that of the character. Third, the arrangement of events as stages along a path, or in addition, the presentation of scenes in different rooms within a building or other architectural framing. That is, to portray separate distinctive spatial planes which are indicative of succession in time. Fourth, use of technical features such as the size of a fresco, that will compel the eye to observe it in a series, logically lending itself to the separation of scenes in an unfolding narrative. One also finds these separations in diptychs and triptychs, where the narrative sequence is conducted through the artist's ordering of the paintings. The fifth is the book format, where pages provide an innate separation which other pictorial media are forced to achieve metaphorically (Steiner, *Pictures* 15).¹⁰

While these criteria endow painting with discreteness and a double temporal configuration, in order for narrative to occur, one still needs cohesiveness. Steiner considers that 'in painting, this narrative centre resides in a literal agent, the carrier of a name' (*Pictures* 19). Hence, the pictorial subject's equivalent of a literary character is a repeated subject within the painting(s): 'in visual narrative, the repetition of a subject is the primary means to know that we are looking at a narrative at all' (Steiner, *Pictures* 17). Such a cohesive device is particularly interesting for Varo's production, as it relies upon a realist principle. That is to say, in reality a person cannot be simultaneously in two places, so if a person appears twice or three times in the same canvas, the viewer assumes that this is because the subject is depicted in different temporal stages. A temporal configuration begins to take shape: 'we know we are looking at a narrative painting because we see a subject repeated and because reality only repeats in time' (Steiner, *Pictures* 17). This

¹⁰ Possibly the most famous surrealist example of the book format are Ernst's collage novels, *Dream of a Young Girl who Wished to Enter a Convent*, *The Hundred-Headed Woman* and *A Week of Kindness*.

repetition establishes cohesiveness and allows the viewer to establish a correlation between the subject's different representations, 'reading' it as a sequence. That is obviously a way for the artist to control the viewer's order of perceiving time, leading her/him to infer a beginning and an end for the story. This would be the last quality of narrative painting (Steiner, *Pictures* 20). Accepting Steiner's criteria and excluding the one which referred to size of paintings (for all of Varo's paintings are relatively small),¹¹ these criteria will now be used in conjunction with the explained narrative patterns in order to assign a structural description to Varo's paintings and capture the significant features of her mode of narrating through images. Simultaneously, we will observe to what extent her paintings can be seen to modify this criterion.

REMEDIOS VARO'S NARRATIVE ORDERING

Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es (Borges, *Aleph* 192).

Let us begin with Varo's most unequivocally narrative painting, the triptych *Hacia la torre* (1960), *Bordando el manto terrestre* (1961) and *La huida* (1961).¹² The additive structure of the triptych provides a neat episodic separation of events, where the viewer interprets the artist's arrangement of the images as indicative of its discourse-time. A main agent also supplies cohesiveness: the blonde girl repeated along the paintings, who in the first one differentiates herself from her clones by looking at the viewer directly in the eye. Through this act of gazing that González called 'la mirada de la búsqueda' (*Trasmundo* 165), as well as through her repetition, she distinguishes herself as the narrative centre and the element that, through continuity, establishes a temporal sequence between the three different paintings. *Hacia la torre* employs a drawing technique that works all planes with the same intensity, with soft curved lines that contribute towards creating a sense of flow and movement in the human figures. Varo employs one-point perspective, with parallel planes converging at the vanishing point on the right as the viewer's gaze loses itself in the door from which the girls emerge. The composition is balanced, although there is more weight on the left side of the painting. The three

¹¹ The average size of her paintings is 20x60cm. See Appendix.

¹² This is the only painting chosen by Epps to comment upon the narrative quality of Varo's paintings. Yet he sees it as sufficient to speak for a common purpose in all her art: 'the three-yellow grey paintings that comprise it attest to Varo's interest in telling stories through images'. He further comments that 'the trajectory of the triptych is linear [...] and its illusory quality lends itself to narrative' (189-190).

principal planes are connected through the birds, which draw a circle centring the composition. The effect of the tall and slim figures is reinforced with the architecture and the vertical lines of the trees, establishing a correlation between the lower and upper part of the painting and creating a self-contained, balanced whole. This equilibrium is also achieved by the use of colour, in which there is a predominance of sepia tonalities in the architecture and the man and a predominance of grey in the girl's clothes, the sky, the birds and the floor. Both the arrangement of the visual elements and the use of colour establish cohesion between the four planes. Composition provides movement to the depicted scene, as it provokes the displacement of the gaze towards the side of the painting in which there is more weight, and which is precisely indicative of the direction the girls are taking. Perspective contributes towards this same movement, as the gaze first focuses on the vanishing point and then moves in the direction the figures are exiting. Thus, the eye establishes a movement indicative of the figures' own movement towards the tower, and which is therefore representative of time. Varo also uses the titles to emphasize the discourse-time and endow cohesiveness.

Hence, the first painting's title indicates the destination of the second, the tower where the protagonist is embroidering a mantle among her clones. If in the first image the repeated subject is distinctive by the power of her gaze, in the second one she is recognisable due to an almost imperceptible fact that also works as a narrative cluster between this temporal sequence and the next. In the piece of mantle she is embroidering, the girl creates an upside down image of herself with the man with whom she will escape. *Bordando...* employs the same drawing technique, this time with a greater taste for detail, almost in the style of a miniaturist. Its composition is equally symmetric, although more centred and equilibrated. Unlike *Hacia la torre*, *Bordando...* presents the use of polifocality. That is, the conjunction of two different perspectives: frontal in the interior space and birds' eye in the exterior. The combination of two perspectives serves to divide the painting into two separate clear registers that can work as narrative sequences thanks to the temporal ordering given by the previous painting (past) and by the girl's drawing (future). Equally, the two registers are united by loose lines to which the gaze endows a sense of movement as this is first directed towards the centre (interior), and then towards the exterior. Varo also relates these interior and external spaces through the combination of warm and cold tonalities, facilitating an optical connection between them. All elements of pictorial composition, from perspective to title and colour,

contribute towards cohesiveness establishing a narrative order between the different surfaces.

La huida repeats the two subjects that the blond girl is embroidering in *Bordando...*, representing the climatic and final action of the narrative, their flight. In this last painting, as in all previous ones (and in fact as in all of her canvases), Varo employs a harmonious drawing technique with a taste for minimal details and atmospheric effects. The composition is based on a large diagonal that divides the work into two halves. The viewer displaces her-his gaze from the lower left side of the painting towards the vanishing point in the rock's opening, which is coincident with the direction the figures are taking and therefore suggestive of their movement in time. The composition is equilibrated by the two vertical lines of the figures that, occupying the optical centre, have their gazes directed towards the next temporal sequence, the entrance into the cave. The employment of oblique lines helps to establish a sense of flow, and colour reinforces the direction of perspective and the equilibrium of the painting as a whole, with a predominance of warm colours in the masculine figure and the stream in which they are sailing, and a predominance of cold ones in the female figure and the rock. All these elements connect the different planes of the painting, endowing them with a sense of temporal ordering and therefore of narrative flow.

To summarise, the three panels of the triptych are ordered by Varo in a way which corresponds to their chronological happening, and thus the different scenes are linked in a cause-effect relationship that constitutes a narrative of the type: because 'x' then 'y'. A girl is guided towards a tower where she is trapped and forced to labour on embroidering the world. Resenting her confinement, she plays a trick on her guardians and crafts a love relationship that will help her to escape. Thanks to her creation, she flees with the man she has invented. The paintings could have been ordered in any other sequence, which would inevitably result in a completely different story, which confirms the independent time structuring characteristic of narrative.

A similar method of narrating is provided in *La despedida* (1958), where Varo employs two-point perspective. Lines converge first at the crossroads (optical centre), and then diverge towards the sides of the alleyways, each of them using a vanishing point. Although the painting represents a path, this is broken up at the

optical centre, interrupting the feeling of surface continuity. Therefore, the symmetric composition provided by the vertical axis at the front allows the viewer's division of the painting into two exactly equal halves. Now, instead of the predictable repetition of the subject commented by Steiner, in order to unite these halves Varo leaves a 'trace' of their presence in the crossroads to convey a past and a present moment. She thus makes of the shadows a metaphorical repetition of the subjects, whose elongation unites the two symmetric halves, endowing the painting with narrative flow. Through cohesion, the shadows become the viewer's main means to know he or she is looking at a narrative, as well as being the method of ordering the discourse-time, fitting with the title. That is, due to the use of colour and light, the gaze is first directed towards the end of the alleyways, and then moves towards the central axis, where one sees the shadows about to kiss. Thus, the viewer first perceives their 'despedida', and then is able to fix their previous location in time through the union of the shadows, letting her/him establish their movement along the pictorial space and with it, a past and a present moment.

The shadows' location in the dark side of the painting is indicative of the figures' previous movement before arriving at the light, and so the broken path and the distinct light function as an analogue for the narrative flow, whose protagonists are breaking apart from each other and starting separate lives. Varo employs a monochromatic palette, with the predominance of red and with the exception of the two cold coloured figures and the cat. These three figures are thus also linked by the use of colour, contrasting with the inanimate red scenery. The title stresses the temporal order, leaving us with no doubt that the couple was formerly together at that intersection of the alleyway. Interestingly, it is not the reality principle based on the fact that 'reality only repeats in time' (Steiner), but the unreal elongation of their shadows that ascertains the time sequence. That is, it is not the impossible repetition in reality, but the 'possible' elongation of the shadows that becomes representative of time and ironically, of realism.

A similar technique is found in *El encuentro* (1959), where Varo provides a main architectural framing, the arch in the middle, to signal an episodic division within two distinct spaces, the foreground and the background, left and right. Varo uses one point perspective, as all lines converge somewhere beyond the three-arch architectural dome at the back of the composition. The dome thus blocks the vanishing point producing an optical stop, preventing the gaze going further and

forcing the viewer to focus on the two main spaces. Varo does not establish the discourse-time through a recurrent subject, the 'bearer of a name' (Steiner), but through the lines of the composition, through the traces (objects) the agent leaves behind him and through colour that, like in *La despedida*, is based on a contrast between cold and warm tonalities. The inclusion of cold and warm colours within a monochromatic darker palette, make them even more visible within the overall composition. Therefore, knowing that the gaze of the viewer moves with colour and light, Varo employs them to help dividing the two main spaces, so that warm tonalities belong to the front and cold ones to the background. Colour not only separates the spaces, but balances them through the inclusion of a red sky within the 'cold space'. Thus, the dog, the water and the statue are related by use of blue and silvery white, making them belong to the same element. As the statue moves towards the warm colours, it establishes cohesion between both spaces, indicating that he is the main agent of the action. Composition contributes towards this same effect, as the viewer is able to ascertain the story-time (how events developed chronologically) because the figure has left his sandals and footprints behind him. Furthermore, the footprints are caused by humid feet, so the viewer knows the exact distance it has travelled, and also that very little time has passed before he has left his statue condition to meet his lover at the door from which she emerges.

Even though the composition is asymmetric, as the front right side of the painting where the two figures encounter has a greater weight and represents the climactic action, Varo compensates composition with another element, a figure that looks at the couple from the left side of the painting. Thus, within the two distinct temporal moments Varo adds a third episode, achieved by the aforementioned equilibrium in composition and by orienting one of the figure's gaze to be looking towards the next event: the discovery of their meeting by a third person. The viewer's gaze, moving with that of the character, distinguishes now three separated and ordered temporal sequences. The first event precedes the second and it is static (the statue was on the pedestal), the second event is active, (the statue comes alive and walks to meet the lover), it temporally precedes the third and causes it, (the meeting of the couple causes the surprise of the woman who looks at them and turns it into a clandestine meeting). A substantial quantity of Varo's paintings employ very similar techniques.¹³

¹³ Because of the repetitive character of commenting upon all, I will just note some which present a very similar criteria of narration: *Visita inesperada* (1958) *Ruptura* (1955), *Nacer de nuevo* (1960), *Mujer saliendo del psicoanalista* (1960), or *Presencia inquietante* (1959).

Another significant number of Varo's images do not make use of the aforementioned conventions to achieve the sense of a double ordered temporal sequence and thus of a narrative. Both the group of paintings just commented upon and the ones to which I will now turn, present an allusive rather than explicit narrative method.¹⁴ However, this second group of paintings is differentiated from the others by several features. Unlike the others, and even these are also based on a drawing technique, there are no visible parallel lines, she does not represent architectural constructions, moving from interior spaces to exterior ones, that is, to natural landscapes. While in the paintings in which she used geometrical central perspective the viewer's spatial reference was given by one, two or three vanishing points as well as by the horizon line, the viewer of these images does not have a clear spatial reference. That is, the landscapes do not provide a neat horizon line, earth and heaven are not that easily distinguished.

While the background lacks stability, Varo nonetheless centres the scene through different planes worked to create depth, as well as through colour, which becomes the observer's main point of reference. Attention is brought to the central figure, often painted orange, red or yellow, that is, warm colours that advance towards the viewer provoking a sense of closeness. If in the previously discussed paintings, colour, perspective and composition helped the viewer to discern separate surfaces which were then linked and temporally ordered, in this group the characters are literally 'floating', 'moving' through the pictorial space. In order to underline the narrative effect, some use the trope of the path or the orientation of the figures' eyes, as these paintings are, like the other ones, rather small, and therefore will never compel the eye to move by its size, but by detail. Temporality is inferred from the scene by making it appear as one stage within a larger scenario, as well as by being able, through composition, to suggest a set of causal associations that establish a past, a present and a future moment within the painted scene. These scenarios are in themselves quite important with regard to the narrative effect, especially at the level of what the painting refers to outside it, as they cause the depicted scenes to be associated with the archetypal system of the quest, turning the pictorial objects into evaluative details. That is, the paintings present a story but also relate to a master narrative beyond it, its signs working allegorically.

¹⁴ This method was according to Steiner 'intended to arouse in the viewer's mind the recollection of the complete story and, in addition, to stand as a symbol for the deeper lying ideas' (*Pictures* 22).

In *Exploración de las fuentes del río Orinoco* (1959), Varo uses zero-point perspective, working the planes so as to endow a sense of depth, with the elements at the front depicted bigger than those at the back. Even though the painting lacks a neat horizon line, a division and therefore a spatial reference is suggested by the tactile value of the elements depicted. That is, all the background possesses the same grey colour yet at the back the transparent water leads to what appears a more dense fog, covering the whole upper part of the painting and suggesting a vague horizon line, even if blurred. The homogeneity of cold colours helps to highlight the central figure, painted red. Yet, colour composition is stabilised though the use of a yellow in the trees that frame the central figure, and the composition of elements is balanced through the inclusion of the birds in the trees at the left and the open tree with the goblet at the right. This not only endows the overall pictorial space with a sense of equilibrium, but provokes a temporal effect in the viewer. That is, the eye first catches the central figure framed by the two trees in the background (present moment), and then moves towards the goblet she is about to find (future moment). Only later does the viewer perceive the birds on the framing trees that are observing the woman and the marks on the water suggesting her passage and thus becoming indicative of her previous location in the painting's 'temporal' sequence (past moment). Therefore, as Parkinson-Zamora has observed with regard to other of her paintings, there is always an 'implicit "before" and "after" to the arrested moment of the painted scene' (*Magical* 136). The suggestion of a future temporal movement is achieved by the orientation of the woman's gaze, which suggests that she is not portrayed in the climactic moment of finding the source of the river, but rather about to find it: one sees it as an unfinished action because the woman has not yet seen her goal.¹⁵ The viewer thus assumes that the finding of the glass will be the climactic action of the narration and thus attributes a future movement to the temporal sequence. Varo regulates discourse-time by not presenting the character's action as finished and yet being able to show what the finishing event will be.

Nonetheless, one does not only extract the 'story' from this ordering, but also by the fact that the canvas is able to relate to a master narrative, alchemy, and yet simultaneously remain wholly independent from it. This external context is given because, even though the source of the river is a common wine glass placed on an

¹⁵ It is significant that most critics had attributed an unfinished character to this painting. For instance, Sánchez mentions how the woman 'is close to a breakthrough but cannot (or has not yet) make the final move' (58).

ordinary table, its hidden location, arrangement, as well as the title's indication that it is 'the source', forces an awareness of a different meaning upon the viewer. The glass becomes independent of its spatiotemporal context to refer back to an Arthurian or alchemical goblet. The objects of the depicted scene can be understood as symbols of a wider mythical structure: the quest for the alchemical centre or the Holy Grail. By extending the work of art to cover classical or mythical subjects, what is being proposed is an 'analogy between the art of painting and the creation of multilayered allegorical narratives' (Steiner, *Pictures* 25). As happens in allegory, the referential subject suffers isolation from her context, the Orinoco River, for this traveller could be at any time and in any place and thus her individual search for the source of the river can transcend into a universal search for alchemical knowledge. The painting could stand as a humorous representation of the quest for the Holy Grail, the Golden Fleece, or the surrealist marvellous. It becomes detached from its dependence on reality, favouring the realm of aesthetic perception and the mental world. Both the glass and the eerie artefact in which the woman is travelling -an ordinary waistcoat transformed into an extraordinary boat- are completely removed from their familiar surroundings and yet are able to become familiar enough to turn into allegorical imagery. This familiarity is partly achieved by the realistic effect provided by the painting's texture, showing Varo's concern for tactile values. The scene is painted with great skill to create the illusion that the spectator is looking at real elements and materials: the figure, while voluminous, is smooth and even, and her clothes and boat suggest, through the drawing of curved lines, softness. The trees are rough, the water is transparent and the fog is dense, appealing to the sense of touch. This realistic effect contrasts with the intriguing and mysterious atmosphere as well as with the awkward apparatuses, but its mixture conveys an overall sense of calmness rather than discrepancy or shock.

A good partner to *Exploración...* is *Ascensión al monte análogo* (1960). Its pictorial composition is markedly similar and it also represents an archetypical hero in one stage of his mythical/mystical quest. As in the previous painting, Varo uses zero-point perspective and has the figure 'floating' into the painting's space. Like in *Exploración...*, she also uses water to locate the figure and the planes are worked gradually so as to endow depth. While there is a predominance of one homogeneous cold colour, shades of grey, the figure advances towards the viewer both by its centrality and by its orange garments. Composition is balanced as the two halves of the painting carry the same weight and, as happened in *Exploración...*,

it suggests temporality, as the gaze first centres on the main figure and then displaces itself towards the other main object of pictorial composition, the mountain, following the path upwards. Varo presents the figure halfway towards achieving his goal, and even though the subject is not repeated, we can follow the path and infer a posterior moment ordering the discourse-time, his arrival at the mountain. In the same manner, one can infer a past moment, as the path indicates the trajectory he has taken by looking downwards towards the last planes. As in *Exploración...*, the painting's narrative is not merely characterised by the suggestion of a stage in a process, but by its allegorical properties, which are making reference to the itself allegorical novel *Mont Analogue* by René Daumal (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 171). The viewer sees a man ascending a spiralling mountain, but once again the representation of elements in the painting provoke this ascension to acquire the broader allegorical meaning of the quest: a solitary figure, going up against the current using a small piece of wood and his garments as sails. The objects are thus cut off from their initial context, and so his precarious method of travel, the sharp ascension and his solitude become symbolic of the difficulty of achieving another spiritual level, a quest signifying the transitional liturgy to the highest possible spirituality.¹⁶

A great number of Varo's canvases present a similar structure and pictorial technique as these two. This is the case of *Hallazgo* (1956), *Roulotte* (1955), *Esquiador* (1960), *La llamada* (1961), *Emigrantes* (1962), and *Camino árido* (1962). All of these images depict a scene in the middle of a story to which the viewer can ascribe a previous and a past moment. All of them can be read as a quest, lending themselves to allegorical and mythical associations. The mythical pattern of her overall production, her representation of nature, the realism conveyed in the depiction of human figures, the unreality or extraordinary quality of the scenery and the events they symbolise, makes Varo's art identifiable with the magical mythical structure, the metamorphic properties of nature and the quest for identity present in some contemporary Latin American writers. Chanady's affirmation that 'Carpentier's transformation of aleatory events into a signifying network characterised by meaningful correspondences reminds us of Borges' distinction between the conception of reality as ruled by chance and a magico-mythic worldview in *which everything is related*' (Chanady 139, my emphasis), connects perfectly with Varo's

¹⁶Regarding this picture she said that it signified 'es el esfuerzo de aquellos que tratan de subir a otro nivel espiritual' (*Catalogue* 118).

representation of 'el hilo que une todas las cosas' (*Catalogue* 114). Nonetheless, in order to arrive at these comparisons, we will first have to see where does Varo come from, the Paris of the surrealist movement.

BETWEEN PARIS AND MEXICO

Pintura especulativa, pintura espejeante: no el mundo al revés, el revés del mundo (Paz, *Remedios* 9).

Images of surrealist art often illustrate impossible juxtapositions or incongruous situations that do not provide the mechanisms to resolve them. The elements within some of its canvases, 'found objects' and *corps exquis* are arranged to disrupt the nature of reality by their very presence. Varo's images, while following a similar disruption, do not follow the same method of elaboration; neither do they cause the same reaction in the viewer. Celorio comments how 'en ninguno de ellos [sus cuadros] podemos encontrar la propositiva oscuridad que se aprecia en las obras de muchos pintores surrealistas' (Celorio 54). One only has to think about surrealist poetic juxtapositions like 'On the bridge the dew with the head of a tabby cat lulls itself to sleep' (Breton, *Manifestoes* 38) to see that these images obtain their value through the *fortuitous* synthesis of elements or concepts which could not possibly be combined in reality (*Manifestoes* 37). In surrealist painting, techniques such as decalcomania, *fumage* and *frottage* became the main means to achieve arbitrariness.¹⁷ However- and here resides the key difference between canonical surrealist images and Varo's- not only are the former based on an arbitrary character, but more significantly, none of these juxtapositions show, like Varo's, the *interdependence* of the two different realities.¹⁸ That is, surrealists' juxtapositions do not entail that one reality needs the other for existence, but rather the contrary, the mind cannot grasp the relationship of the two realities in the presence of each other (Breton, *Manifestoes* 36). While in the 'light of the image' both become indistinguishable, there was a need for surrealism as an art and a philosophy to have the two existing elements as separate entities before their synthesis. 'The value of the image [...] is, consequently, a function of the difference of potential between the two conductors' (Breton, *Manifestoes* 37). Surrealist images as defined by Breton dismiss any initial relation between the two objects because the two schemes of representation have to be

¹⁷ *Fumage* refers to the technique of passing an image over a flame to form suggestive, smoky swirls. *Decalcomania* consists in pressing a sheet of paper over a painted surface and lifting it off to create spongy patterns. *Frottage*, developed by Max Ernst, consists in rubbing a rough surface against the paper or the canvas, creating a textured, spontaneous surface (Taylor 127).

¹⁸ If surrealist images erase the limits between the two concepts or realities juxtaposed, Varo's images never erase them but blur them, for in her synthesis, both are still distinguishable.

separated for it to acquire a higher meaning in its union. Otherwise, it will not create the effect aimed at the viewer/reader: to disturb and shock.

Varo's Mexican paintings were fabricated following an extreme calculation: 'the chance patterns served merely as a starting point from which to elaborate highly controlled images' (Kaplan, *Subversive* 116). In her *Catalogue Raisonné*, one can see how all of Varo's canvases are 'pintura dibujística', indicating how she had her images concisely designed before starting with the canvas.¹⁹ In Mexico, all traces of arbitrariness disappeared from her composition, and although she made use of decalcomania, *frottage* and *fumage*, she did it very conscious of the image that it would give birth to. In contrast with surrealism, 'este mundo desconcertante posee, y de aquí su fuerza, una coherencia indiscutible: no consiste en mil denegaciones diferentes y heteróclitas del mundo real' (Caillois, *Remedios* 17, my emphasis).²⁰ Even more relevant to her difference with European works of the first surrealist stage, is the fact that Varo emphasises the interdependence of the realities or elements juxtaposed. Although her images 'dan la impresión de lo fantástico [...] tales escenas no son las más fecundas en maravillas e imposibilidades escandalosas: son, al contrario, aquellas en que la extrañeza se encuentra lo bastante próxima del mundo cotidiano para ser sentida como familiar y fraternal, hasta en la inquietud que ella suscita' (Caillois, *Remedios* 25). Think about the passage of Donoso's *Casa de campo* in which the figures of the *trompe d'oeil* become alive and come out of the wall to invade the piano room, and then think about a Varo painting like *Energía cósmica* (1956) in which figures emerge out of the wall to play musical instruments. Due to the organic quality of both scenes as well as their coherence within a bigger scenario, the viewer of her paintings feels something akin to what the reader of Donoso's novel experiences with regards to the acceptance of the extraordinary. Equally, one could compare the eerie artificial façades of *El encuentro* and its moving statue or a painting like *Luz emergente*, in which the figure crosses the wall advancing towards the viewer, with the following scene from Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*: 'Era todo un mundo blanco, frío, inmóvil, pero cuyas sombras se

¹⁹ This information is very well documented. Kaplan mentioned that 'her canvases are elaborated with a miniaturist technique that pays attention to the smallest detail, contributing to a realistic effect' (*Unexpected* 190). Similarly, Lozano argues how 'prácticamente cada pintura que realizó está sustentada en un dibujo, y cuanto más complejo se proponía que fuese el contenido de un óleo, más dibujos preparatorios requirió' (48). Taylor states that 'Varo rejected the chance effects inherent in these procedures for absolute artistic control, using decalcomania selectively in hallucinatory compositions' (127).

²⁰ Parkinson-Zamora comments on how 'Varo's visual narrativity gives her paintings an internal coherence and causal structure suggested of an occulted order beyond the visible rather than the utter lack of such an order urged by Breton and Aragon' (*Magical* 136). Lauter asserts that 'Varo's paintings were neither intellectual contrivances nor surrealist abandonment of reason. Her images, however fantastic they may seem, have the quality of things seen' (93).

animaban y crecían a la luz del farol [...]. Solimán creyó advertir que una de las estatuas había bajado un poco el brazo [...]. Ahora eran pinturas las que parecían salir de la pared para animarse' (129). The reader of Donoso and Carpentier as well as the viewer of Varo perceive these scenes not only as possible, but almost as inevitable and logical. The synthesis of realities is realised both in Donoso and Carpentier's literary images and in Varo's painted scenes with an interdependence that the aforementioned surrealist images lack, conveying logic within its whole. While all three might be initially surprising, for figures do not cross walls, and paintings and statues do not become alive, the reader and the viewer see them as consistent with the world described in the rest of the novel or with the rest of the 'world' depicted by the whole of Varo's pictorial production. That is, like in the *trompe d'oeil* scene in *Casa de campo*, and like the sight of Solimán in *El reino de este mundo*, she makes the impossible a logical consequence of the possible; displaying the interconnectedness of two realities and their mutual endorsement. Both Donoso and Carpentier's novels and Varo's paintings, while presenting the commonplace intertwined with the extraordinary, make perfect sense within their contexts.

Within surrealism, the visual and the verbal often flow into one another.²¹ However, art historians have often suggested that literary expression played a more significant role in the work of surrealist women. According to Chadwick, 'even more important than their use of literary as well as visual media is the extent to which a literary imagination gave form to their visual expression' (*Women* 219). Chadwick justifies this pronounced literary tendency in terms of surrealist women artists' disassociation from the theoretical side of surrealism and their refusal to use the body of woman as the 'link' to the ultimate reality. She goes on to argue how 'the self-referential nature of the work of these women [...] almost guarantees an art in which personal reality dominates, and narrative flow, rather than abrupt dislocation and juxtaposition, provides structure' (*Women* 221). Judging from the semantics of Varo's paintings as well as from the fact that most criticism has read her work autobiographically, that is, as personal narrative, Chadwick's statement proves in Varo's circumstances to be accurate. However, I would add that the different awareness present in many of Varo's canvases relates not only to personal, internal reality, but also to the perception of the external world.

²¹ This can be appreciated in Ernst's collage novels, in Dalí's writing of texts for some of his works, in Valentine Hugo's illustrations of Éluard's and Breton's poems as well as in the fact that many artists like Masson, Carrington, Pailthorpe or Dalí, expressed themselves simultaneously in visual and verbal media.

The change in Varo's art is patent by the time she settles in Mexico and, even though other key factors contributed towards developing her own style, it is likely that Mexican culture and its geographical surroundings contributed towards this new pictorial responsiveness.²² As Lozano has mentioned, 'fue en México donde Remedios encontró el espacio mágico idóneo para poder proyectar el cúmulo de sus experiencias'(45).²³ According to Sánchez, 'Varo's 'eventual break with certain aspects of her surrealist past recall Carpentier's groundbreaking reflections on *lo real maravilloso* [...]. It has been suggested that the 'vital organicism' that characterises many of her paintings may have its roots in her adoptive new world surroundings' (59). Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* and other novels fitting into his aesthetic approach such as Asturias' *Leyendas de Guatemala* or Malandrón, Donoso's *Casa de campo* or García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* often imagine nature 'as an enormously powerful, fecund and at times terribly invasive presence' (Sánchez 59). Varo's paintings such as *El gato helecho* (1957), *Les feuilles mortes* (1956) *Aprendiz de Ícaro* (1959), *Música solar* (1955) or *Catedral vegetal* (1957) suggest a magical, invasive and mimetic property of nature. In *El gato helecho*, two cats in the middle of the jungle have metamorphosed in accordance to their surroundings, as their bodies have become composed of ferns. Maintaining their cat-like shape they have, as if they were chameleons, blended in with the adjacent nature. Inversely, the clouds in the sky have adopted the form of a cat's claw, pouring rain from their fingers. The painting recalls the description of the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* in a scene in which he confuses the jungle's vegetation with its animals and viceversa. Langowski has mentioned how 'el protagonista deforma constantemente las verdaderas imágenes de lo que se ve y de este modo adquieren una surrealidad. Donde hay cocodrilos, ve troncos que flotan en el agua, las lianas parecen reptiles, las serpientes se vuelven lianas las plantas acuáticas aparecen alfombra espesa' (213). Like in Varo's painting, 'la selva tiene todas las características de un camaleón, está en un constante estado de metamorfosis' (Langowski 213). The painting equally evokes the description of some indigenous peoples and Gods in Asturias' novels. In *Leyendas de Guatemala*, one of the gods in the story 'Kukul Khan'

²² I am referring to the factors of having a comfortable economic position as well as the time and space to develop her work. Equally important was the creative atmosphere that she shared with other European surrealists there, particularly with Leonora Carrington, Gunter Gerzso and Eva Sulzer. Agosín reports how 'tanto Varo como Carrington construyeron una patria en sí mismas, elucubrando y transformando la cotidianidad sobre los territorios de la magia y lo doméstico' (*Hacedoras* 203).

²³ Note however that Varo was not influenced by the main Mexican artistic movement of the time, the muralists and their social realism and her paintings of the Mexican period reveal influences in aesthetic by European artists praised by the surrealists like Bosch, Goya, El Greco and also by the architectural models of the Renaissance and medieval Spain. Kaplan comments how, 'rather than interpreting this absence of specific mexicanisms in Varo's work as a rejection of her host country's artistic production, it can be seen as a mark of her respect for the integrity of Mexican culture that Varo did not assemble some pastiche of Mexican motifs and annexe them to her work to prove her fealty to her adopted home' (*Subversive* 124).

has his hair composed of ferns and trees, metamorphosed with the jungle and giving way to plantations of corn (109). In *Malandrón* the indigenous people are described through an unequivocal surreal image, quite reminiscent of Varo's cats: 'seres verdes, seres árboles, seres ramas, seres hojas con ojos' (*Malandrón* 217).²⁴

Previously, when commenting on *Exploración...*, I mentioned that one of its possible interpretations was to read it as a quest for the marvellous. Now, this marvellous can be seen to correspond both with the surrealist alchemical search and with Carpentier's search for *lo real maravilloso* as expressed in *Los pasos perdidos*. This is partly suggested by the natural setting, the Amazon jungle and the Orinoco River, the same place where the narrator of Carpentier's novel starts his quest. Sánchez has considered how 'both protagonists come to the realization that in a sense they have never left home and that there was no going back to an unmediated source' (58). However, while Carpentier's narrator is completely serious about his quest, Varo's painting conveys certain humour in the triviality of the object she represents as 'the source'. This is not a paradisiacal place in the middle of the forest, but it is a simple wine glass whose origin might be, in fact, European, fusing the idea of the natural and 'authentic' marvellous reality with alchemical and therefore 'fabricated' notions of the marvellous. Perhaps more importantly, unlike Carpentier's narrative, where the primitive woman (Rosario) plays a crucial role towards the achievement of his quest, the woman in Varo is not represented as medium between man and 'the source', but on the contrary, as the quester for wholeness and knowledge.

Another painting that presents striking parallelisms with a passage from *Los pasos perdidos* is *Catedral vegetal*. Varo's painting depicts a woman travelling through a forest in an orange caravan with the shape of a bird. However, the forest is not a forest as one would expect it, as the trees stand as columns which open up into pointed arches, creating a large gothic vault as if the forest was the roof of a gothic cathedral. At the sight of the jungle, the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* comments how,

Tenía mi memoria que irse al mundo del Bosco, a las babeles imaginarias de los pintores de lo fantástico, de los más alucinados ilustradores de tentaciones de santos, para hallar algo semejante a lo que estaba contemplando [...]. Y allá, sobre aquel fondo de cirros, se

²⁴ Others like *Presencia inquietante* (1959), *Energía cósmica* (1956), *Les feuilles mortes* (1956) or *Emigrantes* (1962), show nature overtaking the interior spaces in a way that recalls the gradual intrusion of nature in the Buendía's house over the course of the years in *Cien años de soledad*, or the advance of the 'gramíneas' and the invasion of the 'vilanos' in Marulanda in Donoso's *Casa de campo*.

afirmaba la Capital de las Formas: una increíble catedral gótica, de una milla de alto, con sus dos torres, su nave, su ábside y sus arbotantes, montada sobre un peñón cónico hecho de una materia extraña (171).

On the one hand, the passage of the novel and the painting make mutual reference to one another, as both are concerned with the extraordinary aspects of natural forms and the relationships this presents with European painting and architecture. On the other, both cathedrals can be associated with the wonders of the new world, as Varo's character's method of travelling presents the sails of a Spanish boat from the XVI century, and could thus be referring to the myths surrounding the discovery of America. The main difference is that while Carpentier's image evokes a marvellous reality surging forth from the seemingly impossible juxtaposition of having a European style gothic cathedral in the middle of the jungle, Varo *creates* that marvellous reality through a vegetal cathedral. Ironically, while Varo's female quester is not surprised, as she looks gently into the viewers eye, Carpentier's narrator precisely finds himself in the surrealist '*état de surprise*' (see Chapter One). While employing different methods, the resulting image and effect on the viewer and reader is indeed very similar, an extraordinary gothic cathedral in the middle of the jungle or forest.

The mimetic and extraordinary representation of nature as an inspirational source for creating the marvellous is not the only common ground between Varo and Carpentier, but also an emphasis on the mystical and metamorphic properties of music. That is, the view of musical instruments as a key to the combination of all things, as an organising principle evocative of the Pythagorean 'music of the spheres' present in both *Los pasos perdidos* and in Varo's paintings such as *Música solar*, *El trovador* or *El flautista* that will be discussed in depth in the last section of this chapter. Thus far, it is enough to mention that both Carpentier and Varo extend this metamorphic quality of music to include corporeal metamorphosis. However, Varo's metamorphic paintings also correspond to writers not pertaining to Carpentier's cultural concept. While a metamorphic process lies 'at the heart of the surrealist vision of an art of fantasy, magic and transformation' (Chadwick, *Women* 180), Varo's images present an organic quality lacking in most surreal metamorphoses, and while she also chooses the body of woman to undergo them, this is never like in canonical surrealist painting, a violent and dismembering one. Some of her metamorphoses recall those undergone by the aforementioned Asturias' indigenous and mythological characters, since hers regularly remit to an

animal or natural form that acquires mythological properties.²⁵ However, in Varo they are not intimately connected with the Latin American mythical cosmogonies, and just like in Asturias 'la India como mujer es la personificación erótica de todos los elementos naturales' (Megged 322), so all these natural and animal metamorphoses in Varo significantly take an asexual, non erotic form, placing an emphasis on women's transgression of corporeal reality as a mode of exploring existence and creativity.

Varo uses metamorphosis to explore the responses to external stimuli and social situations intertwined with myth, as is the case of *Personaje* (1958) and *El minotauro* (1959).²⁶ Paintings like *Mujer lechuza volando* (1957) and *Personaje libélula* (1955), in which the viewer is confronted with an animal that still presents certain human characteristics, could also evoke the transformation undergone by the narrator of Cortázar's 'Axolotl'. Therefore, she also moves beyond *lo real maravilloso* in this metamorphic aspect to evoke other writers such as Cortázar, who like Varo, seems to suggest metamorphosis as a creative game of transition from one plane of existence to another.²⁷ Both Varo and Cortázar's metamorphoses express the intrusion of one reality into the other, where the animal becomes symbolic of that other order of reality: 'los ojos de los axolotls me decían de la presencia de una forma de vida diferente, de otra manera de mirar' (Cortázar, *Final* 164). As happens to this narrator, with Varo's characters it seems 'fácil, casi obvio, caer en la mitología' (Cortázar, *Final* 165). However, Varo's metamorphic paintings also differ from Cortázar, for her characters do not suffer a complete metamorphosis but are always depicted half way through it, still maintaining that coexistence of states surrealism championed and that for example writers like Asturias also maintained. Most importantly, she transforms the archetypal mythic heroes to refer to a female appearance and therefore form of existence, while Cortázar's story provides a mythological statement that relates to the male self, his existential questionings and his account of phenomenological aspects. Like surrealist artists such as Leonora Carrington or Leonor Fini, who often blurred the boundary between animal and human (Colville, 'Beauty' 159-81) Varo uses metamorphosis to reflect upon the

²⁵The only exception to this is the painting *Mimetismo*, in which the woman is half-metamorphosed into a chair. This painting will be commented in the next section in relation with the image of woman.

²⁶ According to Lauter, *Personaje* recalls the image of a winged Pan. For Lauter the image differs from the pattern it echoes since a human female embodies Pan's attributes. She equally argues how in *El minotauro*, 'another mythological figure that is male by convention is rendered in female form; instead of being imprisoned inside a labyrinth [...] she is preparing to open the door to the sky' (90).

²⁷ Interestingly, the third 1987 edition of this volume of short stories, *Final del juego*, has as book cover Varo's painting *Locomoción capilar* (Catalogue 345).

creative female self while providing metaphysical postulations. The same idea of integration, existential problems and use of mythology conveyed in Cortázar's narratives that, like 'Axolotl', deals with human metamorphoses, is transformed by Varo into a medium to reflect upon women's relation to phenomenology, sexuality, metaphysics and their role within society.

Although Varo's work does indeed dialogue with both surrealism and *lo real maravilloso americano*, her pictorial production is, as seen in the case of Cortázar, by no means limited to them. There are other key aspects and themes represented in her paintings such as mysticism, Gnosticism and other Oriental philosophies which would rather connect with Latin American writers that, like Borges, have been labelled as fantastic. Even though Borges would indeed be a good comparison to explore Varo's enactment of the mentioned thematic, and albeit I will comment upon her painting *Armonía* (1956) in the next section in relation to one of Borges' stories, to fully comment upon their connections would be the subject of a different study.²⁸ More significant for my argument is the fact that her revelation of time as circular (*Revelación o El relojero* (1955)), her fusion of the circular with the alchemical, the mythical and spiritual (*Tránsito en espiral* (1962), *Naturaleza muerta resucitando* (1963) and *Rompiendo el círculo vicioso* (1962)) as well as her suggestions on resurrection and eternal return are, as shall be noted in the subsequent chapters, a recurrent topos in Octavio Paz (*Piedra de sol*), Carlos Fuentes (*Terra nostra*) Carmen Boullosa (*Llanto*) and in Elena Garro (*La culpa es de los txacaltecas*).²⁹ For these writers, cyclical time is illustrative of the Nahua cosmovision based on a belief in earth's renewal and resurrection from death. Similar to them and even if following a different pattern, Varo combines circularity with a mythical organization that becomes reminiscent of that *tiempo mexicano* where past, present and future collide to present the idea of renewal, regeneration and earth cycles.

²⁸ *El otro reloj* (1952), *Ermitaño* (1955) *Reflejo lunar* (1957), *El malabarista o El juglar* (1956) and *Tres destinos* (1956) all present similar ideas to those put forward by Borges in *Historia de la eternidad*, *Ficciones*, and *El Aleph*. Both Varo's paintings and Borges' tales manifest a will to search for the norms that underlie our sensuous world, both realise metaphysical postulations, convey mystical, alchemical and religious metaphors as well reflect upon infinity, the cyclic and the eternal return. One could indeed state Varo's equivalent of Borges' Aleph in her painting *Revelación o El relojero* (1955). Hers, instead of representing the point of space that contains all points, becomes the moment of time that contains all moments. Varo's 'revelation' closely parallels the description of the Aleph: 'una pequeña esfera tornasolada, de casi intolerable fulgor. Al principio la creí giratoria, luego comprendí que ese movimiento era una ilusión producida por los vertiginosos espectáculos que encerraba' (Borges, *Aleph* 192). Both emphasise the idea of simultaneity, he in space, she in time. Yet Borges does somehow connect his Aleph with the idea of the beloved, Beatriz, while Varo avoids all connections between her revelation and the loving figure of woman, or man, where time alone is the significant instrument for understanding the infinite.

²⁹ *Tránsito en Espiral*, evokes infinity in its continuity and indeed, if the figures continue travelling, there will be a moment in which they will intersect, for there is no way out the spiral structure. They will occupy the same physical space in the painting, which is impossible, fusing the traditional closed action of painting with the sequential stages of action of narrative. For a detailed study of the circle in the work of Remedios Varo, see Magnolia Rivera's book: *El círculo en la obra de Remedios Varo*.

To conclude, Varo's narrative method has been divided into two main different groups. On the one hand, a great number of her paintings present a geometric perspective that often use architectural backgrounds and framings, in which a narrative ordering is established by providing clear separate surfaces which are then united through lines and ordered in a temporal sequence through colour and composition. In these, her architecture is reminiscent at times of De Chirico's metaphysical painting, but her style is also evocative of the simple lines of the Quattrocento and Mannerism. Her palette is generally quite limited, with a preference for browns, sepias, oranges, reds, blues and greys, often contrasting warm with cold tonalities. While her depiction of space is classic, fully rational and reflexive, the elements located within such space are remarkably elaborated, mostly extraordinary or dreamlike and therefore, in contrast with the simplicity of perspective and colour, the complexity of the ornaments and figures is illustrated aesthetically as well as conceptually. On the other hand, there is another significant amount of paintings that move away from interior spaces and scenarios in which architectural constructions abound, to illustrate natural landscapes or eerie sceneries where a main figure is located. In these, the implicit connotation of movement and the time ordering is suggested through the blurring of the horizon line, the use of colour and the depth with which Varo works the different planes, as well as by devices such as the depiction of a path or the orientation of the figure's eyes.

In both methods of narrating, the viewer finds elements from and affinities with both surrealism and *lo real maravilloso americano*. As in Varo's paintings, the historical subjects of Latin American novels associated with Carpentier's cultural concept disappear behind a scheme of timeless, allegorical, mythical and magical actions. Varo fuses her temporal and spatial patterns into a prototype that excludes, yet paradoxically includes, both the world of fantasy and reality, while employing a mythical pattern to elaborate the narratives of her paintings. As in the prologue to *El reino de este mundo*, Varo wants to show her viewer that the marvellous is ultimately based on reality, although this reality is not in her case the exclusive property of Latin America. Stating her connections with *lo real maravilloso americano* does not mean to oversimplify the differences between Carpentier's aesthetic and the surrealist one, but rather to show how Varo's pictorial production is in direct dialogue with both. The presentation of an imagery that presents parallelisms with *Los pasos perdidos*, *Casa de campo*, *El reino de este mundo*, or Cortazar's 'Axolotl',

simultaneously shows that, even though Varo's use of perspective, composition and colour strictly follows a European tradition and her thematic and pictorial methods are akin to surrealist postulates, her imagination shares a common ground with the marvels of the Latin American continent as imagined by their contemporary writers. This also shows that she found in Mexican culture and popular/indigenous belief, what surrealism had conceptualised intellectually.³⁰ Equally important is to stress how her vision responds to the canonical vision of woman that one finds both within Latin American narratives and within surrealism. She uses mythology and allegory to express notions that relate particularly to women's creative potential and experiences instead of portraying her as an objectified medium, key or metaphor for creativity. Thus, the next section is devoted to showing how Varo's production employs a series of devices that work towards the creation of a responsive aesthetic which are first going to be analysed through her contestation of surrealist images of women and love.

SECTION TWO: CHANGING THE SURREALIST PARADIGMS: REMEDIOS VARO'S IMAGES OF WOMEN AND LOVE.

It has already been noted that a great deal of surrealist efforts were devoted to defining the role of woman in the creative process, where she held a polarised position. Chadwick remarked how 'woman existed in many guises: as Virgin, child, celestial creature on the one hand; as sorceress, erotic object and *femme fatale* on the other' (*Women* 13). In the construction of such images, the gaze held a key position. Concretely, it was the gaze of the male poet, painter or photographer, his way of seeing and imagining femininity, which constructed the icon of the 'feminine'. For Benjamin Péret, the surrealist who was closest to Varo, the image of woman could either lead man towards the extraordinary or impose limits on him, although he often depicts her as an enchantress transporting man to cosmic adventures (Hubert 263). The construction of woman as sorceress is of particular relevance to surrealism as well as to Varo's pictorial production. The difficulty is how, within a male defined scenario of *femmes enfants*, *femmes fatales*, muses and goddesses confined in the role of complementing man's creativity, the *mature* woman artist is to design her own construction. The purpose of my discussion in this section is to analyse the concrete set of devices and tactics Varo has followed to transform and criticise the

³⁰ As Agosin has pointed, 'fue en México donde Remedios, como otros surrealistas, encontró una historia viviente donde el día de los muertos es objeto de celebración, donde se comen calaveras porque lo oculto, lo magnético irracional estalla y se hace habla y es lienzo-óleo volante' (*Hacedoras* 201).

canonical surrealist 'assemblage' of woman and the role she is to play within love. Besides responding to surrealist theorizations, some pictures are simultaneously compared with specific passages taken from Latin American novels that encompass an analogous vision of woman and love to surrealism. Through their plastic quality, most of these literary images lend themselves to associations with Varo's canvases, which allows us to see what aspects Varo's production shares with these writers with regards to images of love and woman.

This section presents a detailed analysis of seven of Varo's paintings dealing with love and the construction of woman's image, moving from an emphasis on colour, perspective and composition to focus almost exclusively on the painting's semantics. While many critics have referred to the agency Varo gives to the woman subject in her paintings and to her concern for female creativity (Haynes, Parkinson-Zamora, Chadwick, Kaplan, Lauter, Agosín among many others) very few have examined how her images of woman disrupt the masculine gaze, and in relationship to what cultural, historical and theoretical discourses might Varo have erected these female images. More surprisingly, there is no critical study on Varo's art to date that has examined her paintings in relationship to love, and Janet Kaplan has even noted that 'Péret developed another theme not found in Varo's work -the theme of love-' (*Unexpected* 214).³¹ In the second part of this section I demonstrate that not only does Varo's art develop the theme of love, but in fact how her conceptualisation of love directly contests various notions of surrealist love, among them Péret's. Hence, the first part of the analysis reflects on how her images revise both the surrealist gaze that sets out a concrete type of female identity and the woman who abandons herself to the (masculine) cultural conceptualisation of what she is. The second part of the analysis demonstrates that Varo's paintings parody and reformulate surrealist principles of love in order to put forward her own vision, while simultaneously showing how they can be understood in tandem with other Latin American novels that have propagated a similar love discourse to surrealism. As a woman painting women she had of necessity to disrupt the nature of the male gaze and the key role this gaze plays both in the elaboration of woman's image and within heterosexual love. Thus, in both sections there will be an emphasis on how it is the woman artist who is positioned in the active role of seeing and therefore of recreating reality.

³¹ The only study that has touched upon love in Varo's work is the mentioned Hubert essay. This however, examines the creative partnership between Varo and Péret rather than examining Varo's love thematic (Hubert 261-271).

DISRUPTING THE MASCULINE GAZE

Necesito el equilibrio del uno subrayado, el ejercicio del aislamiento para no disolverme, para no desaparecer engullida por la voracidad de quienes me rodean [...] no tengo porqué ser la herida cubierta con el vestido rojo de mi propia sangre exhibida en el carnaval de lo otro. (Boullosa, *La Milagrosa* 102).

The four paintings analysed in this first part reflect upon the construction of 'femininity' at the same time that they are seen to possess an allegorical dimension that will, in the conclusion, make it possible to understand Varo's plastic images as visual counterparts to Boullosa's and Garro's literary strategies of response. However, and despite her paintings being on several occasions associated with certain images of contemporary Latin American literature, knowing that the surrealist vision, theory and spirit was the closest influence on Varo, it is against its orthodoxy that her critique should be mainly understood. The first painting, *Au bonheur des dames* (1956), portrays an interior space in which all parallel planes are worked with the same intensity. The tree in the centre of the painting divides it in two balanced halves, and its endless succession of semi-arched doors where the vanishing point is located, arranges an illusionistic walled city. Several humanoid beings, half human, half bicycle, are dressed alternatively with warm and cold tonalities which help to reinforce the painting's composition. These beings frantically proceed towards a shop whose window displays mechanical complements for their bodies. The shop's name reads 'Au bonheur des citoyens' but looking closer the viewer perceives that these 'citizens' are mostly women; confirmed by the title of the painting. Except for a man, whose body is slightly different and who seems reluctant to go into the shop.

Kaplan has mentioned that 'specific literary allusions in Varo's work are a rare instance' (*Unexpected* 171), but this painting seems to be one of those rare instances. The narrative underlying the depicted scene relates to the 'happiness' of women and it is likely that it is presenting an extratextual reference to Emile Zola's 1883 novel *Au bonheur des dames*.³² Surprisingly, there is no specific reference to this novel either in Varo's comments or in any other critical study, yet both convey a similar message. In Zola's novel, the store is the emblem for Parisian women's beauty. The gaze of its owner, Mouret, dictates what is fashionable, how women should dress in order to 'be beautiful', conform to 'femininity' or attract potential husbands. In

³² Zola's novel narrates the opening of the biggest department store in Paris. While the narrative comments upon the consequences that such stores and emerging economy might have for the small merchants, another key issue is how all the wealthy women of Paris have substituted clothing for personal identity.

Varo's painting, the man in front of the shop's door is as mechanised as all other figures are. However, he differs from the women in his extremities, as well as in the major sail of a medieval boat that emerges from his head, which can be read as a symbol of his authority and therefore as the equivalent of Mouret's authoritative figure in Zola's novel. If read against a surrealist background, one could compare Mouret's dictates with Breton's commands on how woman should appear in order to be a 'surrealist discovery', the embodiment of convulsive beauty, the charming *femme-enfant* or the perfect object of desire. The authoritative figure of Mouret in Zola's novel and in Varo's painting is thus comparable to Breton's authority within the surrealist circle; as both men's power rests on their ability to conceptualise how woman should act, dress or behave. Read this way, the mechanical pieces that the women in Varo's picture acquire develop into a metaphor for the clothes Parisian women buy for the sake of their 'delight'.

Now, man-made pieces can always be reproduced, as man-made models can always be emulated, and the painting suggests that these have been constructed not only following the same pattern, but also under the supervision of the same masculine gaze. Varo's canvas shows a stage in this process where the women have already grown to be an extension of their clothes/pieces, and so the wheels and other robotic paraphernalia can be interpreted as a metaphor of their own bodies. Their frantic run towards the shop demonstrates how they are eager to wear that 'mask of womanliness' expressed by Irigaray as, 'alienated or false versions of femininity arising from the woman's awareness of the man's desire [...]. In the masquerade, they submit to the dominant male economy of desire in an attempt to remain 'on the market' in sight of everything' (*Sex* 98). Very much like contemporary society, the result is that the women wearing this peculiar 'mask of femininity' all look the same. They move instinctively towards that which they think will bring their happiness, but which, ironically, will only make them more alienated. That is, the painting presents no communication among the figures; these women have seemingly turned into a copy of a copy, automated beings that circle around the tree roundabout in the centre of the painting.

The reason for their alienation might be that their minds have lost independent thinking, that their bodies have lost their individuality and with it, their humanity.³³

³³ Perhaps, the substitution of a French title for a Spanish one in this painting points towards a more concrete type of woman and society, the Parisian one, who not only has seen the birth of surrealism and an 'automated' construction of woman but which also was the capital of European fashion. With regard to this painting Varo

The critique is not solely of the masculine gaze that has created that pattern of beauty, but also of the women who have transformed their bodies according to certain ways of seeing. They have given themselves to the powers of society's patriarchal gaze, and while this idea might be implicit in Zola, Varo's painting amplifies it. If the man at the front door has been the creator of such a pattern, he has himself become equal to it. That is, his static position and contemplative gesture imply that he is no more autonomous than the women who are buying his pieces. If interpreted as symbolic of a surrealist authoritative figure, Varo's painting can be seen as demonising the surrealist belief that 'the release of desire into the world would find its most potent metaphor in an image of female beauty' (Chadwick, *Women* 31). This is suggested as the painting expresses no spontaneous desire and the stereotypical symbols of women's beauty such as softness and delicateness have developed into robotic objects that satirise such a conception of the beautiful.

Finally, *Au bonheur des dames* suggests the mechanisation of art itself represented in the world of *haute couture*. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Benjamin comments how the 'aura' of art is decaying as the masses are required to bring things closer to themselves in order 'to overcome the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction' (*Illuminations* 223). The picture echoes how, within surrealist painting and photography, the masses have accepted a standard pattern with regard to how woman should dress, behave and look in order to be 'feminine' or in terms of surrealist doctrine, in order to be a 'surrealist discovery'. Patriarchal society and surrealism's urge to bring this 'female object' closer to them, (perhaps to 'understand' it better) by means of artistic reproduction, renders the object devoid of essence. If surrealism looks here for the 'point sublime', as can be seen incessantly in the images of Delvaux, Magritte, Bellmer or Man Ray, the image has become so repetitive that it runs the danger of becoming mechanised. In fact, most canonical surrealist depictions dehumanise and mechanise woman's image: 'no head, no feet, no anything but that body mesmerising, arms akimbo' (Caws, *Surrealist Look* 53). Varo's painting might thus be suggesting how, in its ceaseless emulation, the 'aura' of the image (woman) loses uniqueness, ironically developing into exactly the opposite reason of why surrealism centred its hope on the female 'irrational' beauty. That is, instead of

commented how they represent 'criaturas de nuestra época, sin ideas propias, mecanizadas y próximas a pasar a estado de insectos' (*Catalogue* 113).

escaping 'from an over mechanised masculine world' (Caws, *Péret* 207), it generates it.

Tailleur pour dames (1957) conveys a very similar idea to *Au bonheur des dames*, and it also seems to refer back to a piece of French literature: George Feydeau's comedy *Tailleur pour dames*.³⁴ The canvas presents a frontal perspective view of the inside of a tailor's workshop, the setting in which Feydeau's third act takes place. Three different dresses are being shown to a customer, each worn by a female model. All of them are dressed in cold colours, except the model of the centre, who is dressed in red and therefore advances towards the viewer. The room is octagonal, with two entrances, one luminous on the left leading to the street, and one dark on the right from which the models emerge. The curtains on the sides, the entrances, the illumination, and the visual perspective, all evoke a theatrical stage.³⁵ On the floor, shaped geometrically like a spider's web, a magnet attracts multitudes of needles that circle around the room, tying up the customer with the three models, but avoiding the costumier. The iconography that evokes the theatre stage also triggers an allegorical dimension to the depicted scene. If one interprets this painting as a narrative, one assumes that someone has placed the magnet on the floor, and the most logical answer is that this was an action of the tailor, since the workshop is his. This action can be interpreted as representative of his desire to attach the customer to one of the patterns he has created, each made to represent one (theatrical) role. In fact, the shadow of the tailor, reminiscent of Stoker's *Dracula* or of the devil, disobeys him and reveals the same sinister desire as the famous count: to pounce over his victim. However, one of the needles sticks his shadow to the ceiling, pleading for patience.

The model in the optical centre of the painting recalls a traveller, with accoutrements including a compass hanging around her neck, an umbrella or rolled boat sail, and a wheeled coat that might serve as means of transport. These suggest an independent, adventurous woman. The model on the left shows a stylish party dress; its scarf is convertible into a chair and her hat into a tray.³⁶ The outfit suggests the role of the bored, high-class housewife. The third woman has quite a

³⁴ Varo quite possibly knew his comedy, written in 1889, for Feydeau was considered a precursor of surrealism and the theatre of the absurd (Shapiro 9-13).

³⁵ Callois and Paz have both indicated its theatricality, as their only comment about this painting is to append Calderón de la Barca's famous quotation 'Venid, mortales, venid a adornarnos cada uno para que representéis en el teatro del mundo' (25).

³⁶ According to Varo it was made to go 'a estos cocktail-party en donde no cabe un alfiler y no sabe uno ni dónde poner su vaso ni sentarse' (*Catalogue* 115).

sinister look in her eyes, and is dressed in an obscure purple colour. Effervescent bubbles come out of her dress, which ends up in a cat's tail. The main complement is a front pocket with a tiny glass bottle that, according to Varo, is full of poison (*Catalogue* 114). She stands for the 'killer widow' (Varo, *Catalogue* 114) but also for the sorceress, as the cat remains a common representation of a witch's familiar (Golden 174). Presenting these three types of woman, the painting can be read as comically pondering the multiple, metamorphic incarnations of the female self and the unconscious desire (indicated by the tailor's shadow) that patriarchal society has of entrapping her in a static role. Like *Au bonheur des dames*, the painting also enacts Irigaray's concept of the masquerade as an enactment of 'femininity'. Considering the theatrical allusions of the canvas, one can conjecture that the tailor is presenting the 'actress' (the customer) with three of the different roles she can interpret. However, she is the one that holds the power of the internal gaze over the scene, (the external gaze possessed by the viewer of the painting). This fact, together with the stage-like frame of the painting that refers to a 'woman's workshop' emphasizes a place for the female, rather than the male gaze to *act*.

Quite humorously, her way of seeing proves to be different from the tailor, for she realises an unexpected action. According to Irigaray, the view of 'femininity' as masquerade involves an active and questioning spectatorship that will produce a variety of readings based on a different share of cultural codes. Not knowing which to choose, she divides herself into two translucent selves, one at each side.³⁷ Thus, playing a trick on the scissor-like costumier, the 'actress' opts to play all roles, blurring conventional scripting. In her choice, she exposes 'femininity' as an artificial and imprecise category, as a question of personal choice. Thus, if read against surrealist theories, the painting exposes how any surrealist tenet of what woman is or what role she should play is rendered irrelevant; it becomes, like Faydeau's play, a farce. Femininity becomes a construction through the act of dressing, a concept that will also be seen when commenting upon Boullosa's *Duerme*. Both painting and novel represent this notion through theatrical allusions, as 'regulatory fictions' (Butler) that emphasise its performative aspect. The canvas, together with *Au bonheur des dames* and others like *Visita al cirujano plástico* (1960) all expose a similar thematic, namely, the distance between what women are and how they are seen, the impossibility of developing an identity or subjectivity if one is

³⁷ 'La cliente que contempla los modelos se despliega en dos personas más porque no sabe qué modelo elegir y las repeticiones de ella, a cada lado y algo transparentes, representan la duda en que se encuentra' (Varo *Catalogue* 114).

only to be for the other's eyes.³⁸ That is, the old predicament stated by Berger: 'Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at [...] the surveyor of woman in herself is male, the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object, and most particular an object of vision: a sight' (*Ways of Seeing* 46).

Mimetismo (1960) displays woman literally transformed into what Berger would consider an 'object of vision' (46), albeit an unusual one. The canvas, which as the previous one presents a frontal perspective view of an interior space, exhibits a woman sitting on an armchair inside a squared room. Her green garments contrast with the warm colours of her light brown skin and the oranges of the walls and the floor, endowing balance, depth, and centring the composition. In the wooden floor, a crack has opened and beneath it, a cat contemplates the extraordinary event that is taking place in front of its eyes. The woman is half metamorphosed into the armchair, as her skin has taken the pattern of its *fleur-de-lis* upholstery and her arms and feet are already chair-like. Meanwhile, her sewing basket plays footsie with the armchair, which responds by adopting a crab-like claw to bite its leg. The garment the woman was sewing, made of the same material as her dress, reaches up to grab the back of her heart-shaped head. To the rear of the room, a wardrobe door is ajar, revealing clouds drifting out from its interior in a Magritte-like fashion, perhaps suggesting the entrance to another world. Meanwhile, the leg of the chair next to it opens the lower of the second drawer's beneath to play with a white cloth.

There is incessant movement going on in the painting as 'clothes, wrappings, ribbons, threads, and strings become involved in a constant process of doing and undoing contours, of re-establishing and effacing relations between different orders of things' (Hubert 258-9). All except the woman, who sits there statically, gradually becoming part of the chair. According to Everly, 'the desperation lies in the completion of the transformation of the central figure into a static piece of furniture' (99). For Kaplan, the image expresses a 'desperate tone of passivity' (*Voyages* 15). In the words of Beatriz Varo, it portrays 'el horror de Remedios al estancamiento' (129). However, there seems to be no desperation or horror conveyed in this scene. As the woman is the optical centre of the painting, it is on her face that the viewer's gaze initially concentrates. Thus, her face would seem key for the painting's semantics, and the woman's face looks placid and peaceful, almost smiling. The

³⁸*Visita al cirujano plástico* humorously presents the ridiculousness of some women's desires to be converted into what men would expect of them by showing the surgeon's last creation as a woman with three sets of breasts.

objects are happily playing with one another. Therefore, no element really suggests anguish, but rather a humorous liveliness by the objects and a static gesture on the part of the woman. It looks as if every element has become bored of its status and is now demanding to explore a different form of existence. The inanimate will turn into animate and vice versa. Hence, rather than portraying horror or desperation, I would suggest that it conveys a reflection upon the synthesis of the psychic with the physical in relationship within the woman's existential condition and appearance.³⁹

While the viewer watches the cat watching the woman, the image reveals itself as a meta-image, synthesising two different spatial and visual planes. That is, the cat is in a specular relationship with the viewer, as both share the position of the subject who finds that the woman has given away her consciousness and vitality to appear as an object, or that she has projected her identity into it. Therefore, the cat as well as the viewer's gaze turn the woman into an appearance, into an *objet trouvé*. Yet, the particularity of Varo's painting does not rely on the metamorphosed object itself, but on the very moment of transformation in which the blurring of the limits between the human and the object takes place as well as on the space-time relationship that the depicted moment itself establishes.⁴⁰ *Mimetismo* can be seen to represent what Chadwick has seen as a vital characteristic of surrealism: the 'metamorphic process that lies at the heart of the surrealist vision of an art of fantasy, magic and transformation' (*Women* 180).

As I have commented in the previous section, corporeal metamorphoses are also a frequent trope in contemporary Latin American novels. Celorio has read *Mimetismo* in connection with the image of *Cien años de soledad* where Rebeca Buendía appears sitting on a chair. Rebeca, supposedly alive, has not moved from her chair in many years and has become almost as rough as this. According to Celorio, the elements which integrate both images 'cubren las mismas funciones: el intercambio de lo animado con lo inanimado; y expresan, por lo tanto, significados equivalentes: la cosificación, la desesperanza, la soledad' (25). Despite the aspect of desperation which, as already commented, my interpretation does not share,

³⁹ Such blurring is given by the cat, which could be representing the objective gaze of the artist. Several surrealist painters would often incorporate their own figure in the picture in the form of an animal which they considered as an alter-ego. Among the closest to Varo, we find the image of the white horse or hyena in Leonora Carrington, the bird in Max Ernst, the cat in Leonor Fini, or the hummingbird in Frida Kahlo (Chadwick, *Women*, Chapters 3 and 4).

⁴⁰ Talking about metamorphosis in painting, Steiner argues that, 'if a painting at its best should capture a significant action, it must catch it at its crucial moment, the moment that contains past and future within it [...] thus, either the picture plane must be split into two moments so that its physical unity contradicts its representational disunity; or the figure must be represented half way through his change' (*Colours* 159).

Celorio's argument presents very interesting points. He mentions how 'el vertiginoso ritmo de la narración de Márquez se detiene de pronto para dar cabida a una imagen rigurosamente plástica: la imagen estática de Rebeca Buendía' (26). The identification of the plastic connotations of Márquez's scene and Varo's painting resides in the common way of organising the formal elements so that they constitute the same functions and provoke a similar effect on the reader and the viewer. However, in Varo's painting, it is precisely this time-stopping logic that provokes the emergence of the narration.

The painting suggests the story of a woman who, having been caught up all her life within a house and being left only with the possibility of doing domestic tasks, has given away all her vitality and creativity to become one more part of the space that is confining her. This is exactly what happens to Rebeca Buendía since, once Jose Arcadio is dead, she locks herself in the house with her servant. Although Rebeca's role in the novel is generally quite subversive, her final confinement in the house suggests the same passivity and domesticity as the figure of Varo's painting. On one level the painting works as an allegory of nineteenth century notions of 'the angel in the house' (Patmore/Woolf),⁴¹ as the woman has humorously become the 'chair in the house' and therefore also representative of a syndrome that was reformulated by Betty Friedan in the mid 1960s as the 'feminine mystique'.⁴² Her consciousness and humanity have disappeared within domesticity, but in this process, she has, on another level, also turned into the surrealist object par excellence, into an *objet trouvé*, that is, into a perfect synthesis of realities and states, the animate and the inanimate.⁴³ Within the idea of woman's 'cosificación' in society as a whole, Varo's figure, due its quality of *objet trouvé*, includes a witty commentary regarding the objectification of woman within the surrealist group.⁴⁴ Therefore, the critique is not solely of the housewife role or 'eternal female essence', but of how the surrealist exploration of woman in terms of an appalling object of

⁴¹ 'The Angel in the House', a famous poem by Coventry Patmore and later on an image which Virginia Woolf adopted in 'Profession for Women' came to signify the Victorian image of the perfect wife who was expected to be submissive, passive, always remaining within the house, the sphere of the private and the domestic. In the same essay in which she described this notion, Woolf famously stated how 'killing the angel in the house was part of the occupation of a woman writer' (Woolf 237).

⁴² See Betty Friedan's book of the same name.

⁴³ See for example Kurt Seligmann's *Ultra-Furniture* (1938), which represents a three-legged chair with woman's legs. While the sculpture maintains the eroticism of the object through the sensuousness of her legs, in Varo's objectification all traces of eroticism disappear, enabling a different reading.

⁴⁴ For Orenstein, 'the role of woman [within surrealism] is not without contradictions. For the same *femme enfant* that Breton exalted and Péret felt would attract only the totally virile man who would reveal love to her, woman remains deprived of her human position in the world as long as her uniqueness is restricted to any stereotype' (109). Hence, while they encouraged women to escape domesticity and take on the streets, they simultaneously enclosed her within an equally constrictive object role that did not provide a worthwhile model for real women to follow.

desire, can literally transform her into one. In an interview with Alain Jouffroy partly reproduced in Chadwick's *Surrealism and Women*, Dorothea Tanning makes a comment which expresses the double commentary of this painting: 'I noticed, with a certain consternation that the place of woman in Surrealism was no different than her place in bourgeois society in general' (11).

Mujer saliendo del psicoanalista (1961) parallels the reworking of theoretical surrealist ideas present in *Mimetismo*.⁴⁵ It illustrates a white-haired woman dressed in a medieval green dress exiting a rectangular door with an engraving that reads 'Doctor FJA', initials that Varo explained as a reference to Freud, Jung and Adler.⁴⁶ Holding her father's head in her right hand, she advances to drop it into a small well at her feet.⁴⁷ On her left hand, she carries a basket filled with several apparatus that, according to Varo, are yet more psychological waste (*Catalogue* 118). She looks absent and her mouth is covered, but as her dress unveils, her face emerges duplicated in a mask-like composition. On the floor, the same fog that fills the sky emerges underneath the psychoanalyst's door, uniting the first and last planes of the painting and wrapping around the heels of the figure.

Varo substitutes the Oedipal complex present in many surrealist paintings like Dalí's *El enigma del deseo: Ma mère, ma mère, ma mère* (1929), for that of Electra. While in her citational aspect Varo propagates a reverse psychoanalytical discourse, the literal throwing away of the father's head satirises the notion of a metaphorical killing of the father and thus somehow ridicules the idea that psychoanalysis can constitute a proper mental healing.⁴⁸ Concurrently, the emergence of a latent identity in the layer of her dress, whose eyes look in the opposite direction, could indicate her ambivalence towards psychoanalytic discourse: she has a divided opinion about it, or perhaps indulges in possessing a dual self. Finally, it also suggests a masquerade, the mask that she put on herself while being with the psychoanalyst and which, now that she is free, falls down. Either way, what becomes evident is a witty and humorous parody of psychoanalytical models of

⁴⁵ According to Beatriz Varo 'el cuadro es el retrato de su amiga Juliana González, pero en realidad refleja las vivencias de Remedios. La máscara oculta entre sus ropas significa una modificación de su persona para convertirse en otra la transformación de lo que es a lo que va a llegar a ser' (94).

⁴⁶ For Teresa del Conde, the garment is reminiscent of 'la suntuosa capa verde bordeada de armiño que porta Giovanna Arnolfini en el famosísimo cuadro de Jan Van Eyck (23). She is referring to Arnolfini *Wedding Portrait* (1434).

⁴⁷ 'Esta señora sale de su casa arrojando a un pozo la cabeza de su padre (como es correcto hacer al salir del psicoanalista)' (*Catalogue* 118).

⁴⁸ Teresa del Conde points out that 'nunca sabremos si Remedios visitó o no durante su vida a algún psiquiatra o psicoanalista, lo que sí sabemos, a través de ciertas pinturas, es que conocía bien aquello de lo que el psicoanálisis se trata' (22).

women that are at the centre of surrealist theoretical positions. As Teresa del Conde has revealed, the head, rather than resembling Varo's father, resembles Benjamin Péret's (23). The allusion to the surrealist 'great inquisitor', invites us to make the assumption that, like in *Ruptura* (1955) -where the desire to break with the past is clearly expressed- Varo depicts the need for the artist to break free from the figure of the father in the person of Péret as well as from surrealists' theorisation regarding woman's psyche.⁴⁹

The idea is further enhanced by her basket of psychological waste, which is filled with surrealist symbols. There she carries a key, a watch, a baby's bottle and a pair of glasses whose lenses are shaped like crescent moons. For Breton the woman was the key, the 'opener' of the marvellous, but this figure throws the key away, asserting its hopelessness in the quest she is about to commence. References to the *femme enfant* are evoked in the baby's bottle, which the protagonist discards together with the watch, another frequent surrealist symbol but also indicative of how she has grown confident enough so as not to worry about entering mature age, about not being a young surrealist revelation. The moon glasses, where the moon is often associated with clairvoyance, instinct, intuition and subconscious thought (Liungman 224), are left aside suggesting she does not need them any more to enact her 'seer' or clairvoyant qualities. The painting can thus be seen as representative of a discourse that has been extensively associated with the position of the woman artist within the surrealist movement. That is, how 'the surrealist search for the woman child [...] would inevitably and perhaps more than any other factor exclude women artists from the possibility of a profound personal identification with the theoretical side of surrealism' (Chadwick, *Women* 33).

That Varo represents those elements as 'waste' clearly indicates the artist's views on such theory, as the figure's white hair evokes her readiness to be a mature creator, or else, that her search starts with mature age and not in childhood. Kaplan, Del Conde, Hubert and Beatriz Varo have questioned whether this is really a break free from surrealism and patriarchy, arguing that the high walls evoke entrapment and her veiled mouth leaves the figure mute (Kaplan, *Voyages* 15, Hubert 272, Del Conde 23, B.Varo 36). While this is plausible, I would rather differentiate my argument from these critics by attributing the high walls to Varo's distinctive

⁴⁹ Most commentators on this painting share the view that it represents a rupture with the authority of official surrealism (Sanchez, Kaplan, Hubert and Del Conde).

architectural scenarios, which tend to repeat themselves along different canvases: 'subsisten, en efecto, altas murallas desnudas, de granito o basalto, rodeadas de escalinatas o surcadas por senderos estrechos' (Callois, *Remedios* 18). Similarly, Freud widely associated muteness with a symbol of death ('Caskets' 241), and neither this figure, nor the painting as a whole appears to evoke death in any way. Besides, the fog wrapping around her feet unites the figure with the last planes, as if preventing her from leaving. This is emphasised by the fact that it comes out of the psychoanalyst's door, suggesting that in fact the woman is escaping from that entrapping world which lies outside and which belongs to the psychoanalyst, now entering her personal, protected ambit. It is only through such rupture that the woman artist can initiate her pictorial quest, that her access to the synthesis of realities surrealism championed, starts to fully depend on the 'I'. To achieve this, a parricide seems to be necessary, and so Varo's figure disposes of what becomes no longer relevant, of a male-centred psychoanalytical discourse, of psychological waste. However, as she does in *Encuentro* (1959) -which can also be seen as elucidating Freudian ideas regarding women's identity- rather than condemning this system overtly, Varo uses humour to break the rigidity of her critique and be able to maintain an ambivalent position.⁵⁰

MIRROR IMAGES, SURREAL LOVE.

Pienso ahora hasta qué punto el amor enceguece y qué mágico poder de transformación tiene. ¡La hermosura del mundo! ¡Si es para morirse de risa! (Sábado, *El túnel* 66).

The setting of *Los amantes* (1963) shows a dark park or forest filled with semi-transparent orange trees. There, a couple sits quietly holding hands. Their matching garments are of different blue shades, the predominant colour in the canvas. The steam that emerges from their bodies transforms into rain, causing a lake at their feet. The couple stare statically at each other, and while the shape of their chests implies a man and a woman, their mirror-heads reflect an identical androgynous image. The monochromatic blue palette helps to establish the mirrors as the optical centre, as together with their centrality, these are painted in a warm yellowish colour. Santos-Phillips considers that 'the artist initially wants the viewer to believe

⁵⁰ In 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' Freud looks at Shakespeare's scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, concluding that the three caskets become symbolic representatives of three women: 'if what we were concerned with were a dream, it would occur to us that the caskets are also women, symbols of what is essential in woman and therefore woman herself' (236). Hence, he argues, the choice of one casket will be the choice for the woman behind it, and what this will reveal is the psychoanalytical nature of the chooser rather than what is being chosen (235-240). In Varo's humorous canvas, the chooser and the chosen thing is the same, suggesting that the 'essence' for the woman that is behind the casket, is herself.

each lover thinks he or she sees a perfect image of the other, whereas upon close examination the opposite seems true. By having each figure see his or her own face in the other, Varo seems to suggest each can love only him or herself' (161). Kaplan considers that Varo is presenting 'the bonds of love as an impediment for true autonomy' (151) and that their narcissistic attraction is the generator of the steam that will end up drowning them, seeing their love as 'a potential for doom' (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 151). Epps sees that 'the specular play, whereby the self sees the self and only the self in the other, is as witty as it is disquieting' (198). While the myth of Narcissus is evident, there are no reasons to deny the interpretation that the lovers are indeed seeing the perfect image of the other, a reading that according to Santos-Phillips proves untrue (161). I would suggest that to deny this reading is to devoid the picture of one of its many allegorical possibilities. If one accepts Breton's assertion that within the realm of love 'it is their own essence that people seek in the other' (*Communicating Vessels* 69) and that this is the same thing as the narcissistic encounter with the self, the canvas acquires a double interpretation. One satirises surrealist love, the other conveys Varo's own elucidation of it.

The double reading is suggested by one particular element. Namely, Varo does not represent different facial qualities on the lovers, but the mirror only reflects the image of one of them. In Locke's *Essay* 'the mind is said to resemble a mirror which fixes the object it reflects' (in Steiner, *Colours* 10). Hence, if each was indeed seeing a reflection of his or her own self in the other, either as narcissistic contemplation or as looking for its own personal essence in the other, then a man's face will appear in the woman's mirror and a woman's face in the male. However, the fact that the same face appears in both mirrors implies that only one of them is reflecting her/his face onto the other. That only one of them embodies Narcissus looking at himself in the pool, the other becoming just the recipient into which his image is being projected. The one who projects has therefore completely absorbed the identity of the other. It is true that one cannot possibly know which of the two is being the one who projects his/her own image onto the other, who is the object and who the reflection. However, because of the allusion to Narcissus, because both within surrealism and society the man has historically been the domineering partner and taking as a starting point the suggestion that Varo's aesthetic includes a strategic response to canonical surrealist ideas, one can unproblematically conjecture that the projection is his. This conjecture ties up with a very plastic image in Ernesto Sábato's *El túnel*, conveying a similar message regarding the role man plays in the

couple dynamics: 'No sé cuanto tiempo pasó en los relojes, que es ajeno a nuestros sentimientos, a nuestros destinos, a la formación o derrumbe de un amor, a la esperanza de una muerte. Pero de mi propio tiempo fue una cantidad inmensa [...] mar inmóvil y perpetuo donde María y yo estábamos frente a frente contemplándonos estáticamente' (144).

María and the love she represents have turned into the sole obsession of the protagonist, blocking his other activities and process of thinking. She represents the medium of the integrative experience, that which presupposes the only hope for Castel's communication with another human being and with the world: 'cada vez que María se aproximaba a mí en medio de otras personas, yo pensaba: "Entre este ser maravilloso y yo hay un vínculo secreto"' (108). Furthermore, if she is able to enact that bond between the painter and the world it is because she is the actual embodiment of his work of art, where her finding acquires Breton's 'magic circumstantial' properties due to an extraordinary coincidence: he painted her before he knew her. Castel has encountered the object of his desire in the unexpected real existence of María Iribarne. Her image coincides with what he had previously imagined in his painting, turning her into a *trouvaille*. She is the only being who, according to Castel, possesses the key to the understanding of his art, and therefore of himself. María thus encompasses 'un instrumento de conocimiento' or 'el conocimiento mismo' (Paz, *Laberinto* 203). We can perceive here Breton's belief that love is the only thing that can reconcile man with life, for María indeed constitutes the unique element of the external world that could make the neurotic protagonist step outside his tunnel, his madness. Yet, because of the impossibility of him possessing her only for himself and with her possession, acquiring his integration and reconciliation with his existence and the world, he becomes determined to kill her in a scene that turns into quite a literal example of mad love. María dies with the same passive and silent attitude she has always adopted next to him.

If the surrealist man, like the painter in Ernesto Sábato's novel, looks into the soul of the woman to attain his integration with the external world, his apprehension of the marvellous realm and soul's integration, Varo's painting misleads this search. The painting suggests that doing so, he erases the subjectivity and identity of the woman whom he loves and, in his act of egotism, he metaphorically kills her. Like Castel, the man who reflects his identity in the mirror can only see a carbon copy of

himself. In seeing his own image all the erotic desire surrealism supports must surely die, unless he feels indeed a passion for himself like that of Narcissus. Varo's image reveals that the male individual and his erotic dream of the woman not only denies her subjectivity but that, in his act of gazing, the man becomes a function of his own restrictive mirror, which in Castel's case, has led to complete madness. In this first interpretation, the painting suggests that surrealist conceptions of love as the search for each other's essence do not endow woman with a subjectivity independent from man's. Rather, as in Sábato's novel, it conveys an 'image of the couple in which woman completes man, is brought to life by him and she in turn inspires him' (Chadwick, *Women* 65).

However, *Los amantes* does not exactly resemble *amour fou*, for it refuses to show any illumination within love, nor does it match Péret's *amour sublime*.⁵¹ As Hubert has mentioned, 'although, according to Péret, sublime love transports the lover far away and ensures a flight toward the spiritual, such a passage can hardly take place in the painting, for it lacks the key ingredient of sublime love: the dynamics of revolt' (269). From the painting's distance from any concrete surrealist love conception, I would argue that a second interpretation regarding Varo's own mythology of love becomes feasible. However, this reading invalidates the one just given insofar as it needs to start from the basis that it is impossible to know which of the two figures is projecting her/his image onto the other. As the petrified lovers look at each other, Varo avoids falling into showing a sexualised female or male other, the bodies' and garments' striking similarity makes them somehow dehumanised, and this is how Varo makes the figure of the androgyne work for her. That is, neither of them had a predefined image, they are only mirrors, and thus the image that the mirror reflects is the image that has emerged from their love, the marvellous image or the image of the androgyne in which Varo refuses to narrow the object of love/desire to one gender. She does not portray an idealised vision of the androgynous, but this is understood metaphorically as that which provokes the active blurring of fixed gender categories. In the sexually undefined image of love, she denies a female or male domineering partner. In the sexually undefined image of love, she denies a female or male domineering partner.

⁵¹ Neither does it share a common ground with one of the most famous surrealist pictures that depict the lovers, Magritte's *Les Amants*, where the artist represents the lovers faces covered by a white cloth, stressing the act of non-seeing, as if viewing one another will break free a desire contained by blindness.

The gender codes that have become accepted and identified as natural within orthodox surrealism are lost and redefined in Varo's mirrors, which blur the boundary between the woman and the man. In her representation of love, the androgynous suggests equality between the sexes, not the female completing element for man's narcissistic ego or vice versa. In fact, the process of sublimation they seem to be undergoing points towards their future dissolution into one. Thus, *Los amantes* reflects upon the need each individual has to recognise oneself as *an equal* with a significant other in order to find one self. This understanding of love is more akin to the love vision of other women within the surrealist circle, like that of Ithell Colquhoun's Siamese twins and as will be seen in the following chapters, it is also in accord with the visions of Garro and Boullosa.⁵² The picture can thus be considered as an embodiment of love filtered through the eyes of a woman artist that, recognising in *amour fou/sublime* one of life's essential experiences, reformulates the dichotomy between the lover and the loved one.⁵³

Another representation of Varo's vision of love is *El encuentro* (1959), whose use of colour, perspective, composition and narrative method has been analysed in the previous section. Under the light of a red sky, an encounter between a white and a golden-orange figure takes place. The chimerich space, the monochromatic palette, the illumination and the backdrop's parallel doors, recall the artificial façades of De Chirico and Delvaux. The blue figure's lack of breasts and the golden figure's long voluminous hair, suggest that they are man and woman, although a gender ambiguity is sustained throughout. An equally gender ambiguous figure observes this unexpected reunion from her/his thin rectangular window, and the way in which the blue figure turns his gaze at the spy, gives the encounter an atmosphere of secrecy and clandestinity. The viewer possesses the same specular relationship with this woman as s-he had with the cat in *Mimetismo*, provoking a *mise-en-abîme*. First, there is the encounter between the two figures. Second, the encounter experienced by the woman who finds the couple. Finally, the external viewer who watches the fictional viewer watching the scene.

⁵² 'No more tyrants and victims, no more the fevered alterations of that demon-star which sponsored the births of De Sade and Von Sacher-Masoch: but the hermaphrodite whole, opposites bound together in mitigating embrace by a silk-worm's thread [...] The new myth, the myth of the Siamese twins will make of him [Freud] a forgotten bogey' (Ithell Colquhoun in Chadwick 105).

⁵³ In this way the painting connects with Leonora Carrington's comprehension when she asked how 'in *l'amour-passion*, it is the loved one the other who gives the key. Now the question is: who can the loved one be? It can be a man a horse or another woman' (in Chadwick, *Women* 105). Ironically, *l'amour passion* means nothing more than loving oneself, finding oneself and never losing oneself, yet for that discovery to happen one needs to love another.

The reason for astonishment of both real and fictional viewer is that they are contemplating an extraordinary encounter. As has been seen through the analysis of the painting's composition, the encounter is not fortuitous and it is this non-fortuitousness, working contrary to surrealist encounters, that establishes the temporal sequence and thus the narrative. Following the footprints of the white figure, one discovers that he was the statue of the fountain in the middle of the square. He has left his sandals behind him, one on the floor the other on the pedestal, and as his wet footprints indicate, his feet are still humid. This links the statue with the realm of water, and his silvery white luminous presence evokes the coldness of marble as well as of moonlight. On the contrary, she is golden and shining; her hair floats in the air recalling warm sun flames, the ethereal and the fire element.⁵⁴ Their encounter thus suggests love as a forbidden, 'luminous phenomenon' in which opposites are reconciled. Contrary to *Los amantes*, this painting could make reference to Péret's 'sublime love', since their union implies an unexpected revolt: a statue rebels against its lifeless condition and is articulated in the name of love. The image also recalls Breton's *amour fou* in its allusion to luminosity and the suggestion of opposites being reconciled. Furthermore, the classic drapery around his neck and the vine leaf hiding his sex suggests that the statue is based on Roman or Greek mythology, becoming possible to associate it with the myth of Pygmalion and therefore with that of Gradiva.⁵⁵ Breton considered Gradiva's image 'as a symbolic expression of the unification of polarized states of consciousness [...] both as dream image and corporeal being, belonging to the worlds of life and death, madness and sanity, fantasy and reality' (Chadwick, *Women* 55). Varo's painting evokes Gradiva's story both in the coming to life of a statue and in the fusion of opposites between man and the woman, coldness and warmth, water and fire, solid and ethereal bodies, sun and moon, animate and inanimate, myth and reality. Yet, in a similar way than we will see Garro doing when commenting upon 'Era Mercurio', she does not endow her 'Gradiva' with all these integrating qualities, but rather mocks the suggestion that woman is able to encompass all opposites within her by illustrating how contraries meet through the union of two beings whose gender identity is blurred.

⁵⁴ Varo explained how the woman with whom the statue has the appointment 'es de fuego, cosa ideal para la estatua que tiene frío' (*Catalogue* 118).

⁵⁵ Jensen's novel has as its protagonist a young archaeologist named Norbet Hanold who, after finding an unusual Roman bas-relief, is bewitched by its appearance. The relief shows 'a complete female figure in the act of walking: she was still young but no longer in childhood and, on the other hand, apparently not a woman, but a Roman virgin about in her twentieth year' (Jensen 147). Norbert's imagination is constantly occupied with the image of this girl, who he names Gradiva, 'the girl splendid in walking'. After a disquieting dream and driven by an inner restlessness, Norbert travels to Pompeii, where he has several unexpected chance encounters with a girl who he sees as the living embodiment of the bas-relief, making him believe that she is the reincarnation of Gradiva.

El encuentro is one of the few paintings in which Varo gives to her male and female characters the colours with which they are normally associated. That is, even though warm colours are associated with femininity and cold colours with masculinity, Varo tends to represent her female characters with blue or cold tonalities, and male figures with warm ones. Although she sticks to typical colour symbolism in this painting, the symbolism of the figures themselves is reversed. That is, the male statue has feminine reminiscences in its apparent fragility, in its associations with the moon, the corporeal, and the myth of Gradiva. The female figure has masculine reminiscences in her association with the male gods of the sun. In *El encuentro* the love union signifies, as in canonical surrealist love, the luminous fusion of two complementary beings. However, Varo's painting does not result in the image of the androgynous but it already implies an androgynous starting point. The love encounter is thus linked with a commentary about fluid gender categories and gender undefined figures, in which gender is implicitly understood as a 'series of acts' (Butler), where it becomes possible to denaturalise the conventional view of external appearance as interior essence.

One final painting regarding Varo's re-conceptualisation of surrealist love is *La despedida* (1958), whose technical features have also been analysed in the previous section. The canvas exhibits two forking paths inside a red building structure that recalls the interior of a city. Due to its architectural features and exaggerated perspective, the painting has been associated with De Chirico's *Anxious Journey* (1913) (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 208). Although indeed strikingly similar, especially in its disorienting complexity, Varo incorporates a human factor that De Chirico's painting is lacking. In *La despedida* each corridor ends in a luminous door from which a man and a woman exit in opposite directions, provoking a chiaroscuro effect. Yet, their shadows decide not to part and, rising from their bodies, remain together at the crossroads about to kiss. The shadows are in fact the protagonists, triggering the narrative of the image by suggesting that there is or was a love story between the otherwise apparently unrelated figures. From one of the multiple doors that are within the passageways, a cat looks directly at the viewer, which painted in the same cold colour as the figures, suggests its belonging to their same realm. The cat which, as has been seen, is associated with the witch's familiar, was also considered a sacred animal in ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt (Golden 174). This sacred interpretation connects with the symbol that appears on the alleyway from

which the man exists, the ladder.⁵⁶ Junco reads it as a reference to 'Jacob's ladder' (217), which will also imply the entrance into the sacred. It can also be related with the ladder of transmigration, which symbolises the soul's pilgrimage from the earthly existence to paradise, a synonym to the alchemical symbol of the golden chair (Liungman 96). If the cat and the ladder are read as sacred symbols, the union of their shadows can be interpreted as the lovers coming together after their death, an interpretation which ties up with José Asunción Silva's poem *Nocturno III* as noted by Junco (217).

To this literary comparison, I would add another one with an image from Sábato's *El túnel*

Y era como si los dos hubiéramos estado viviendo en pasadizos o túneles paralelos, sin saber que íbamos el uno al lado del otro, como almas semejantes, para encontrarnos al fin de esos pasadizos, delante de una escena pintada por mí, como clave destinada a ella sola, como un secreto anuncio de que ya estaba yo allí y que los pasadizos se habían por fin unido y que la hora del encuentro había llegado [...]. Pero ¿realmente los pasadizos se habían unido y nuestras almas se habían comunicado? (144).

The general structure of the paths evokes circularity, suggested by its architecture with rounded arches, windows and doors. The shadows that unite the two figures contribute towards the feeling of a circular structure, as if indeed the central architecture was a column inside a piazza that the figures were bordering. If this is the case, then like in Sabato's scene, the paths will finally converge, leading to their encounter. However, the bodily position of the woman suggests that she is taking the contrary direction, as if she was indeed going outside the canvas, which endows her with certain independence from the man. Both the novel's scene and the painting pose the same question, that is, it is unknown and suspicious whether the forking paths and thus the subjects will come together, even if it initially appears so. What is nonetheless true in Varo's painting and impossible in Sábato's novel, is that their souls have encountered each other before. That is, the shadows work as the manifestation of their souls refusing to leave. The canvas, like the novel, suggests a conflict between the two sides of the 'I': the bodily, and the spiritual. Yet, in Varo's painting the mirroring shadows have kept their spiritual selves together even if the materiality of their bodies is apart.

⁵⁶ Like in those other pictures that include an animal or person contemplating the scene, the cat could symbolise the objective gaze of the painter, which will be in consonance with Varo's understanding of Gurdjieff's mystic theory. One basic tenet of his 'was objective observation of the self' (Kaplan, *Voyages* 172) and these figures can be representative of self-awareness within the creative process.

The circular forms and curved lines of the architecture suggest a possible 'communication' between the implicit and the explicit spaces in the picture, that is, the one we see and that which we only imagine, a communication that, like Sábato's image, ties in with Breton's use of 'communicating vessels' as a metaphor for love.⁵⁷ Within the realm of love, the subjects behave like these vessels, each finding in the other an equal degree of identity (*Communicating Vessels* 67-70). Now, Breton's development of an integrated self in the beloved leads him to the primordial androgyne. His search for love becomes therefore the search for the marvellous, 'for the holy grail, the philosopher's stone or the golden fleece' (Balakian 105). Although Varo's figures are usually engaged in this very search, the key difference resides in the fact that, while for Breton and other surrealists love had an overwhelming sexual power, Varo's vision stresses its metaphysical and spiritual aspect. Surrealism's image of the primordial androgyne comprises an experience of totality that results from the man finding his feminine counterpart in woman, and the woman recognising her masculine self in man (Orenstein 101). However, a statement by Gérard Legrand reveals the unbalanced nature of this seemingly completing experience: 'here, the woman would play the role, from the man's point of view, of that "drop of being" poured into an already saturated solution that would transform into crystal' (in Orenstein 103). Clearly, the woman is seen once more as the complementing element that will bring man perfection, rather than an entity in her own right.⁵⁸

Varo's shadows do not look like those of a man and a woman, but rather of two humanoid, non-gendered subjects. As in *El encuentro*, the starting point is already androgynous. If one accepts that the shadows are representative of the essence or soul of the lovers and that in their act of kissing they are symbolising love, then Varo's painting employs the stratagem of the spiritual to satirise Breton's communicating vessels as a love metaphor that culminates in the sexualised androgynous. If such love union was consummated through erotic power and the sexual act, Varo gives preference to the 'essence' or spiritual side of love. Her allusion to the androgynous is in the realm of the mystical, the non-touchable, the translucent, shadows and, while shadows can be gendered, these are explicitly not

⁵⁷ His idea refers to two connected alchemical vessels in which the liquid rises to the very same level, which serves as a metaphor for how the contents of dream and reality are constantly nourishing one another (*Communicating Vessels* part one).

⁵⁸ A significant picture that represents this love union is Victor Brauner's *Number* (1934), which exhibits the male and female sexual organs joined together to a womb-like box as confirmative of the assertion that the union of opposites ascertains its prime manifestation in the sexual act.

so. In her vision, Varo emphasizes that whether these figures are man or woman does not matter in terms of essence, or that such thing as a masculine or feminine essence does not exist. This love relationship emphasises equality (shadows), but also difference (bodies). Finally, her painting conveys the idea that man and woman can start their independent quest for creativity and autonomy while still being spiritually connected in love.

To conclude, Varo knowingly criticises basic surrealist tenets regarding the construction of female identity through the power of the masculine gaze. However, she has done so with allegorical and humorous strategies that instead of realising a harsh critique relates ambivalently and comically to surrealist theorisations. Unlike the other chapters and sections, this analysis leaves slightly apart Varo's relationship with *lo real maravilloso americano*, but this is because her images on love and woman are better understood if seen in response to and in dialogue with the surrealist doctrine. However, as has been seen with paintings such as *Mimetismo*, *Los amantes* or *La despedida* these images also bear resemblance to some of the images portrayed in Latin American texts one of which does correspond to *lo real maravilloso americano*. Even though Sábato's *El túnel* does not definitely belong to Carpentier's aesthetic approach, it is nonetheless suitable for the general argument of this thesis because, like Paz's poetry and Cortázar's *Rayuela*, it encompasses a representation of woman and love that intimately ties up with the surrealist conception, showing how this notion took hold of contemporary Latin American writers. In the paintings commented upon, Varo revises the nature of the gaze and changes the position of the viewer/viewed, subject/object, and contests specific aspects of surrealist philosophy and in particular those which have to do with the construction of woman's image and love. Finally, while her paintings reject what Chadwick has considered as a central surrealist postulate, 'the desire to represent the image of the erotic female as a key to the revolutionary transformation of consciousness' (*Women* 123), her narrativity, the evoking of the world of reverie, fusion of opposites, alchemy, corporeal metamorphosis and an illusionistic scenery, constantly evokes affinities with surrealism. This section is therefore the logical precursor of the next, in which Varo left obsolete canonical surrealist theorisations in order to create her own marvellous vision that, presenting affinities with *lo real maravilloso americano*, will be seen as dialoguing with both approaches while emphasising women's creative and visionary powers.

SECTION THREE: VARO'S ALCHEMICAL LABYRINTHS, QUEST FOR AND CREATION OF THE MARVELLOUS.

La realidad (como las grandes ciudades) se ha extendido y se ha ramificado en los últimos años. Esto ha influido en el Tiempo: el pasado se aleja con inexorable rapidez. (Bioy-Casares, 'El perjurio de la nieve', *La trama celeste* 229).

The previous section constituted an elucidation of Varo's ambivalent relationship to and strategic contestation of the canonical surrealist 'assembly' of woman and the role she was to play within love. This section analyses how Varo enriches, contests and amplifies archetypal surrealist symbols of accessing the marvellous by refusing to relate the quintessence of reality with the female body, the flow of desire and the (hetero)sexual act. As in the previous section, I will place an emphasis on the narratives that the paintings evoke rather than on pictorial composition. Varo's art conceptualises the surrealist vision through the representation of the two stages explained in the first chapter through Breton's theories. The first is the depiction of an ecstatic experience that leads to clairvoyance, the second, the illustration of the creative process that supposedly takes place after such an inspirational moment.⁵⁹ Thus, the focus of this section resides, on the one hand, in analysing how Varo tactically employs a different set of metaphors, myths and images in order to represent her quest for the 'foundations of the real', revindicate women artists' visionary gifts and redefine her role within the creative process. On the other, to analyse how, within this different imagery, Varo incorporates elements, themes and symbols that establish a direct dialogue with Carpentier's theorisations on *lo real maravilloso*.

The section therefore consists of two parts. The first deals with a group of paintings in which Varo depicts a metaphysical journey, a spiritual breakthrough, a mystical awareness or moment of epiphany that is understood as the antecedent of the general thematic conveyed in a second group of paintings, the actual process of creating the extraordinary. Both parts explore to what extent Varo has transformed archetypal surrealist images, as well as survey the strategic significance of the distinct set of sources and symbols she has chosen for her pictorial vision. In the first group of paintings, the symbolic composition functions to express an experience of

⁵⁹ As I have already mentioned in Chapter One, Mabille conceptualises the marvellous according to these two stages. He comments how 'because of the tension they produce, magical ceremonies, psychic exercises leading to concentration and ecstatic states, the freedom of mental automatism [...] are some of the means by which the normal faculties can be increased, resulting in clairvoyance. There lies the ways into the realm of the marvelous'. (16). Later on he explains how 'the mind [...] wants to translate these visions [...] it takes on material form in writing, in the plastic arts, in the building of monuments' (16).

wholeness and integration from which the characters might extract stimulation and knowledge, fitting with the notions of surrealist experience that have been explained in the first chapter. In the second, the paintings illustrate a figure in the process of translating this vision into art.

The reason why Varo's iconography relates back to alchemy is perhaps not very different from why male surrealists did: 'alchemy can be understood as an attempt to grapple with the underlying mystery that pervades all things and experience' (Haynes 29).⁶⁰ Now, as a young artist who had an early contact with the surrealist movement, Varo could not start developing her own aesthetic from scratch, but through a relationship with what was already there (surrealism), enriching, contesting and adjusting its principles to her own style.⁶¹ This notion of transformation finds a perfect partner in alchemy, which allowed Varo and other women artists who appropriated Hermetic imagery such as Carrington or Fini to extract a double function from it.⁶² That is, 'alchemy is not the process of making something from nothing; it is the process of increasing and improving that which already exists' (Hall, in Haynes 29). The elaboration of a personal and defined aesthetic like the one the viewer encounters in Varo's paintings, presupposed both a process of revision of surrealist principles and an incorporation of new sources of inspiration. In the first section it was suggested how it was in 'México donde Remedios encontró el espacio mágico idóneo para poder proyectar el cúmulo de sus experiencias' (Lozano 45) and how the 'vital organicism' (Sánchez 59) that pervades a great number of her paintings emerged from her Mexican surroundings. These statements are accepted in this section in order to question whether her strategies of response incorporate a vocabulary in affinity with *lo real maravilloso americano*.

In the section on narrative painting, I have explained Varo's images as presenting an interdependence between the two juxtaposed elements of reality that was not often found in European surrealism. Interdependence, together with her magical-mythical quests, the mimetic and metamorphic qualities of nature and the suggestion of a circular overall structure, was the main reason why I considered that

⁶⁰ By the second manifesto Breton 'sees the movement as heir of alchemists of fourteenth century [...] Breton believes that like them, surrealism is in search of the 'philosophers' stone which would permit man's imagination 'to take a brilliant revenge upon things' (Nadeau 179).

⁶¹ In an interview with Raquel Tibol, years after she left Paris, Varo commented regarding the surrealist group that 'Estuve junto a ellos porque sentía cierta afinidad. Hoy no pertenezco a ningún grupo; pinto lo que se me ocurre y se acabó' (in Beatriz Varo 59).

⁶² In this respect Colville has noted that 'Carrington, Varo and Fini invented their own alchemy seeking to create the gold of a fulfilling woman's world' (*Beauty* 166).

her aesthetic included elements that were not only in consonance with surrealist ideas, but also with the literary imagination found in certain Latin American novels. Therefore, the following analysis becomes significant insofar as it incorporates a gendered perception of surrealist experiences and the creative act, while simultaneously showing how Varo's alteration and contestation of surrealism incorporates elements that are in consonance with *lo real maravilloso*. Varo always illustrates figures that are either female or gender ambiguous; female figures that are never the medium but the questers, the thinkers, the artists or the alchemists. She therefore also follows, even if not being conscious of it, a strategy against the pervading canon of Latin American literature.

VISIONARY POWERS: WALKING THROUGH THE LABYRINTH

I am looking for the face I had
Before the world was made
(Yeats quoted in Borges, *El Aleph* 62).

Nacer de nuevo (1960) illustrates the interior of a hexagonal room in the middle of a forest. Through one of its walls, a partly naked woman emerges into the room with eyes wide open and an amazed expression on her face. This surprise is clearly instigated by the sight she has just discovered: in the centre of the sanctuary-like room, whose walls, floor and ceiling have been overtaken by the forest's vegetation, a luminous goblet rests on a table. The liquid in the goblet reflects a crescent moon, a reflection originating from a hole in the ceiling that gives a view of the dark sky lit by the moon. The painting has been interpreted as a spiritual revelation, an ecstatic moment of awakening in which the protagonist discovers the Holy Grail (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 166, Lauter 92, Sánchez 68, Parkinson-Zamora, *Magical* 119). While this is undeniable, my analysis will rather focus on the symbolism Varo employs to convey her understanding of visionary powers and the significance this symbolism has for her representation and tactical revision of experiencing the metaphysical wholeness, the revelation that leads to artistic inspiration that is associated with both surrealism and Carpentier's clairvoyant experience.

To be reborn has obvious religious connotations, implying that the person who experiences rebirth has been through death and resurrection. It can also be a metaphorical rebirth, meaning that one has had a moment of epiphany, of spiritual awakening, such that they feel symbolically born again. The vegetation invading the room, the forest, the circularity of the vessel and the suggestion that the moon is

somehow involved within this figure's rebirth link the figure with natural and moon cycles as well as with a circular time indicative of return and renewal. The Aztec and Mayan cosmovision function through natural cycles, where the moon and the sun also play a unique role, connecting with a belief in resurrection (Martin 147). These are ideas found, for example, in texts such as Octavio Paz's *Piedra de sol* and Miguel Ángel Asturias' *Hombres de maíz*. Both authors use, one in poetry the other in prose, Aztec and Mayan cosmogonies respectively to suggest that there is another form of knowledge that, relying on a natural and mythical structure, accounts for an ancestral homeland that wishes to be protected and recovered. These texts also involve the two different types of rebirth that Varo's painting suggests, literal or as epiphany. However, a distinctive female imagery pushes it aside from Paz and Asturias' texts, both of which present woman as an idealised being, and rather evokes a narrative such as Gioconda Belli's *La mujer habitada*. In Belli's novel, an indigenous woman is reborn into the natural form of a tree whose consciousness is later on transferred into the protagonist, Lavinia. Both women's experiences with a new form of corporality and psyche make them establish, as happens with the figure in the painting, a new relationship with the earth as well as with their inner selves. The novel and the painting are connected insofar as they endorse a magical act whose force lies in transmutation, in a resurrective power coupled with nature and mythology that is later on transferred into the consciousness of woman. While Belli's novel is more obviously indebted to the literature of *lo real maravilloso*, the associations that Varo's painting triggers with these Latin American texts suggests the American mythologies as one possible source for the paintings' eclectic imagery.

On the other hand, the moon's reflection in a goblet reminiscent of the Holy Grail refers back to the Hermetic tradition. Jung explains how

The whole secret of the art [alchemy] lay in knowledge of the Hermetic vessel [...]. The natural vessel is the *aqua permanens* [...] which obviously means that it is the arcane substance itself [...]. We can therefore understand why Mylius calls the vessel the "root and principle of our art". Laurentius calls it "Luna", the *foemina alba* and mother of the stone (86).

According to Jung's statement, if the woman in the canvas sees the symbol of the moon reflected in the Hermetic vessel, it means that the 'arcane substance' has been revealed to her; but also that, together with this revelation, came the 'whole secret of the art', 'Luna'; a statement which seems confirmed by her sight of the moon.

Within surrealism, alchemy has been often been coupled with painting (Chadwick, *Women* 181-218), making it plausible to link the result of alchemical workings with pictorial art.⁶³ Jung goes on to argue that the *prima materia* has to do with the soul, where the symbol in the vessel is transferred (86).⁶⁴ In Varo's painting, the image of the moon set into the goblet must have -according to the alchemical principle- transferred into the soul of the woman.⁶⁵ Mainly what this suggests is that the viewer is not simply contemplating an alchemical transmutation of substance, but an inner, spiritual metamorphosis that relates to the figure's consciousness and soul, transferring the symbol and glow of the vessel onto her persona. The woman has gained understanding of the *prima materia*, but perhaps more importantly, she has attained knowledge of herself, for according to Jung, the understanding of the arcane substance is 'essentially a psychic operation, the creation of an inner readiness to accept the archetype of the self in whatever subjective form it appears' (87).

Interestingly, the 'subjective form' has materialised into the shape of the moon. Chadwick points out how 'woman's lunar and reproductive cycles have long fascinated male artists, who have often turned their backs on the physical and psychological realities of these biological facts in order to invest them with a mythic meaning that might deny woman's real experience' (*Women* 183). Despite woman having been universally and historically associated with her reproductive functions, surrealists, in their exaltation of the *femme-enfant*, doomed the association of women with maternity. While this vision has positive aspects, as it frees woman from her essential biological functions, it does not let woman choose, for it indeed condemns those women who want to become mothers as well as reducing female sexuality to a tool, as provider of man's pleasure, enhancer of his desire or redeemer of visionary gifts. In this regard, it is significant that Varo's picture has conveyed certain eroticism to her figure, and that she has used the wall instead of the archway on the left of the painting as mode of entering the sacred. Varo illustrates nature, the moon, round contours provided by the paintings' use of curved and oblique lines, and imagery reminiscent of the female genitalia in the wall's breaking. That is,

⁶³ 'El trabajo de la pintura está asociado a la alquimia en cuanto a que ambos son intentos de dominación y purificación de la materia como proceso de crecimiento y superación personal del individuo en relación con el cosmos' (González 15).

⁶⁴ The example Jung gives also matches with the nature of the painting as he gives Cesariou's definition of the soul as 'a spiritual substance of spherical nature, like the globe of the moon or like a glass vessel' (86).

⁶⁵ For Beatriz Varo, 'la estructura hexagonal de la mesa y de la habitación representa el alma, por ser la unión de dos triángulos (fuego y agua)' (148), again pointing towards the transference of the experience into the soul of the woman.

iconography associated with both constructions of the 'feminine' and woman's biology.

However, she does not use these to express an essential female difference, or to emphasise her erotic power or basic reproductive functions. Through the coupling of painting with alchemy, she has rather re-appropriated and revindicated such symbols in order to portray woman as a thinking, illuminated and privileged subject that has been revealed a unique artistic vision, while simultaneously giving her art a sacred quality. If read against surrealist postulates, being born again might therefore also serve as a metaphor for the death of archetypal surrealist mythology regarding the female body and its functions. Varo's painting illustrates visionary power as a movement across a borderline, the profane and the sacred, the inner and the outer, death and resurrection, humanity and divinity. Significantly, the representation of achieving the necessary input to express a marvellous revelation is not provided by the semi-naked woman herself, but by associating her alchemical vision with an inspirational moment, as if it was during these trances that she is to accept both herself and her art.

It is undeniable that the view of the sorceress embraced by surrealism 'offered the woman artist a self-image that united her roles as woman and creator in a way that neither the concept of the *femme-enfant* nor that of the erotic muse could' (Chadwick, *Women* 182). However, it is equally true that she was seen as being controlled by those mysterious powers rather than in control of them. Varo depicts the female character as an active subject, the finder, the one who possesses and enjoys the power of the gaze. Her amazed expression and the suggestion of agency conveyed by the painting's sense of movement through her wall-crossing, redefines simplistic connections between woman and earth or woman and nature, preventing the reading of the painting as a romanticised vision of the nature goddess silently waiting for the man in order to be awakened. Orenstein touches upon how the surrealist woman artist would 'ultimately define herself as the *magna mater* rather than as the *femme-enfant*' (111), and this is precisely the definition that Varo seems to be giving to her figure. She demonstrates how the female artist does not have to renounce nature as an inspirational force, or to be endangered by her reproductive sexuality. Rather, the painting emphasises women's visionary powers, the possibility of her communion with nature and a representation of her body that does not need to renounce eroticism. As Sánchez has commented, 'the erotic part of

her nature is no longer perceived as a threat or as something that can be threatened from the outside; it is totally integrated into her being' (69).

Two other paintings transmit similar notions to the ones expressed in *Nacer...* albeit employing slightly different iconography. These are *La llamada* (1961) and *Luz emergente* (1962). Kaplan mentioned how Varo 'visualised the moment of spiritual breakthrough in a variety of ways. In *Emerging Light*, a woman steps from behind a wall [...]. Ripping layers of wallpaper like labial folds, she is born as a seeker of truth' (*Unexpected* 166). However, something else surfaces in *Luz...* From a crack on the floor, the face of a man rises from darkness to stare at the woman, evoking the cat's scene in *Mimesis* (1960). Her lamp drops liquid through the gap, suggesting the fetching of light into the space below. In fact, one can see a continuation between this painting and the previous one. If in *Nacer...* the *light came from above*, from a hole in the ceiling to illuminate the woman, the radiant woman now metaphorically adopts the role of the natural light, albeit hers is artificial, and she herself comes from above to enlighten the *darkness below*, the inferior space opened in the floor. If read in conjunction, the paintings express the alchemical notion of the creation of divine harmony within the self: 'paraphrasing Hermes who said, "all is above as it is below to make up the miracle of a single thing"', we could say that all is within us as it is outside us to make up a single reality' (Mabille 16). The combination of both paintings can thus be seen as enacting the surrealist belief regarding how the marvellous constituted a condition at once external and internal to the subject from a gender perspective.

Even though the painting's title is *Luz emergente*, the one that really emerges is the woman and therefore the word 'light' can be understood as a metaphor for the figure herself who, as the bearer of light, has been chosen to pass on esoteric knowledge. The same idea of traversing boundaries and psychic states disclosed in *Nacer...* is present in this scene as it represents the figure's crossing from one space to another. This crossing might be symbolic of the passing from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, using an analogous female imagery to signify this transcendental movement of the self. That is, in *Luz...* the symbolism of the wall has also been read as a 'vaginal space' (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 166, Lauter 94). Chadwick has pointed out how many women artists 'often chose to emphasise the fundamental biological and spiritual forces that distinguish woman's experiences from those of man's' (*Women* 182). Varo's female imagery does not seem however to

place an emphasis on the female body to express an essential biological difference, but through the alchemical couplings, and as in *Nacer...*, the painting points towards the transformation of the female *artist*. It can thus be read as representing a woman who has left behind a historical and cultural ambit that confines her to darkness and ignorance (patriarchy or canonical surrealism) to establish a new relation with the world in general and with pictorial creation in particular. Read this way, instead of using reproductive imagery to refer to woman's biological creation, Varo employs it to express the process of artistic production, as well as to underline that artistic creation also takes place through the acceptance and understanding of one's biological and spiritual self. Simultaneously, the imagery serves as a symbolic strategy to differentiate her art from violent depictions against the female body found in surrealist works such as Hans Bellmer's series *La poupée* or Max Ernst's collage novels, while renouncing altogether conventional phallic metaphors for creativity found in paintings such as Salvador Dalí's, *El gran masturbador* (1929).

In a corresponding way to *Luz...* and *Nacer...*, in *La llamada* darkness surrounds the glowing protagonist. In this scene, she shines with most intensity, making her appear incandescent. Haynes comments how the female figure 'leaves behind the state of sleep which according to mystics such as Gurdjieff, thought was [sic]. the normal human condition' (31). However, judging from the fact that she wears 'an alchemist mortar around her neck and carries a magical vessel' (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 168) together with her surroundings- a path whose walls are lined with figures in a lethargic state-the picture equally refers to the alchemical finding of the 'divine spark buried in the darkness' (Jung 160). She indeed looks a like flame and the vessel she carries in her hand is filled with red tincture, indicative of the last stage of alchemical transmutation, the finding of the philosopher's stone (Jung 292), which also can reveal the means to acquire the elixir of life (Jung 294). Now, through the already mentioned equivalence between alchemy and painting, one can infer that the elixir she carries in the bottle is not only the elixir of life but also represents that of art, and thus the concept of Knowledge or Sapientia becomes coincident with the artistic inspiration necessary to artistically create a different order of reality.

The position of her right hand and her hair's connection with the celestial body in the sky suggest that there are also other 'media' contributing to her ecstatic experience. The hand makes a gesture that recalls a mudra of some oriental mystic tradition. The cosmic source of her illumination, the star, introduces cosmology as

well as the Sufi belief of understanding the microcosm (one's self) through the macrocosm, aiming for a higher Ordering (Arberry 12). These elements place the figure close to the realm of divinity and the search for the spiritual centre of perception that according to Sufism lies dormant within us all (Arberry 11). The word 'centre' has been used both in alchemy and mystic disciplines to refer to the most sacred, the reach of absolute reality and divine order. In his book on surrealist myth, Mabille also refers to this centre of divine order as a metaphor for the marvellous realm, in which one is able to 'explore universal reality more thoroughly' (7). Both the esoteric disciplines as well as Mabille place an emphasis on the aspect that the seeker must overcome many obstacles in order to reach that centre, presenting obvious overtones with the myth of the labyrinth. Varo's prime articulation of this myth is found in *Tránsito en espiral* (1962) where she depicts its oldest form, the spiral.⁶⁶ The labyrinth in this painting constitutes a walled medieval city shaped in a spiral and located in the middle of the vast ocean. The spiral transit implies that whatever arrives at the centre, in which an alchemical bird resides, must come back, suggesting the notion of eternal return. However, her labyrinths do not always take such an explicit form, but rather a metaphorical one: 'a labyrinth may be natural or man-made, above or below ground -the Ulyssean or Thesean variants- designed as a puzzle, entertainment, trap or prison. It may be real or imaginary, metaphor, symbol or myth. It might be essentially symmetrical, or spiral, or have no discernible structure; its outer boundaries may like wise be of any shape' (Martin 25).

La llamada as well as *Luz emergente* and *Nacer de nuevo* can be seen to correspond to the Thesean variant of the labyrinth. The idea of the labyrinth implies the notion of the quest, of finding our identity, the meaning of life (Martin 26), suggested in Varo's paintings. In the three depicted scenes, the predominant colour is a dark or light orange. By not using the colour of the last stage of transmutation, red, yet suggesting closeness to it through different shades of orange along the paintings, Varo highlights the unfinished quality of the event and invites the viewer to infer the final moment of the alchemical search. This final moment can thus be coupled with finding the centre of the metaphorical labyrinth where instead of a Minotaur, it is knowledge of the self, the sacred space and divine order what dwells inside. Now, according to Martin, 'the labyrinth has become a symbol for Latin American

⁶⁶ According to Kaplan, this composition is remarkably similar to a Renaissance alchemical drawing of The Lapis Sanctuary, in which the tower at the centre of the maze hides the philosopher's stone (*Unexpected* 169). There are also striking similarities between Varo's painting and a later one by Leonora Carrington, called *Laberinto* (1991).

literature' (27).⁶⁷ *La llamada* suggests the quester's advance through one of the labyrinth's alleyways, while *Nacer de nuevo* and *Luz emergente* suggest the Thesean centre of the labyrinth: 'la existencia, en el centro del recinto sagrado, de un talismán o de un objeto cualquiera [...]. Si en el mito de Perseo los elementos místicos apenas son visibles, en el del Santo Grial el ascetismo y la mística se alían'' (Paz, *Laberinto* 357).⁶⁸ Within the major novels of the 'Boom', the labyrinth has taken many metaphorical forms and, aside from the many shapes that Borges has given to it, another form of the labyrinth can be seen in the jungle. Thus, comparable to the quest for identity and desire to apprehend reality that the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* undergoes and that he thinks he has found right in the centre of the jungle, the three paintings function, like Carpentier's novel, as an allegorical journey, in Varo's case imaginary and abstract, in Carpentier's more geographical and historical. In Paz's words, 'hemos sido expulsados del centro del mundo y estamos condenados a buscarlo por selvas y desiertos, por los vericuetos y subterráneos del Laberinto' (Paz, *Laberinto* 357). Thus, the objective in both is the same: to seek out the realm of authentic and clairvoyant experiences where things will acquire their primary significance or presence, that is, to find the source, the origin from which we have been expelled and which will serve in turn towards artistic inspiration.

However, as commented in Chapter One, Carpentier's novel couples his quest with a 'return to the maternal realm of nature' in which 'Rosario's spontaneous eroticism' constitutes a 'cosmic ritual' (Martin 194) from which the narration will extract artistic inspiration. Varo points towards an ethereal, intangible source of artistic inspiration centred on the female metaphysical and spiritual aspect in which she avoids references to the flow of desire, distinguishing her quests from

⁶⁷ *Nacer...* can indeed be seen to endorse a metaphor for the labyrinth's myth in a comparable way to Borges' 'Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz'. At the centre of these metaphorical labyrinths, there is a mirror rather than a Minotaur (Canfield 137). Tadeo's labyrinth is symbolised by a forest that he crosses in the middle of the night to capture the deserter Martín Fierro. When he finally encounters him, he encounters the centre so to speak, because at that moment he comprehends that 'el otro era él' (Borges *Aleph* 67). The revelation occurs with Tadeo's discovery that he has found his true identity, making him understand his destiny and therefore allowing him an integrative experience with the world, to gain a sense of meaning. In *Nacer*, the protagonist has also reached the centre of 'the labyrinth' in the nocturnal forest. Like Tadeo, she does not find what she expects. She awaits for her own image but rather sees a reflection of the moon, which allows her to understand her destiny, undergoing an integrative epiphany that allows her rebirth. Thus, Fierro and the moon relate to the inner self, are able to reveal the subject's identity, and are encounters with an alterity that is capable of transforming consciousness.

⁶⁸ Again, Jorge Luis Borges comes to mind; particularly his short story 'La casa de Asterión'. The labyrinth for Asterión takes the metaphorical form of his house, while the figure of Varo's *La llamada* or *Luz emergente* could be walking through one. However, in contrast with Varo's figures, Asterión appears as a passive character. He knows that the knowledge that will allow him to escape his condition resides in death, but knowing that his redeemer exists, he prefers to wait for him rather than starting the quest that will allow him to be reborn with knowledge. *La llamada* and *Luz emergente* thus represent the opposite situation to Asterión, as the women are depicted in the initiation process of the quest towards self knowledge that starts by taking the path to the centre of that labyrinth Asterión fears. *La llamada* is also ruled by a cosmic principle, connecting with Borges' notion of destiny in so far as the celestial body has come to signify how 'destiny has summoned the heroine and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity [...] to a zone unknown' (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 168).

Carpentier's, other Latin American 'Ulyssean' novels, and the surrealists. At the same time, she strategically uses the female quester to reject an all-encompassing masculine world of knowledge in which she was present as 'erotic stimulator', but absent as an active and thinking subject. The three canvases present visionary power as a road to creativity in which the woman artist is in full control of this potential, never conquered by it or offering it to man. As Hubert has mentioned, it appears that Varo believed that, 'if woman had easier access to the sacred and needed no mediator, her full potential for self-expression would know no bounds' (264). Therefore, at the end of her quest, lies the centre of the labyrinth, the perfect place to sit and translate the vision she has seen into a form of artistic expression.

EI HILO DE ARIADNA: WEAVING THE MARVELLOUS

Possibly, the most renowned of Varo's paintings representing the process of artistic creation are *Música solar* (1954), *Creación de las aves* (1957), *El flautista* (1955) and *Armonía* (1956). However, a less popular painting that deals with this subject in an equally effective way is *La tejedora de Verona* (1956). In this canvas, a woman of metallic coloured face sits knitting on a chair.⁶⁹ Judging from the architectural style of the surrounding city, she is in what appears to be the upper room of a medieval house. There, her magic needles produce two separate threads that turn into a being. While the hair, face and hands of her creation have already taken a human shape, the rest of her body, including her winged arms, is two dimensional and composed of red lace. The weaver's creation flies upwards to the sky, and in the moment of passing through the window, she turns her head towards the viewer and looks us directly in the eye.

According to alchemical lore, in the attainment of the elixir of life, there are three stages of transmutation that correspond respectively to blackening (*nigredo*), whitening (*albedo*) and reddening (*rubedo*) (Haynes 29). A metaphor for this process is suggested through the painting's use of colour. First, the origin of the strings takes the viewer all the way to the ceiling of the room, disappearing up towards a *black* sky. The next stage is given by the weaver, particularly by her *white* skin, garments and needles. The strings that go down from the ceiling to her hands are of a mixed red and white colour, but in the moment they become the woman's

⁶⁹ Varo painted a sinister version of the same idea in *La tejedora roja* (1956). This room is obscure, and the created woman does not move towards the light but towards the darkness of the night. The room is full of silhouettes that emulate dead bodies stuck to the wall. The weaver is a sinister, black character in the dark interior, contrasting with the luminosity of Verona.

creation, they turn *red*. The alchemical process equally endows the painting with a narrative sequence, as one can easily infer a past, a present and a future moment to the depicted scene. The fact that only the winged woman's face and hands have taken human shape, points once more towards the idea of a process and not a finished action. One can therefore consider the conversion of the red lace into human form as the equivalent of the attainment of the elixir of life; since from her knitting emerges the impossible, the creation of non-human life. However, her peculiar human features do not only refer to the creation of life, but of art, as her face and hair possesses characteristics identifiable with a more conventional style of painting. The employment of one point perspective and the foreshortening of the figure also remind the viewer of the simple lines of the Quattrocento. Varo combines two points of view, one frontal and one inferior to reinforce the effect of the perspective and emphasise the vanishing lines in the ceiling beams. Equally, the woman that comes out of the weaver's hands is foreshortened, allowing her to link the last and first planes to introduce movement into the scene. Verona thus acquires significance, as this city saw the work of great Renaissance artists of whom the weaver might be an example.

While Varo continues to compare alchemy with painting in *La tejedora...*, this comparison finds its best realisation in *Creación de las aves*. In this canvas, an owl-woman sits quietly on a table painting with the three primary colours provided by the workings of two alchemical communicating vessels (which themselves distil 'substance' from a round window), in what Chadwick considers a reference to Breton's *Les Vases Communicants* (Women 202). The palette is quite limited, and the three painted birds are highlighted through colour, as they have black, white and red wings respectively (*nigredo*, *albedo*, *rubedo*). If in the weaver's act of creation it was the sky that supplied the first stage of alchemical transmutation, in *Creación...* it is a cosmic light coming from a celestial body and which the owl-woman filters through a triangle-shaped magnifying glass that make the birds come to life and fly away through the window. Like *El encuentro*, both *Creación...* and *La tejedora...* are reminiscent of the myth of Pygmalion and thus of Gradiva in so far as the work of art becomes a living entity. In both of them, Varo shifts the archetypical male mythical figure, Pygmalion, Breton or Harold, for a female one, changing the prototypical female role from creation to creator and signalling her metamorphosis into owl as a symbol of wisdom. This also associates her with other mythical figures, in this case with the wisdom represented by Minerva (Pallas Athena). The

possible reference to Minerva in *Creación...* appears thus intimately linked with the figure represented in *La tejedora...*, as Minerva was also famous for her marvellous weavings (Ovid 134), as if they were indeed representing two aspects of the same character. It is also worth noticing that, except for the communicating vessels, Varo's symbols for creation and alchemical transformation are strategically different from those used by her surrealist counterparts. That is, she employs weaving in *La tejedora...* and music and celestial light in *Creación...*, as the owl-woman's paintbrush is united to the strings of a violin around her neck.⁷⁰

The image created by Varo's weaver recalls another extraordinary image that has been noted by Celorio. This is the character of Remedios la Bella in García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*. Spectator and reader observe both flying figures without hesitation, accepting that from ordinary tasks such as knitting and folding bed linen, the marvellous emerges.⁷¹ Both painting and text are drawing from domestic 'feminine' activities, in which the flying women share an angelical, luminous and ethereal nature. However, Remedios la Bella represents a type of woman with little or no human sensibility and intelligence, who cannot look people in the eye because they will inevitably burn with desire and who has for this very reason been confined to solitude within the house. On the other hand, the flying creature in Varo's painting looks defiantly at the viewer, possesses a non-sexed body and ironically becomes the contrary, the angel that, as soon as it is born, yearns for freedom and leaves the house. While García Márquez's Remedios seems to fly out of her divine stupidity and the danger her beauty presupposes, Remedios Varo's figure is just born into a free life that, while still in possession of beauty and magical powers, has ceased to be passive, endangered by her beauty or gaze.

In *Música solar* Varo recovers the communion between woman and nature that was already seen in *Nacer de nuevo*, presenting parallels with another scene in Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*. Sánchez has mentioned how like 'Varo's quester, [the narrator] believes himself to be in tune with this natural world as well as with himself, and a composition flows from his creative centre' (66). While it is true that both relate music with the natural world, music nevertheless plays a wholly

⁷⁰ Lauter associates *Creación...* with Pinocchio, pointing out that 'their creator brought them to life out of a desire to be loved [...]. In [Varo's] case [...] her creation is the product of her love rather than of her desire to be loved' (85).

⁷¹ Celorio establishes an autobiographical comparison between the two Remedios, [Varo and La Bella] noticing how 'de las agujas de la tejedora de Verona, entre las madejas que flotan juguetonas por la atmósfera del recinto medieval, surge silenciosa, tímida, vibrátil, Remedios convirtiéndose en luz, Remedios convirtiéndose en aire a medida que la tejedora avanza en su labor, Remedios alejándose del mundo pero sin desprenderse de él totalmente, Remedios navegando por el viento pero unida a la domesticidad de las agujas de tejer' (Celorio 8).

different role in each. To Carpentier's jaded narrator, spiritual rebirth occurs when he feels surrounded by *lo real maravilloso*, and it is from there that his inspiration for the creative musical act emerges. As was seen in Chapter One, in his experience, very much like in canonical surrealism, the indigenous woman Rosario becomes a metaphor for that marvellous reality, the earth woman who finally leads to his communion with the surrounding nature and triggers his act of creation, the threnody based on Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. Varo's painting presents a substantially different idea of the creative act. Nature does not inspire the woman, but she is the creator of life and colour within it. The mantle that covers her indicates that she is already in communion with the natural realm, not a metaphor for it, and that her musical inspiration originates from the sun, where the creation of the marvellous involves the idea of a fecund musical light. While in both cases the marvellous is associated with nature, the key difference from Carpentier's text is that Varo's figure is creating nature and life through music, whilst Carpentier's protagonist creates music through natural inspiration triggered by the earth-woman figure. In other words, she is not the medium between man and a marvellous that leads to creation, but the creator of that marvellous herself.

According to Kaplan, 'Varo had long been interested in the occult, stimulated by the surrealist belief in the 'occultation of the Marvellous' and by wide readings in witchcraft, alchemy, sorcery, Tarot and magic' (*Subversive* 118). However interested in the occult she might have been it is not precisely the surrealist belief that Varo's paintings seem to be projecting. That is, when in the second surrealist manifesto Breton referred to the 'occultation of Surrealism' (178), he was allying the movement with the discredited sciences of astrology and alchemy, seeing surrealism as their successor both in its unacceptability vis-à-vis the public and in its concern with the transmutation of matter and consciousness. When he explained how to achieve such occultation, he argued that one must follow and submit *himself* to certain media, to 'praise hysteria and its train of young, naked women sliding along the roofs' (*Manifestoes* 180). Hence, because woman was 'the most wonderful and disturbing problem of all' (*Manifestoes* 181) it was her delusion and frenzy that led man towards the achievement of this marvellous 'occultation'. For Remedios Varo, to whom one of the main surrealist's works on love was dedicated, Péret's *Anthology of Sublime Love* (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 214), it might have been particularly important to construct an image of woman which would deliberately lie outside Breton or Péret's definition of her as the primordial element that led to artistic composition.

In this respect it is noteworthy how, in most paintings that deal with artistic creation, Varo depicts a gender ambiguous image (*Armonía*), metamorphosed into animal form (*Creación...*) or a body without gender (*La tejedora...*). Even in this last painting, where the face's creation clearly takes the attributes of a woman, the body is ethereal and non-sexed.⁷² Both *Música solar* and *Creación de las aves* use an imagery that separates the creation of the marvellous from the female body and her metaphor as mother earth by 'conforming to the Sufi belief that light, vibration and sound are together the source of all creation' (Chadwick, *Women* 203). While praising the 'occult', Varo avoids at all times the representation of woman in frenzied states and abject positions, displaying her as the one who, through a different 'media', extracts and actively channels all sources of creative energy. She does not lead anyone but herself, presenting images which transmit a sense of balance between many different sources for inspiration such as science and art, nature and psychology, reason and magic. It is thus through this revision of images and metaphors that 'her access to the marvelous relies on the self as active agent without need for erotic displacement' (Kaplan, *Subversive* 117).

The paintings I have discussed therefore reformulate two key notions regarding the role of women within surrealism and within Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*: the woman as creator and as creation. Varo's paintings about creativity all illustrate on the one hand how the woman has ceased to be the passive and sexualised muse to reveal a central role in the course of creation. On the other, Varo has chosen archetypal 'feminine' tasks and mythical associations in order to reformulate the negative meaning ascribed to them. If in *Nacer de nuevo* and *Música solar*, Varo 'rewrote' the stereotypical relationship between woman and nature, in *La tejedora de Verona* or in *Bordando el manto terrestre*, she recuperates a sphere that is traditionally associated with women's domestic tasks like knitting and embroidery.⁷³ These occupations stress woman's historical and social experiences while simultaneously demonstrating that they do not have of necessity to confine woman into a static role but that they can be transformed into subversive tools, into elements of alchemical power, magical crafts and activities. Interestingly, it is this image of

⁷² Regarding Varo's general depiction of gender, Haynes has commented how 'gender masquerade does not refer here to cross-dressing or transexualism. The masquerade, the masking of gender, often takes another more subtle form: that of gender ambiguity, the active blurring rather than the undifferentiated expression of gender identity' (27).

⁷³ As will be seen in the conclusion, together with Leonora Carrington, she also reappropriates the kitchen as a place for alchemical 'cooking' and experiments, which recalls the stratagems adopted by writers like Laura Esquivel in *Como agua para chocolate*, or the writings of Sor Juana.

weaving/knitting which serves as the best metaphor for the notion of the woman creating at the centre of the labyrinth.⁷⁴ The spider is a weaver that finds itself at the centre of her spiral web, another form of maze and the insect from which Arachne derives her name, whose quality of weaving was indeed superior to that of Minerva (Ovid 135), an image suggested both in *La tejedora...* and *Creación de las aves*. The paintings also evoke the thread of Ariadna, which in this case is not being used to lead Theseus around the labyrinth but indeed to weave, knit or embroider in order to lead herself. Thus, adopting many mythical forms and rewriting these myths so as to empower woman, she becomes the one who, from the 'centre', always stressed by the employment of central perspective and by making the woman advance towards the viewer through the use of warm colours, becomes the architect of the labyrinth, the weaver of dreams and illusions.⁷⁵

In the last chapter of Mabilles's *Mirror of the Marvelous*, meaningfully entitled 'In Quest of the Grail', he gives literary examples revolving around love and desire, using hermetic imagery to express how woman is coupled with nature in a metaphor that shows her as the earth 'put to sleep by winter' and waiting to be awakened by man' (251). There, he contends, we are 'granted the access to the marvelous realm' and 'at the end of his quest, the conqueror must begin another round of labours in order to make all her hidden beauty, all the life held captive within her, spring forth' (Mabilles 251). It is thus that the marvellous realm is in surrealism coupled with the creation of human life, with the fruit emerging from *amour fou*. Now, it is noteworthy how in Varo's paintings there also exists an association between the artistic creation and the creation of life: an extraordinary being in *La tejedora de Verona*, birds in *Creación de las aves*, plants and birds in *Música solar*, the world itself in *Bordando el manto terrestre*. Certainly, there is an affiliation between Varo's paintings and the surrealist idea of the marvellous as referring to the ultimate mystery of creating life. However, none of Varo's paintings conceptualise the marvellous as the result of the love union, neither as something that germinates in woman due to man's seed, as none of her images imply the creation of human life. Rather, she depicts it as result of woman's own

⁷⁴ Among Varo's paintings there are numerous images which portray the woman as a magic weaver, among the ones not discussed here there are two drawings named *Bordando el manto lunar* (1956) and *Los ancestros* (1956) as well as other paintings like *La tejedora roja* (1956), *Tejedora* (1956), *Les feuilles mortes* (1956).

⁷⁵ This metaphor for the woman as the creator of her own world is most appropriately articulated in the painting commended upon in the first section of this chapter, *Bordando el manto terrestre*, where Varo 'transformed the art of embroidery [...] into a godlike act of creation and means of escape' (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 215).

communication with natural and cosmic forces, alchemy, music, Sufi mysticism, weaving, knitting or embroidering, as the creative act of awakening *non-human life*.

However, in other paintings such as *Armonía* or *El flautista*, Varo moves away from the association between the marvellous and the myth of genesis, and seems to rely entirely on the metaphysical/Gnostic idea of finding that which will be able to connect all things, the threads of destiny, already evoked in the weaver, that will establish order within disorder. This idea is not very different from Breton's objective chance, the place of encounter between man and a mysterious force or 'other'. However, Varo rejects Breton's uniting 'flow of desire' and in these paintings, music and mathematics are often the media to amplify the foundations of the real, making clear how the forces that guided male artists through sexuality and intercession do not concern Varo at all. For Ouspensky, a mathematician disciple of Gurdjieff, art could lead to cosmic awareness and music is seen as necessary for the recognition of the world's harmony (Taylor 128). He also held the view that musical relationships order all existence, notions that obviously inform Varo's art (Taylor 128). Both *Armonía* and *El flautista* convey these beliefs, as in the two paintings, the main guiding force towards the creation of an order and general structure is music either achieved through mathematical formulas or resulting in them.

El flautista, whose title indicates a masculine identity but whose face is quite feminine, is, like the woman in *Música solar*, part of the surrounding nature. His magical music does not create life but a monument, as the fossils, freed from gravity, fly up to form a building that could recall the architectural structure of Mayan pyramids. To an extent, *El flautista* represents a similar idea to Carpentier's 'Viaje a la semilla'. Junco, noticing this analogy comments how in both Varo's painting and Carpentier's short story stones elevate themselves magically to construct a building, suggesting the reversal of time (Junco 215). Indeed, both stress the magical properties of music as if its power alone was capable of constructing and destructing life, as Carpentier places the central event of the story in the Carnival within the music salon, which celebrates the end of one cycle and the beginning of the other. There is also in both an association of musical powers with natural ones, as Varo's painting takes place in what seems the middle of the jungle or a forest and the flautist is partly metamorphosed with the hill he is leaning against.

As the ruins at the beginning of Carpentier's story are the 'huellas de ese texto que Marcial va hilvanando a su paso por la tierra' (Alonso 388), so the ruins that the flautist is elevating to reconstruct the tower have the prints of fossils in them, indicative of their passage through earth. As Marcial's story has the pre-existing structure, in the painting, the edifice is being constructed following an existing pattern that is suggested by the lines of the tower, which are already drawn in the pictorial space.⁷⁶ Varo has mentioned how the octagonal tower is supposed to represent 'la teoría de las octavas [...] muy importante en ciertas enseñanzas esotéricas' (*Catalogue* 112). Even though this theory also corresponds to Western musical theories concerning tonality in music, Varo is giving emphasis to esoteric, mystical and cosmological processes. Carpentier's narration also places an emphasis on the metaphysical aspect of the magical, and through its regressive dynamic, it suggests, like the pre-existing tower in Varo's painting, 'la existencia de un texto primordial, anterior a la pulverización' (Alonso 388). Carpentier's story ends up suggesting how all elements of the house 'salieron volando en la noche buscando sus antiguas raíces al pie de las selvas [...]. Todo se metamorfoseaba, regresando a su condición primera' ('Viaje' 189). And so in Varo's painting the tower comes back to its prime condition and the flautist integrates more and more with the nature that surrounds him as if all was going back to the condition from which it emerged.

This painting, as well as *Armonía*, connects with the Pythagorean 'music of the spheres', which also related music with mathematics, seeking perfection within chaos: 'Pythagoras envisioned the cosmos as a huge monochord, a single string connected to heaven and absolute spirit at one end and absolute matter at the other' (Haynes 30). Music then, rather than desire, becomes the means to construct a perfect coherence indicative of an ordered divine or universal structure. The mathematical and Gnostic aspect of Varo's pictorial production also locates her beyond surrealism and the literature of *lo real maravilloso*. This implies that, as mentioned in the introduction and in the previous section, although Varo's art certainly establishes a dialogue with the two aesthetic approaches of interest for this thesis as a whole, it would be unfair to reduce her sources to these. The labyrinthine metaphysics of fantasy present in some of her paintings, also couple her art with

⁷⁶ 'El negro viejo [...] hizo gestos extraños, volteando su cayado sobre un cementerio de baldosas. Los cuadrados de mármol, blancos y negros, volaron a los pisos, vistiendo la tierra. Las piedras, con saltos certeros, fueron a cerrar los boquetes de las murallas. Hojas de nogal claveteadas se encajaron en sus marcos [...] con rápida rotación. [...] Las tejas juntaron sus fragmentos, alzando un sonoro torbellino[...]. La casa creció, traída nuevamente a sus proporciones habituales' (Carpentier, 'Viaje' 180).

writers like Borges who, although by no means part of the literature of *lo real maravilloso americano*, overlaps with these in his use of myth. Therefore, and considering that it is also important to do justice to the possible association of her work with a broader range of literary sources, I will finally comment upon *Armonía* in relationship to one of Borges short stories.

Armonía shows a room reminiscent of Renaissance depictions of saints and scholars (Kaplan, *Unexpected* 190). Sitting at a table, an androgynous figure proceeds to search for 'el hilo invisible que une todas las cosas' (Varo, *Catalogue* 114). S-he uses, among other objects and crystals, a mathematical formula. As soon as s-he manages to locate everything in the right place of the stave, 'debe salir una música no sólo armoniosa sino también objetiva, es decir, capaz de mover todas las cosas si así se desea' (Varo, *Catalogue* 114). A figure emerging from the wall is helping the 'protagonist' to obtain the melody. According to Varo, 'representa el azar [...] pero el azar objetivo. Cuando uso la palabra objetivo entiendo por ello que es algo fuera de nuestro mundo, más allá de él' (Varo, *Catalogue* 114). In this sense, Varo is giving to the act of creation the same importance to the element of objective chance that Breton and Mabille did. For her it also presupposes an encounter with an alterity, mysterious and external to us.⁷⁷ Now, the room depicted in *Armonía* is surrounded by chaos. Flowers and roots emerge from the floor, tiles levitate in disorder. The chest at the figure's side is full of objects that spread over the room in disarray. The drawers of a small bureau are open, showing a mess of handkerchiefs, ribbons and crystals. The main idea articulated is therefore that of trying to find an order within the vast disorder that permeates space, and this can be read as a metaphor for finding order within existence.

In 'La biblioteca de Babel', the dying narrator recounts his lifelong search. The geometrical space he finds himself can be linked with to the painting's geometrical perspective, although his is a hexagonal cubicle and his disorder is not caused by nature and objects but by books of a 'naturaleza informe y caótica' (*Ficciones* 89). The narrator tells us how he spent his years looking for the 'libro total que sea la cifra y el compendio perfecto de todos los demás' (*Ficciones* 95, emphasis Borges). The finding of this book can be comparable to the finding of objective music as both are seen as possessing a divine quality that will justify the existence of the universe and thus,

⁷⁷ As mentioned in Chapter One for Mabille, 'the problem arises from reconciling human necessity which stems from our desires, with a natural necessity of implacable laws', and 'these are the questions that allow us to reach an exact definition of the marvelous' (7).

the existence of the quester. Both book and music work as metaphors for that which is able to decipher meaning within chaos and therefore both are seen as enacting a higher principle, one in language the other in sound, endowing existence with a higher significance that, as Varo said, does not belong to our world but to the world of causes (*Catalogue* 114). Just as the library's organised structure is repetitive and symmetric, so we find symmetry in Varo's reflexive and rational space. Symmetry and geometry are both in the painting and the story suggestive of a perfect structure, of a mathematical ordering in the external construction and therefore of a rationality that is lacking in the interior elements. Thus, Borges' books and Varo's objects do not possess a meaning by themselves, but only will achieve one if combined properly in the musical stave or in *The Book*.⁷⁸

As I have argued throughout this section, Varo's differences from surrealist conceptualisations of the marvellous image are found both in her iconography as well as in her metaphysical postulations. The surrealist idea of deepening the foundations of the real moves purposefully in Varo beyond the metaphor of love, the revolutionary power of sexual desire and the objectified or dismembered female body towards an alternative mythology that is knowingly linked with crafts and symbols that have long been associated with women. Varo pursued a similar goal to her surrealist counterparts, that is, to translate into a painted/written image an inspirational vision that tries to represent the underlying mystery of existence and the world. In an analogous way to surrealist artists, Varo conceptualises the marvellous first as an image witnessed with the intensity, clarity and 'authenticity' of dream symbols in a visionary experience. Second, as the creative process that aims to give shape to such revelation, be this through music, nature, alchemy or weaving. Hence, her vision of the marvellous consists, as do Carpentier's and Breton's, first in images that are projected from the outside, messages from another state of being, the inspirational experience that the artist must decode or translate. Second, in the marvellous image or reality itself.

However, her main difference from them is not only a new set of myths and images to express her own particular vision but the fact that in these representations, Varo intentionally highlights the position of the woman as a being in complete control of her visionary gifts, never as the link between these and man.

⁷⁸ It is true that in Borges's story there seems to be the suggestion that this key or absolute is indeed unreachable. Varo's painting, while depicting the same search, seems to suggest that the ultimate 'armonía' is indeed attainable.

Meanwhile, her paintings remind us that their *modus operandi* connects the musical, the mystical, the alchemical and the natural realms to show the conviction that there is no physical reality that is not also a spiritual and psychic one. As will be seen in the next chapter, Garro's narratives will also be seen as adjusting and revisiting male motifs, mythologies and metaphors to portray the woman as the one who undergoes the 'constant inward searching' and the one who has understood the 'dialect between dream and action' (Mabille 17). She ceases to be the passive sleeping beauty, the mother earth waiting for awakening, because she is now the one who awakens, who illuminates, who creates non-human forms of life rather than procreates the human, who achieves the inner lucidity necessary for translating the revelatory moment into a marvellous image.

CHAPTER THREE: ELENA GARRO, A WALK THROUGH LOVE AND DEATH.

SECTION ONE: *LA SEMANA DE COLORES*, THE DEMYTHOLOGISATION OF LOVE.

The cult of the mythical woman [...] lies at the heart of the surrealist credo (Shattuck 25).

From the 1930s onwards, as I have already mentioned, the surrealists' ambitions were deeply concerned with the apprehension of love embodied in the figure of the muse and her particular potential for liberation through passion and desire. Studies like *Mad Love* express as the *ars poetica* of love 'the entire power and hope of surrealism to *remake the world through the emotions*' (Caws, *Mad Love* 13, my emphasis). Other versions of surrealist love like Péret's *Anthology of Sublime Love* or Aragon's *The Libertine* present a similar idea, if somewhat different in form and feeling. Common to these manifestations is the fact that they all 'found in passionate devotion to a woman over a long period of time the surest means of liberating desire. And by desire read imagination' (Shattuck 25). In the previous chapter, we have seen how the myth of Gradiva became the quintessence of this imagination: 'for the goddess Venus, the surrealists substituted the muse Gradiva, she who could help the artist penetrate the barrier between the real and the surreal' (Chadwick, *Masson's* 418).¹ Inspired by Freud's writing,² the image of Gradiva acquired a notorious presence in the works of Breton, Dalí, Masson, Péret, Éluard and Aragon among others.³ However, by the time Breton finished writing *Arcane 17*, the image of Mélusine took over from Gradiva. The mysterious mermaid was invoked by Breton as the epitome of love and the bringer of peace and unity among all men.⁴ Hence, if the surrealist goal was to 'transform the world' (Marx) and 'change life'

¹ According to Chadwick, 'Gradiva became the incarnation of that collective myth the creation of which Breton later described as fundamental to Surrealism's aspirations' (Masson's 415).

² As mentioned in the Chapter on Varo, the surrealist interest in Gradiva came from Freud's essay *Delusion and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva*.

³ It was she who was behind the representations of the surrealist muses Nadja, Jaqueline Lamba, Gala or Elsa. Depictions of these women as THE muse can be seen in Breton's *Nadja* and *Mad Love*, in Péret's *Anthology of Sublime Love*, in Dalí's *Gradiva* or *Tres apariciones de la cara de Gala* (1945), in Éluard's *Love, Poetry*, in Masson's *Gradiva* (*Metamorphoses of Gradiva*) or in Aragon's *The Libertine*.

⁴ Breton invokes her presence as saviour: 'I've always been stupefied that she didn't make her voice heard, that she didn't think of taking every possible advantage, the immense advantage of the two irresistible and priceless inflections given to her, one for talking to men during love, the other that commands all of a child's trust... when would we see a woman simply as woman perform quite a different miracle of extending her arms between those who are about to grapple and say: you are brothers' (79).

(Rimbaud) through the remaking of existence, there came a stage in the movement's beliefs in which the love a woman could bring was signalled as the principal means of doing so, and thus 'love had to be remade, like life. It longs to be always kept as marvelous, safe from the "null and void movements" which go to make up an ordinary existence' (Caws, *Mad Love* 12). That is, the power of the imagination permeated by woman's love equals the notion of a utopia erected upon its potential to evoke the marvellous.

It is also towards a utopic space that the great majority of Elena Garro's characters move, often employing mythical patterns to escape the restrictions of time and space in order to achieve the wished for liberation. Similarly, one of the common means through which Garro's characters break away from societal constraints is through the love experience. Even though her work presents obvious affinities with surrealism, her mythical imagination and especially her capturing of the essence of Mexican culture also makes some of her narratives an example of the literature of *lo real maravilloso americano*. As Joan Marx has commented, 'while surrealist affinities appear in her narrative, Garro's use of myth puts her in the company of other Hispano-American writers such as Carpentier, Paz, Fuentes and Rulfo' (3). However, it is precisely the strategic employment of such mythical patterns, which, as has been seen in relation with Varo's work and will be seen in relation with Boulosa's, separates her from them. Bearing in mind Garro's relationship with both surrealism and the literature of *lo real maravilloso americano*, the present study will compare the notion of love and the employment of myth in two short stories belonging to *La semana de colores*: 'La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas' and 'Era Mercurio'. At the centre of this reading will be love, the female body, Garro's mythical design and the capacity these discursive elements have to elicit a marvellous, utopic realm in which the protagonists gain knowledge and experience the deepening of reality. Through this comparison, I will show to what extent Garro transformed the mainstream surrealist representation of *amour fou* through a new representation of love that deliberately employs *lo real maravilloso* for its contestation. Along these lines, the comparison of the two stories reveals a point of intersection in Garro's choice of imagery between Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano* and surrealism, in which the former is strategically employed to contest the latter, albeit not in the same manner as Carpentier did. Her strategic response is visibly different as Garro's texts represent, on the one hand, the psychological scope

of the female love experience and demythologise, on the other, the archetype of the mythical woman in which this love was traditionally anchored.

In the first chapter, I discussed how the surrealists' praise of woman and their conceptualisation of love took a strong hold in several Latin American poets. Commenting on Rubén Darío, Paz expresses his own view on woman as well as that of surrealism itself: 'para Rubén Darío, como para todos los grandes poetas, la mujer no es solamente instrumento de conocimiento sino el conocimiento mismo' (*Laberinto* 204). Therefore, Garro's text does not only contest surrealist postulates, but also those of other Latin American poets and writers like Paz, Carpentier, Fuentes or Cortázar who adopted a view towards love and woman analogous to surrealism. While 'Era Mercurio' is perhaps Garro's text closest to surrealism in terms of thematic and choice of metaphors and images, 'La culpa' is, on the other hand, one of her texts that most systematically and successfully deals with Mexican history and the myths of its indigenous communities, concretely the Aztec. If in 'Era Mercurio' Garro parodies and directly contests the aforementioned surrealist view on love and woman, in 'La culpa' Garro elaborates a different love conception in which woman ceases to be a visual parade to transform herself into an active and compelling participant within the dynamics of the couple. Garro's love project participates in the arational experience, enlarges the reality in which the lovers live and leads them to transcend existence by entering into mythical time. Simultaneously, the mythical pattern of this love is formed around Mexican historical memory, cyclical time and the Aztec cosmogony. As such, Garro also employs the vocabulary of *lo real maravilloso*, for it presupposes an amplification of reality that is embedded in a discourse of Americanism or *Mexicanidad*, conceptualising the marvellous revelation of love in relationship with Mexican socio-historical events. Therefore, the stories constitute two complementary positions as regards the exploration of love and the female body as catalysts for surpassing reality as well as illustrating a communication of ideas between surrealism and *lo real maravilloso* in the work of Elena Garro. Ultimately, as her re-appropriation of Mexican, Classical and surrealist mythology indicates -in an echo of Varo's paintings- Garro shows that woman's development away from the role of goddess or muse is vital to her aesthetic/literary production.

THE ENCOUNTERS

'La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas' begins with Laura Aldama secretly knocking at her kitchen door. In silence, her Indian servant, Nacha, lets her in whilst looking astonished at her lady's figure clothed in a burned, bloody and soiled dress. Non-verbal communication establishes an atmosphere of intimacy among the two women, who then start talking over a warm cup of coffee. The kitchen, celebrated as a space of affection and protectiveness turns, like the alchemical kitchen of Remedios Varo and Leonora Carrington, into a magical space where time will flow differently, where time will stop, waiting: 'la cocina estaba separada del mundo por un muro invisible de tristeza, por un compás de espera' (11). In 'Era Mercurio', we find exactly the opposite scenario as we contemplate Javier's arrival at his work place in Mexico City, thinking about politics and his fiancée. In the elevator, he encounters a stunning woman, making him to be overwhelmed by her presence. Soon after, he gains access to his father-in-law's bureau. In contrast to the rapport of the first story, the office is described as a grey, dull and impersonal place where no 'real' communication occurs. The private space of the kitchen strongly contrasts with the cold public space of the workplace where Javier remains silent, absent from his relatives' conversation.

As I have been arguing in previous chapters, fortuitous encounters are a crucial concept within surrealism and its search for the marvellous, as well as being common events in Latin American novels associated with *lo real maravilloso americano*. These encounters relate to the discovery of certain objects (or persons) that are able to unlock aesthetic and psychological emotions in the subject leading her/him to an awakening into a dimension of greater knowledge and a different perception of reality. The subject then immediately associates the encounter with her/his own destiny (in terms of 'objective chance') through the linking of this event to other previous events in her/his life. According to Breton, a conscious desire that is primarily sexual rules the encounter. Equally, there is an association between the object (or subject) encountered and the beauty this is able to convey. This beauty, termed 'convulsive' by Breton, is the prime component of *amour fou*, and the beauty that 'animates' the marvellous (Breton, *Mad Love* 13-20).⁵ Both 'La culpa' and 'Era Mercurio' have as a cathartic incident a fortuitous encounter between the

⁵In Gershman's introduction to Breton, he comments that 'what is convulsive (or surrealist) is the intolerable tension between opposites which cannot logically coexist: the erotic (which implies something seen or sensed) and the hidden, the volatile and the unchangeable, the magic and the world of cause and effect' (360). According to Breton, this is the only type of beauty in which one is able to 'recognize the marvelous precipitate of desire. It alone can enlarge the universe' (*Mad Love* 15).

protagonist and a subject of the opposite sex to whom they feel attracted, the former by a complex feeling of commitment and tenderness and the latter by purely sexual desire. The two encounters are described through a vocabulary of light that shares an unexpected, 'magic-circumstantial' (Breton) and 'convulsive' character, although it is also in this description that one finds the first difference. While both encounters can be understood in surrealist terms, in only one of the encounters, the one taking place in 'Era Mercurio', female beauty plays the same key role as it did in surrealism. In Laura's encounter, although the external appearance of the man is commented upon, the emphasis placed upon his features and garments denote no interest whatsoever in his sexual appeal.

In 'Era Mercurio', Javier places an emphasis on the beauty, the whiteness, the coldness and the metallic aura that surrounds the woman. Essentially, this is a description that one would rather expect of a statue than of a human being: 'Miré su frente abombada, sus cabellos casi plateados, su nariz recta y sus ojos fijos en el tablero' (156). As in the formulaic surreal encounter, Javier strictly focuses on her physical appearance, associating her persona with a previous memory: 'La volví a mirar. ¿En dónde había visto antes su traje plateado, su cuello largo y su boca pensativa?' (156). His experience soon falls under the category of the irrational, as he thinks she is telepathically communicating to him where they met before (in a very suitable place for encountering a statue): 'En el Museo Metropolitano de Nueva York-me dijo ella sin mover la cabeza y sin mover los labios' (156). The irrational factor not only comes from his auditory delusion but from the fact that his recollection is impossible, as he has never been in New York (156). As an impossible memory, the beauty that describes it acquires an extraordinary, 'convulsive' character: 'Su abrigo de pieles estaba constelado de escamas metálicas formadas por la nieve y toda ella relucía como una alhaja cincelada en platino [...]. Su piel relucía como una camelia o más bien como un guante blanco ajustado a una mano y a un brazo' (156-7). The white glove is a common surrealist image. Breton wrote together with Souppault a short story entitled 'White Gloves' included within Breton's *The Magnetic Fields*, the image is present in one of Joan Miró's paintings of his surrealist stage, *El guante blanco* (1925), and white globes come as rain in Lorca's surrealist play *El público*. Therefore, while giving the woman a peculiar, distinctive appearance, the comparison of her skin with a white glove already associates the woman with a well-known and recurrent surrealist image.

Like the woman described in the poetry of Breton, Péret or Éluard, the poetic description of the woman does not only describe her, but supplants her, rendering her subjectivity and identity superfluous. That is, she ceases to be a person to become equal to the objects that describe and explain her, giving the impression that her presence casts the same spell on Javier that a metallic statue, a shining precious stone or an avalanche of snow would have on him. Namely, she takes on the nature of those elements rather than simply being portrayed by them. As Simone De Beauvoir commented regarding the depiction of woman in Breton's poetry, 'she is a disturbing factor, she tears man from the sleep of immanence, mouth, key, door, bridge, she is Beatriz leading Dante into the beyond' (261). For this very reason, her figure also epitomises the white pages on which Javier's desire is written. The story's use of first person narration intensifies the effect that she is Javier's artistic construction; his experience is purely aesthetic, recreating pleasure and evoking desire: "'Ya he visto ese camino", me dije sintiendo que una delicia fría me soplaban en la nuca' (157). Javier's experience represents a relationship between desire, the work of art symbolised by the woman and the effect it/she has upon Javier's (un)conscious. This is precisely the same relationship that, as seen in the chapter on Varo, fascinated the surrealists, and was expressed in Freud's reading of *Gradiva*. According to Chadwick, the relationship was established between 'the myth of love, the primacy of desire, the mechanisms of repression and the dynamism of the repressed' (*Masson's* 417). That is, in both cases we find a fascination for the mythological statement of the female condition, its relation with the inanimate work of art and the unlocking effects it can have upon the masculine mind.

In the course of a stream of consciousness comparable to Javier's, in 'La culpa' Laura tells Nacha about her arrival at Cuitzeo. She is standing in the middle of the bridge when she abruptly senses how 'la luz era muy blanca y el puente, las lajas y el automóvil empezaron a flotar en ella. Luego la luz se partió en miles de pedazos hasta convertirse en miles de puntitos y empezó a girar hasta que se quedó fija como un retrato. El tiempo había dado la vuelta completa' (12).⁶ In the midst of the light, Laura finds a man who, as in Javier's experience, seems at first an hallucination. Yet, unlike Javier's astonishment, Laura accepts the event as normal, she is not shocked or surprised: 'No me asombré. Levanté los ojos y lo vi venir' (13). Her acceptance of the marvellous event presupposes a main difference between two

⁶ According to Joan Marx, this bridge corresponds to one of the causeways that lead to the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán (51), acquiring immediate historical connotations.

types of encounters, one fitting into the surrealist type, the other, by perceiving the extraordinary as real, rather refers back to Carpentier's explanation of *lo real maravilloso*, as it fuses Laura's modern beliefs with the indigenous cosmogony. Furthermore, instead of associating the encounter with erotic desire and beauty as Javier did, Laura's thoughts are transported to a previous historical memory in which she recalls 'la magnitud de mi traición' (13). It is in the moment of association between the subject encountered and a past memory that the event starts unsettling her, instigating a feeling of fear that she links with fate: 'alguna vez te encontrarás frente a tus acciones convertidas en piedras irrevocables como ésa, me dijeron de niña' (13). Although this encounter is consonant with the surrealist experience that associates the found subject/object with one's previous life events and destiny, Laura's experience of revelation is equally related to Carpentier's revelatory moment in as far as Laura associates this epiphanic moment with the Aztec collective subconscious. According to this, it is believed that the light of the sun 'distribuye el tiempo con sus rayos, arroja el tiempo sobre el mundo [...] arroja los Tonalli (irradiaciones) o destinos sobre las criaturas' (López-Austin n.p.). Along with the Aztec code, Laura describes how 'la luz produce estas catástrofes cuando el sol se vuelve blanco y uno está en el mismo centro de sus rayos' (12) and shortly after how time closes around her: 'el tiempo se cerró alrededor de mi, se volvió único y perecedero' (13).

Laura interlaces the three temporal frames, understanding in the present how her past and destiny are written in irrevocable stones, which is also the Aztec way of gathering knowledge: 'la piedra se solidificaba al terminar cada palabra, para quedar escrita para siempre en el tiempo' (13). For those bounded by western rationality, the arational dwells in the impossibility of seeing her destiny with the clarity of a recent lived memory, as well as of becoming aware of another past life, of 'la otra niña que fui' (12). Hence, while the other characters attribute her comments to madness, it ceases to be irrational for Laura, who has become part of a mythical space. Laura is not surprised, she possesses that faith, that magical indigenous mentality that Carpentier referred to, and therefore she accepts and perceives as sound logic the indigenous approach to time cycles and resurrection, a vision that indeed appears marvellous for those bounded by western rationality. In contrast with the previous story, this encounter follows the logic of 'faith' which, as seen in Chapter One, can be considered as Carpentier's equivalent to Breton's 'objective chance', moving therefore into the realm of *lo real maravilloso* and coming

to represent a relationship between Mexican time, history and Aztec mythology as essential parts of each other. Laura's life, like her narration, is presented as a stream of consciousness in which time has become 'other' time and the space in which this is ascertained gets detached from western rational parameters and history to become mythic in a way that has been extensively associated with Mexican pre-Columbian culture: 'el tiempo deja de ser sucesión y vuelve a ser lo que fue, y es, originariamente: un presente en donde pasado y futuro al fin se reconcilian' (Paz, *Laberinto* 183).

According to Breton, at the sight of the 'luminous phenomenon' or surrealist images, the subject 'soon realizes that they flatter its reason, and increases its knowledge accordingly. The mind becomes aware of the limitless expanses wherein its desires are made manifest' (*Manifestoes* 37). Whilst experiencing the light, Laura's thoughts become aware of their limitlessness: 'los pensamientos también se vuelven mil puntitos, y uno sufre vértigo' (12). Simultaneously, her knowledge increases as she understands how 'todo lo increíble es verdadero' (13). However, Garro explains those surrealist beliefs through a culture which precedes it by many centuries, as Laura's acceptance of the extraordinary comes from her newly acquired knowledge of the Aztec cosmogony and faith in it. To a certain extent, Garro's text also shows why Aztec and other indigenous cultural forms of knowledge might have been appealing to the surrealists who saw many of their theories confirmed in primitive societies and their mode of cultural knowledge, an issue I will return to when commenting on Boullosa's *Duerme*. Most notoriously, it conforms to Carpentier's experience of revelation. Namely, Laura, possessing a privileged vision, has come to notice her surroundings as marvellous, and accepting it as normal, she perceives a continuity that links her past and her present, endowing her existence with a new significance.

In 'Era Mercurio', the blinding effect of the light on the snow and the shimmer that surrounds the woman also recalls the description of Breton's 'luminous phenomenon'. Javier's sight provokes the immediate effect of expanding the limits of his mind, as happened to Laura. He similarly describes a sudden transport to another dimension: 'Me acerqué por detrás para besar la vena azul de su nuca [...] antes de que mis labios alcanzaran su piel, ella se lanzó por el aire [...] para no verla, volví a mirar los números del tablero que ahora marcaban 1715. No me alarmé, en México se descompone todo' (157, my emphasis). While the enlargement of

reality is in Javier mainly triggered by the female body and the sexual desire that compels Javier to kiss her, Garro includes a convergence between the formulaic surreal encounter based on desire and Mexican culture. Even though Javier's experience is not related to the magical mentalities of indigenous cultures, he nonetheless attributes the extraordinary quality of the event in the elevator to the peculiar reality of Mexico City. Javier gradually accepts the irrational event, for he is acknowledging a magical disposition to Mexican reality, reflecting his acceptance of Mexican marvels as real or common. Through their similar experiences, both characters' realities are amplified, and this amplification brings a new understanding of both the external world and their inner consciousness.

The dimensions of this knowledge are however quite different, and I refer again to the debate regarding Benjamin and Sartre's critique of surrealism as providing images of aesthetic consolation that I contrasted in Chapter One with the 'revolutionary' images provided by Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*. Laura's experience has led her to a direct knowledge of the marvellous, yet historical reality she inhabits. That is, right after learning about the 'magnitud de mi traición' (13), she undergoes a marvellous vision of reality that makes her ally with a collective historical memory (the Spanish Conquest) as well as amplifying her spatio-temporal coordinates and knowledge (she enters, and thus begins to understand, Aztec mythical time). On the other hand, Javier has learnt about another reality where love and beauty acquire a new meaning, enlarging his way of perceiving aesthetically. The nature of both encounters is therefore similar in that it opens the subjects to an enlarged dimension of reality through which they are to acquire knowledge, in that they are not restricted to the logic of time and space and in that they present several points of intersection between surrealism and Mexican 'extraordinary' reality. Nonetheless, the outcomes and significance of both encounters differ significantly, which not only reflects key differences between surrealism and *lo real maravilloso americano*, but also Garro's strategic employment of both in order to reject a patriarchal, traditional view of love and the role woman is to play within it.

Javier's experience seems traditionally surreal, since it is the idea of female beauty, love, desire and its irrational appearance that compels his mind to shape the extraordinary. It is in this aspect that the story reveals striking similarities with both the myths of Gradiva and Mélusine. That is, it is not difficult to link the

consequences that the sight of Mercurio has on Javier with those provoked in Norbert by Gradiva, in Breton by Nadja, in Dalí and Éluard by Gala. These are very similar to the effects on Oliveira at the sight of La Maga or Talita in Cortázar's *Rayuela*, on Castel at the sight of María Iribarne in Ernesto Sábato's *El túnel*, on the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* at the sight of Rosario, or on all the male characters of *Cien Años de Soledad* at the sight of Remedios la Bella. Analogously, the role of the woman in 'Era Mercurio' varies between the work of art, the erotic object and the delusion, and her principal function is to personify a visual spectacle through which Javier feels transported to an oneiric world that appears more intuitive and authentic. In contrast, the dimension to which Laura travels is not the abstract world of beauty that has emerged for Javier, but rather a crucial moment of colonial history, the moment of the battle between the Spanish and the Aztecs in Tenochtitlán. The female character in 'Era Mercurio' represents nothing but the mystery of a beautiful, surreal object: the workings of her mind remain inscrutable for the reader, as we only hear her speak through Javier's consciousness. In 'La culpa', readers are within Laura's stream of consciousness and thus hers is the power of words, hers is the perspective and the thinking mind. Equally, hers are the desire and the means to escape from the contemporary alienation in which she feels trapped. There are no references to the man or woman's sensuousness that could incite erotic desire in any way. Instead, there is a feeling that these are two subjects that encounter each other, that will transfigure each other and that the relevance of their transformation lies in a bigger picture where history and memory are the protagonists.

Like Carpentier, Garro does not simply represent the abstract notion of the extraordinary, and chooses to incorporate a concrete moment of Mexican history as background music to elaborate the personal love story of her protagonist. Dealing with a key moment in Mexican history, the language of *lo real maravilloso americano* does not lose its realistic effect. Yet, unlike Carpentier, Garro's aesthetic approach towards reality is interlaced with a gendered pattern. Rather, it shares in the nature of love representations by Carmen Boullosa's *Llanto* or María Luisa Bombal's *La última niebla*. As will be seen in the next chapter in relationship to *Llanto*, in 'La culpa' the extraordinary character of the encounter lies in the timeless dissolution of opposites between the white and the Indian, the man and the woman, the past and the present into an 'utopian syncretism' (Nafinto 131), relating to the specificity of Mexican colonial history and Aztec mythology. Like the unnamed narrator of *La*

última niebla, Laura develops a fantasy life through love, incorporating a nostalgia that rests 'on the memory of a past in which the world was felt to be solid, protected' (Mora 94).

THE DOOR TO TRANSCENDENCE: REPHRASING LOVE

Joan Marx claims that each story of *La semana de colores* 'reflects the surrealist idea of love as the device to free everyone from the bonds of ordinary reality in order to search the ultimate reality' (168). This is not entirely true. The surrealist appeal to Garro's concept of love and imagery does not imply that she employs a surrealist idea of love, at least not as it was understood by its main theorists, Breton, Péret or Aragon. Although the impact of surrealism is patent, Garro, as Varo does in *Los amantes* and *La despedida*, rather establishes an ambivalent dialogue with Breton's *amour fou* and Péret's *amour sublime*. Only in one of these two stories will the subject attain the freedom and knowledge that surrealism attributed to the love which partakes of the arational marvellous, which is why the comparison of both texts becomes effective to illustrate the assessment Garro makes of surrealist love at the same time that, in response, she constructs her personal model. It is also significant that in constructing this, she rather chooses to employ the language of *lo real maravilloso* as a strategic response to surrealism.

The surrealists' conceptualisation of love commonly uses an 'aesthetic contrast of light and dark or a philosophical contrast of subjective belief and objective reality' (Caws, Péret 208) that is paralleled in Garro's images.⁷ In 'Era Mercurio', Javier recounts how 'del cielo caía una nieve pulverizada y blanquísima [...] que envolvía los muros y los troncos negros de los árboles en Central Park' (156). In 'La Culpa', the whiteness of the light establishes a disparity with the man's black sparkling eyes, hair and skin: 'Traía los ojos brillantes. Desde lejos me llegaron sus chispas negras y vi ondear sus cabellos negros en medio de la luz blanquísima del encuentro' (13). Both descriptions can be seen to use the surrealist aesthetic contrast in so far as they employ a philosophical disparity between what the characters subjectively perceive as real and the external, objective reality, but also through the employment of aesthetic imagery, the colours black and white, the contrast between light and darkness in the construction of the beloved's image. It seems clear that Garro's imagery is indebted to surrealism. However, through the citational aspect of her repetition, Garro, on the one hand, parodies (in 'Era Mercurio') the surrealist

⁷ I am referring to Breton's *Amour Fou*, Péret's *Amour Sublime* and Aragon's *Libertinage*.

feminine mythical archetype as the 'medium' towards the marvellous realm, and on the other, she rephrases (in 'La culpa') surrealist love through an aesthetic approach that connects with Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*.

Laura's narration, happening simultaneously in the present and in the past, blurring opposites between the conscious and the unconscious, contains the simultaneity of Mexican history that, like her narration, does not function chronologically but through the coexistence of various time frames. According to Paz, 'hubo un tiempo en el que el tiempo no era sucesión y tránsito, sino manar continuo de un presente fijo, en el que estaban contenidos todos los tiempos, el pasado y el futuro' (*Laberinto* 357). It also corresponds to Fuentes' *tiempo mexicano* (see Meyer 156):

La coexistencia de todos los niveles históricos en México es sólo el signo externo de una decisión subconsciente de esta tierra y de esta gente: todo tiempo ha de ser mantenido. ¿Por qué? Porque ningún tiempo mexicano se ha cumplido aún. Porque la historia de México es una serie de 'edenes subvertidos' a los que [...] quisiéramos a un tiempo regresar y olvidar (*Tiempo* 10).

However, Garro adds her personal touch to this temporal simultaneity as Laura tells Nacha how at that moment she learnt that 'el tiempo y el amor son uno solo' (14). Concurrently, if love and time are but one, the fusion of temporal frames and their respective cultural modes of knowledge contained within historical coexistence are expressed through love. Therefore, the image of the beloved appears together with the 'changing-time' image and so love becomes intertwined with a different culture, with the cyclical time of the Aztecs and with Laura's own internal time: 'el sol estaba plateado, el pensamiento se me hizo polvo brillante y no hubo presente, ni pasado, ni futuro. En la acera estaba mi primo' (2). Love and the transfiguration of reality it triggers, is expressed and constructed through Laura's psychological experience with Mexican time. That is, Garro conceptualises 'true love' through a process in which Laura's subjectivity unites the simultaneity of Mexican history, cyclical time and mythical space with the internal world of the emotions. Through the combination of a modern setting and ancient modes of understanding time and space, love is configured within a new social and cultural reality that, in its extraordinary dimension, refers back to Carpentier's concept but also to Fuentes and Paz's understanding of Mexican time as mythical. What happens to Laura can thus be described accurately through Paz's conceptualisation of time: 'el tiempo mítico [...] se halla impregnado de todas las particularidades de nuestra vida [...]

Tiempo y vida se funden y forman un solo bloque, imposible de escindir' (*Laberinto* 358). Nonetheless, unlike Paz or Carpentier, who also include their conceptualisation of love within mythical time (in *Piedra de sol* and *Los pasos perdidos* respectively), Garro gives primary importance to female agency. In Aztec mythology, there is a space in which reality was subject to exploration by those who held the symbolic key (Marx 56). Laura, echoing Varo's female questers in possession of visionary powers, becomes the holder of this key, entering mythical space and exploring dissimilar realities. That is, her visionary quality, shaped by her own subjectivity, triggers *her own* exchange from one temporal dimension to the other. She is the one who through *her desire* for liberation, escaped into the past through a crack in reality with other women who did not want to 'morir junto con la flecha' (27). Later on, she admits how 'me escapé otra vez' (22) because she felt fear. Like Varo's characters who cross from one space to another, Laura 'flees' from one reality to the other suiting her own needs rather than a male requirement.

Javier's situation is exactly the opposite; he alone cannot transform the world. Reality will only appear different if Mercurio comes along. When Javier sees her, he senses the existence of the world of pleasures: 'El mundo no era tan aparente como parecía, existía otro mundo imprevisto, que era el revés del mundo en el que yo vivía y en el cual sucedía el amor, la música, la belleza' (160). Mercurio signifies the input to access the imaginary space and therefore it is through a very different mythology to Laura's that she becomes the 'key holder': the mythology of her body, of her condition as object to be worshipped. Hence, because Javier so far has not been able to possess her sexually, he cannot enter the utopic sphere: 'me pareció que ese otro mundo era inalcanzable para mí, carecía de la clave *para penetrarlo*' (160, my emphasis). Mercurio incarnates Gradiva, Mélusine, the muse interceding between man and the world of reverie:

el mundo exterior continuaba su ritmo acostumbrado, salvo que las cosas de pronto, tomaban sesgos inesperados: una mañana el cielo del zócalo se abrió en un hermoso túnel por el que desfilaron figuras hermosas e imprevistas, que en unos segundos se convirtieron en columnas de azogue. Después al salir del Departamento Central, me crucé con la joven del elevador (160).

Such a world of aesthetic pleasures, filled with unexpected figures and attractive tunnels only exists as long as Mercurio exerts some influence over Javier's mind. Now, 'the important place held by love in surrealism is partly explained by *the hope centred in the female or irrational element* as the only liberating force from an over

mechanised masculine world' (Caws, *Péret* 207, my emphasis).⁸ Javier places his hope in the woman to 'escape', to find the liberating force from the world of self-annihilating rationality. However, as we shall shortly see, even though he can peep at the marvellous through a hole, the door will ultimately remain closed for him, he will not gain access to knowledge or to a full revelation in which he is to perceive life with different, enriched eyes. By comparing the way in which the two stories present the access to the dimension of greater knowledge and truth, one can see how Garro establishes a difference between liberation achieved through love, and liberation achieved through the female irrational presence and sexuality. Doing this, she is also establishing two contrasting visions of love. One would correspond to the surrealist, the other, partaking in the Aztec cosmogony and in the magic mentalities of the people who share it, would rather make reference to the literature of *lo real maravilloso*. However, Garro's notion of love and woman remains very far away from the way in which Carpentier used woman to encompass the literary representation of his cultural concept.

WHAT LOVE CAN TEACH

In 'La culpa', it appears plausible to make several comparisons between Garro's images and Benjamin Péret's *amour sublime*. There is in Garro, as in Péret, a fascination with geometry and geometrical images. For Péret poetry is a geometrical place, inseparable from love (Caws, *Péret* 207). Within his idea of love, 'the lovers exalt each other in an always symmetrical movement, "jusqu'à constituer un complexe à la fois religieux et magique"' (Caws, *Péret* 208). In an analogous geometrical fashion, Laura's Indian husband draws two symmetrical lines on the ground as a metaphor for the two of them, which comes to signify for Laura a magical complex encapsulating the end of time, corresponding to the Aztec mythical (or religious) belief on time cycles. The moment time stops, love will consolidate itself and the symmetrical lines will become one, *undifferentiated*: 'cuando ya no quede sino una capa transparente, llegará él y las dos rayas dibujadas se volverán una sola y yo habitaré la alcoba más preciosa de su pecho' (20). While this geometrical image of love recalls the geometrical love images of Péret, (as it recalls the symmetrical image of love Varo realises in *Los amantes*), Garro's construction of imagery makes primary reference to *lo real maravilloso americano* through the coupling of her symmetry to Aztec cosmic geometry via the image of

⁸ Similarly, when Breton invokes Mélusine he does it as the 'antidote to those masculine characteristics which have brought humanity to the brink of self-annihilation through the dominance of rationality and aggression over the more intuitive modes of knowledge and creation' (Orenstein 108).

totality in Aztec mythology. That is, the image of the silvery sun suggests an eclipse, synthesising the past and the present, the man and the woman, representing perhaps that time of the year when the sun casts its light simultaneously upon the two pyramids in Tenochtitlán and thus making of the lovers a representation of the *axis mundi*.⁹ Garro also evokes Aztec geometry by conceptualising their love in the circle. Through an analogous conception of time and love to the one found in Octavio Paz's *Piedra de Sol*, the text reveals that full integration can only happen the moment time stops and the cycle starts all over: 'cuando se gaste el tiempo, los dos hemos de quedarnos el uno en el otro, para entrar en el tiempo verdadero convertidos en uno sólo' (15).

Even though the text locates the concept of 'truth' and unity of the self in the beloved one in an echo of Paz's *Piedra del sol*, it is not the sexual act or the beloved's body which activates this truth and fusion of opposites, but this is rather described as a union which transcends the body: 'Me acordé de que cuando un hombre y una mujer se aman y no tienen hijos están condenados a convertirse en uno solo' (20, my emphasis). As was seen in Varo's chapter, in surrealism, the union of opposites 'finds its supreme incarnation in the physical act of love, for this act is the concretization of desire and the realization of the unification of opposites in the real world' (Orenstein 103). The same can be said of Paz's *Piedra de sol*, in which 'en un "instante inmenso" de plenitud y libertad podemos, en el amor, ver no sólo nuestra "unidad perdida", es decir, la genuina condición humana' (Gimferrer 38). Laura and her husband's integration is not consummated through the sexual act, neither does Garro place an emphasis on love as bringer of the 'mystery of life', for they do not have any children. Rather, love is viewed as that which can free humans from the burdens of their time and history while endowing them with a privileged knowledge and vision of them. The new cycle of time starts once again when Laura visualises the colours in the sky, discovering that 'se había acabado el tiempo' (27). This is 'La culpa's' *point sublime* (Péret), where the beautiful emerges from the lost colours of the sky, the movement of earth and the opacity of the sun. Namely, the description of love is inspired by Aztec cosmogony and Mexican history, not by

⁹ 'La geometría cósmica los obliga a construir en el punto central una pirámide para el dios patrono. [...] El axis mundi es una figura compleja. Uno de sus componentes es el Monte Sagrado, promontorio hueco que tiene en su interior un gran depósito con las aguas, los vientos y las riquezas potenciales del mundo. Sobre el Monte Sagrado se levanta el Árbol Florido, compuesto por dos ramales, en ocasiones representados en forma de un torzal. Los dos ramales son los caminos de los flujos de los elementos opuestos y complementarios del cosmos: el agua y el fuego. El axis mundi se proyecta hacia los cuatro extremos de la tierra, reproduciendo sus figuras como pilares que separan el Mundo de los Muertos de las capas celestes' (López-Austin n.p.)

erotic desire. At that moment, Laura waits in the kitchen until Nacha sees the man arrive. Shortly after, they are both lost in the timeless, symmetric space of love.

Javier's image of integration is produced through a very different path to Laura's, mimicking the way in which surrealism represented the achievement of totality through the sexual union that invokes the figure of the androgyne. Mercurio shows Javier the way to her house. There her celestial body lights up the room:

se quedó desnuda iluminando la habitación como una estrella radiante y mirando con sus ojos de estatua [...]. Con la punta de los dedos acaricié el contorno de su cuerpo misterioso [...]. "Tú no crees en la belleza" quizás imaginé que me decía, mientras su cuerpo alargado y desnudo parecía convertirse en un río luminoso (163).

Her body emerges as Javier feels reality widening through sexual pleasure. In the sexual scene, she perfectly matches the function of the surrealist erotic mediator between man and the marvellous: 'el cuerpo tendido sobre mí [...] no era de este mundo. Estar con ella fue como entrar en la veta luminosa de una mina secreta, en donde los tesoros ocultos reaparecen en formas cada vez más preciosas' (163). Again, she is that which broadens reality and opens up a voluptuous world, where the experience takes over all Javier's senses. There words cease to convey meaning, no words or sounds can express the intensity of the *point sublime* (Péret). The convulsiveness of beauty reigns in their integration, seeing love through a surrealist tenet, that is, 'as a creative act in which a couple is united in an experience of totality and oneness symbolised in the androgyne' (Orenstein 102). However, Garro's use of a charged, almost purple prose, suggests the citational aspect of her repetition, and all repetitions convey to some degree or other a hint of parody. Before commenting on Garro's parody in the concluding section of this analysis, it is first important to detail how she elaborates her own conception of love.

Therefore, going back to 'La culpa' it can be appreciated that Garro's geometric love also connects with evenness between the sexes and the gender roles these are to play. Laura has learnt not to fear men, not to behave among them in a submissive way. Within the couple dynamics, she has shifted from a fearful person who had to look up to men, to an assertive subject who is able to look her lover in the eye and take the initiative: 'Antes nunca me hubiera atrevido a besarlo, pero ahora he aprendido a no tenerle respeto al hombre, y me abracé a su cuello y lo besé en la boca' (15). After the encounter, Laura not only has learnt about her historical reality, but now she is also able to differentiate between two types of love, one in each of

her 'husbands', and by extension, one in each culture and historical time. Starting from a comparative basis rooted in their common physical features, she reports to Nacha how her modern husband has become a pathetic figure who 'no hablaba con palabras sino con letras' (17) and thus someone whose words and behaviour has ceased to convey meaning. The modern man is represented as aggressive, jealous and superficial, a man who only thinks about the present without realising that the present is a consequence of the past, a husband who 'no tiene memoria y no sabe más que las cosas de cada día '(17). Throughout the course of the narration, and triggered by the experience of the encounter which has worked as a revelation both with respect to the historical and the personal, Laura grows confident of her place in history and existence, showing a new sensibility and leading her to look for horizons beyond her customary understanding. On the level of the personal, she is no longer prepared to stand Pablo's oppressive, ridiculous and violent personality: 'sus gestos son feroces y su conducta tan incoherente como sus palabras. Yo no tengo la culpa de que aceptara su derrota -dijo Laura con desdén' (19).

The macho figure is dehumanised, but what is worse, he is presented as a carbon copy of Mexico's contemporary man: 'inmediatamente volvía a ser absurdo, sin memoria, y sólo repetía los gestos de todos los hombres de la ciudad de México' (19). A new vision of love leads Laura to understand the pathetic role of machismo, gaining a new insight into Mexico's modern sexual and marital relations and establishing a position from which to demonise them. On the level of the historical, she has acquired a need to comprehend colonial history from a modern perspective, as suggested by her fervent reading of Bernal Díaz del Castillo: 'apenas volvía a su casa, la señora Laurita se encerraba en su cuarto para leer la conquista de México de Bernal Díaz' (25). After *lo real maravilloso 'mexicano'* was revealed to her, Laura realises that 'la historia de México contiene la respuesta a todas las preguntas. La situación del pueblo durante el periodo colonial sería así la raíz de nuestra actitud cerrada e inestable' (Paz, *Laberinto* 208). Like a historian or archaeologist, Laura tries to make sense of the present by reading the past, realising that one's personal attitude is itself part of history.

In a similar fashion to Laura's assessment of the two 'husbands', Javier makes a comparison between the two types of love he has known thus far. At one extreme stands the commonplace love of his soon-to-be wife, at the other, the love of the baffling mercury woman. In fact, before meeting the latter, 'nunca había pensado en

que el amor fuera otra cosa que lo que Ema me ofrecía' (160). If Laura refused to go back to the life that her modern husband offered, Javier's scenario is the perfect opposite. After experiencing a love capable of transfiguring his reality and existence, Javier fulfils the social commitment he had with his fiancée and returns to the ordinary. The love Ema offers matches the negativity represented by Laura's husband. Her physical description and name, like Mercurio's, becomes a metaphor for her personality: 'sólo sentí sobre el casimir de mi traje el peso compacto de su cuerpo cuando me besa' (156), or '¡Ema es un nombre pesado!' (159). Her heaviness contrasts with the lightness and ethereal nature of Mercurio, as the words used to describe her are related with heavy layers of earth, which also stand as a symbol for 'earthly' and ordinary love in opposition with the heavenly love of Mercurio: 'Ema me cubre como una espesa capa de tierra, inamovible a cualquier milagro. Sé que no voy a recuperarla, es el castigo por haber renunciado a la belleza [...]. Nunca más hallaré la preciosa veta' (164). Javier protects himself against miracles and the possibility beauty had of showing him an unexpected world. He returns to the commonplace. Interestingly, while each woman encompasses one reality, heavenly and earthly, no reality seems to encompass the narrator. In a circular movement, the end goes back to one of his thoughts in the beginning: 'es curioso, no sabemos si nosotros somos los que decidimos o si alguien decidió por nosotros' (155). That is, it was the love embodied in each woman what triggered all his decisions and actions, making of him little more than a puppet dancing from the charms of the beautiful to the burdens of the ordinary.

MERCURIO: PARODYING THE EROTIC MUSE.

Javier's last words 'era Mercurio' (164) bring together the multiple identity of the woman as well as establish the dual significance of the story. To begin with, there are several elements that associate Mercurio with the (al)chemical element of the same name: her metallic and silvery-white looks, the columns of 'azogue' that Javier sees in the sky, the coldness of her figure and the liquid feeling of her skin. Now, Mercury is one of the three basic elements used in alchemy. According to Schwarz, 'for the alchemist, the *Rebis*, the Philosopher's Stone, is also a metaphor for what Breton has termed *l'amour fou*-mad love, total love [...] the fruit of the 'chymical nuptials' between mercury (the female, lunar principle) and sulphur (the male, solar principle)' (58). Throughout the chapter on Varo, it has been seen how surrealism referred to the alchemical search as a symbol for the quest of the 'golden understanding', the 'elixir of life' and the marvellous itself. If one thinks in surrealist terms about the alchemical lunar or female principle, the images of Gradiva and

Mélusine predictably come to mind. Just as Varo contested the role of woman within surrealist alchemical mythology in paintings like *Creación de las aves*, *El encuentro* or *La tejedora de Verona* by placing the woman in the role of creator and of the alchemist in search of the 'centre', so Garro realises a similar subversion of surrealist mythology. To realise her transgressive commentary, Garro juxtaposes the two surrealist mythical women par excellence, Gradiva and Mélusine, with that of the roman god Mercury.¹⁰

Classic artistic representations of Mercury depict him wearing winged sandals and helmet, a small bag and a caduceus (Cruz 25).¹¹ Mercury was the 'snake-god' (Frothingam 192), messenger of the gods, swift and clever.¹² In Garro's story, these characteristics are recalled in Mercurio's coat 'constelado de escamas metálicas' (156), as well as in her way of walking with 'la rapidez de una serpiente' (162). The winged sandals and helmet of Mercury are insinuated in her dress, which had 'dos volantes casi geométricos que más bien parecían alas pequeñas y erguidas, [...] alas que parecían nacer de sus hombros' (163). Mercury's relation with music, especially the mesmerising sound that came out of his lyre, is well documented (Johnston 112). In a corresponding fashion, every time Mercurio is present, the atmosphere trembles with a 'música que hacía girar las hojas de los árboles invisibles' (158). Now, there are very differing opinions and versions regarding the nature of the mythical Mercury and the role he played. There is consensus among critics regarding his caduceus, which, adorned with an intertwined male and female serpents, symbolises both the fusion of opposites as well as the fertility over which Hermes/Mercury presided (Tyson 54, Frothingam 176, Johnston 114). Mercury's image signifies a phallic character for some (Frothingam 177) as well as a model for masculine behaviour for others (Johnston 115-6). Further opinions report how he was 'sometimes thought of as male, sometimes female, offspring and lover of one or both of the principal deities, Jupiter and Venus' (Frothingam 207, Cruz 37). Thus far, the myth of Mercury to whom the woman is associated is characterised by its gender undefined or androgynous character, as well as by his quality of making opposites converge.

¹⁰The sculpture of Gradiva portrayed her with 'one foot rested squarely on the ground; the other, lifted from the ground in the act of following after, touched it only with the tips of the toes, while the sole and heel rose almost perpendicularly' (Freud 36). In certain aspects, particularly in the lifted foot and its fragility, the image itself recalls many representations of the god Mercury, particularly the famous sculpture by Giambologna.

¹¹ Mercury found two snakes in the act of fighting, which he separated with his caduceus. The snakes, in gratitude, remained with him eternally. The caduceus thus stands as a symbol for the fusion of opposites, represented in the symmetric, yet contrary snakes (see Cruz 25-6).

¹² Note also how 'alchemically, the snake or Ourobouros is 'the one in the all' or the goal of alchemical transformation' (see Orenstein 42).

Both the androgynous representation and the synthesising property of the god Mercury are shared by the hermetic tradition. Speaking about Varo's paintings, Haynes mentioned how sometimes the alchemical goal, the philosopher's stone, was visualised in the image of the androgyne (30), she then goes on to explain how Varo's figures are not hermaphrodites but gender ambiguous, mentioning how 'in alchemy, the god Mercury is depicted as a double-headed figure with the word Rebis, meaning 'double thing' (30). Garro's characterisation of Mercurio, rather than suggesting hermaphroditism, presents an analogous gender ambiguity. Not only is Mercurio a metaphor for the Roman god, but she also presents striking similarities with Mélusine. As a mermaid, Mélusine's songs are as mesmerising as the music Javier hears, and she is also 'part serpent, related to earthly life, but also had wings, which permitted her to transcend ordinary reality, so that she constituted a link between two worlds' (Orenstein 102). These characteristics, as we have seen, also define the character in Garro's story: her wings, the music which accompanies her and her connection between two worlds. Garro's story strategically presents 'Mercurio' associated with the alchemical female principle, with the male or double gendered Roman God as well as with the (al)chemical element Mercury. With these eclectic yet deliberately chosen associations, Garro parodies the formulaic erotic female and mediator for love and beauty with an image coupled with phallic character, masculine behaviour, femininity and androgyny. Garro's story not only recalls the reappropriation of symbols and mythology realised by Varo's paintings, but as I will elucidate in the next chapter, her tactic is also comparable to Boullosa's re-writing of the figures of Aphrodite and Iphis' figures in *Duerme*.

'In surrealism, woman is to be loved and honoured as the great promise [...] the sign she bears as the Chosen One, which is there for a *single individual* to read (each of us must discover it for himself) suffices to make short work of the charge that there is a soul-body dualism' (Breton, *Manifestoes* 301, emphasis his). Now, in Garro's story, one can find a clear cut parody of the above statement. First, the mythic female ceases to exist as female in Mercurio, for she emerges between the male and female categories, not as the 'hermaphrodite whole' which serves as surrealist metaphor for the philosopher's stone or the marvellous, but as a sexually undefined, ambiguous figure. Second, Mercurio's love is not monogamous, a component that Breton included in *amour fou* by defining it as 'unique love', but quite the contrary, she arrives just before Javier's wedding and therefore she is also

the promoter of promiscuity in their relationship.¹³ Neither does their love suggest a 'soul and body dualism' (Breton, *Manifestoes* 301), but pure bodily pleasure: 'Los placeres más inesperados me rodeaban. El cuerpo se escurría entre mis manos cada vez más brillante' (163). Third, at the end of the story Javier renounces beauty, resigning himself to what he has been allotted, that is, to ordinary love. His experience has therefore provoked no crossing, no personal transformation or moment of communion with the world. Is Garro suggesting that *he* lacks the imaginative capacity to enlarge his surroundings without the presence of a glimmering woman? A mocking of those who have to adore the female body in order to 'experience' life fully?

To conclude, the contrasting views on love presented by 'Era Mercurio' and 'La culpa' can be summarised by an image present in both stories: the *axis mundi*. Mercurio symbolises the reconciliation of opposites. Not only through her alchemical couplings, but also in its reference to the God Mercury, whose caduceus embodies the *axis mundi* itself, the border between two worlds, the forces of opposition and equilibrium (Cruz 30). That is, Mercurio alone signifies what in 'La culpa' was manifested through the union of the two lovers, concretely through the image in which they were symbolised as a moon eclipse, as the *axis mundi* within Aztec cosmology. Matching the surreal definition of woman, Mercurio 'becomes the magical reveller of the surreal, linking the spiritual and the material world by uniting opposites through her mythic symbolism' (Orenstein 102). While in 'La culpa' love portrays the coalition of both beings to achieve the enlargement of reality and apprehend totality, in 'Era Mercurio' such a quality is an exclusive attribute of the woman, yet presented as incomplete. This incompleteness is confirmed by the fact that, when the woman's body has been the unique means to transcend reality, there was no ultimate exceeding: Javier remains in the everyday world and nothing liberates him from his burden. In 'La culpa', Garro displays a more suitable mythology to express her notion of love. To express it, she relinquishes surrealist imagery and instead chooses to represent the convergence of contrasting cultural modes of knowledge and temporal dimensions within Mexican society. That is, she employs that discourse, which, in its reference to real socio-historical events that have taken place in Mexico, corresponds rather to Carpentier's approach towards *lo real maravilloso americano*.

¹³ Quoting Engels, Breton states how monogamy should be acclaimed as the superior form of sexual relationship (*Mad Love* 77).

However, once more and unlike Carpentier, Garro incorporates a gender approach into her expression of the 'extraordinary' character of Mexico's history. Right at the beginning, after mentioning the tlaxcaltecas, Laura identifies with them: 'Yo soy como ellos: traidora...' (12). Then she asks Nacha, for only if she shares the same treacherous condition will she understand her; and Nacha does. The obvious figure recalled here and noticed practically by all readers of this tale (see Meyer, Glantz, Marx, Gutiérrez, Mora and Messinger's articles on this story) is that of La Malinche. The erotic muse is changed in this story for a real historical figure who, recalling the techniques employed by Carpentier in *El reino de este mundo*, allows readers to attain a direct contact with the reality presented. At the same time, this figure is made universal by her mythological associations with the 'Mexican Eve'. However, Garro reverses the negative connotations of this myth, demythologises her figure and shows a concern for the way in which the mythical woman still has a pervasive presence in the Mexican present. On the one hand, the text does not blame 'her' for colonial treason, but as the very title indicates, it broadens the culpability to include the tlaxcaltecas. On the other, La Malinche becomes a figure of identification between Nacha and Laura, and therefore an empowering figure that establishes complicity between the two women. Both thus adopt willingly the role of 'La Malinche's daughters' (Glantz), transcending the negativity to which they were condemned historically and biologically. As Margo Glantz comments,

En la intimidad de la cocina se confiesa la culpa, se verbaliza la traición [...]. Laura ha obrado como la Malinche [...] pero una Malinche 'que ha comprendido la magnitud de su traición' el tamaño de su culpa [...] una Malinche rubia que como la indígena traiciona a los suyos pero reforzando el revés de la misma trama porque al traicionar no aumenta las filas de los conquistadores sino la de los conquistados, la de los vencidos ('Elena Garro' 293).

Garro posits a crucial cultural question for Mexican society through the metaphor of Laura's love experience, subjectivity and feelings. Namely, the debate regarding how a multi-racial nation attempts to be coherent with that of a multi-racial population. This difficulty has been neatly expressed by Paz: 'el mexicano no quiere ni ser indio ni español. Tampoco quiere descender de ellos, los niega' (*Laberinto* 207). One of the reasons for these, according to Glantz is because 'ser hijos de la Malinche supone una exclusión muy grave, no seguir el cauce de la historia, guardar una situación periférica' (*Malinche* 282). However, Laura has now understood and accepted the 'magnitude of her treason', partly removing the negative connotations from Malinche's myth. Yet, if she has arrived at this

recognition, this is due to the new dimension, in terms of both personal transformation and historical awareness, love has opened for her. In the eternity of love, her treachery becomes permanent (25) and double: the unfaithfulness to her husbands and the disloyalty to the Aztec people from whom she fled in the past. Nevertheless, the evils that befall her husbands and therefore Mexican society (the man from the past and the modern man) are soon disconnected from 'the traitor', suggesting that it takes intelligence and sensibility on the other's side to understand what is behind treason: 'ya sé que eres traidora y que tienes buena voluntad. Lo bueno crece junto con lo malo [...] traidora te conocí y así te quise' (26). On the contrary, her modern husband has 'aceptado su derrota' (29), suggesting that the ones to blame are those who have accepted defeat, both in love and in history.¹⁴

Laura and her Aztec husband represent a communicative love, which stresses the communicative role of Malinche herself and which suggests that perhaps, the dialogue she started was out of love for Cortés. At the same time, the meaning of their love transcends its metaphysical and abstract meaning, there is in Garro no emphasis on a histrionic notion of the mystery such as one would likely find in a surrealist text, but love serves here as a metaphor for the discourse of Mexican identity posed by the betrayal of Malinche. As her indigenous husband understands her actions through the love he feels for her, the text raises the issue of how the effort of understanding Malinche's myth is a point of departure from which to understand the modern Mexican condition. Therefore, love transcends the lovers and acquires a historical and cultural reason for existence, it becomes, like Malinche, the bridge between two cultures; where one of the functions of myth is to validate another culture's principles. Their love, intertwined with the myths of colonial history, can potentially serve as a rupture with established discourses and present a possibility of change for the future, allowing the generality of Mexican history and mythology to be contained within the particularities of their love story. It is thus in this love and not in the cult to Mercurio's celestial body, that we ironically find the purpose of surrealist love. That is, a love which 'breaks the collective links created by *race*, raises above *national differences* and *social hierarchies* and so doing contributes in large measure to the *progress of culture*' (Breton, *Mad Love* 77, my emphasis).

¹⁴ In this respect Duncan has commented how 'In her former existence, Laura was a native American, but she could not stoically accept defeat and destruction at the hands of the whites as her first husband did. She fled into another time, another existence, wherein she herself has become a white woman rather than a member of the defeated race' (*A Reevaluation of Mexico's Past* 117).

SECTION TWO: *LA CASA JUNTO AL RÍO*, TOWARDS THE GOLDEN CENTRE.

Pensé en un laberinto de laberintos, en un sinuoso laberinto creciente que abarcara el pasado y el porvenir y que implicara de algún modo los astros. (Borges, 'El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan', *Ficciones* 107).

La casa junto al río is part of Garro's production published in the 1990s and written in exile. Perhaps the novel does not possess the force of the short stories just discussed, nor that of many other of Garro's narratives, as its characters have been constructed following a much more schematic pattern. However, it enacts a central theme in Latin American literature as well as presents significant associations with surrealism, turning into a suitable example to observe the response and dialogue of both discourses in Garro's work. The novel constitutes the story of a quest, and the general metaphor of the labyrinthine structure has already been mentioned in my chapter on Varo.¹⁵ In *La casa junto al río*, the protagonist's labyrinth takes the shape of a prison, symbolised by the town in which she arrives, and seemingly corresponding to the Ulyssean variant. Like those of Varo's paintings that illustrate a metaphysical or mystical quest, the protagonist of Garro's novel starts a search towards self-knowledge, meaning and identity, although her idea of the 'centre' is envisioned through a different imagery and symbolism. That is, Consuelo's quest has been designed along the lines of tragedy. Yet like Varo's, this quest is designed through a mythical pattern in which reaching the centre is analogous to the attainment of a marvellous realm in which one arrives at the understanding of oneself, the meaning of life and death, one's position in the world and in relation to humanity.

Anita K. Stoll, examining mythical patterns in *La casa junto al río*, argues that the novel shows Elena Garro's 'kinship with other contemporary Mexican writers who have also used mythical patterns in sharing their own perceptions of human experience with the world' (Stoll, *Mythic* 159-60). However, she fails to mention what these writers and their novels are. In fact, the novel does not only present affinities with Garro's Mexican contemporaries, but rather, and as I have discussed in Chapter One, a general mythical structure and a tendency to mythologise reality so as to convey a sense of universality to Latin American culture is found in Latin American contemporary narratives since the mid 1920s. Prominent examples are Carpentier's

¹⁵ Martin's quote is worth repeating in here: 'a labyrinth may be natural or man-made, above or below ground -the Ulyssean or Thesean variants- designed as a puzzle, entertainment, trap or prison. It may be real or imaginary, metaphor, symbol or myth. It might be essentially symmetrical, or spiral, or have no discernible structure' (25).

Los pasos perdidos, Cortázar's *Rayuela*, Rulfo's *Pédro Páramo*, Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and Asturias' *Hombres de maíz* and *Mulata de Tal*.¹⁶ These writers, together with Borges or Andrade, constitute the Latin American 'Ulyssean' narrators par excellence and can be seen as effective intermediaries between America and Europe (see Martin 166). On the other side of the ocean and particularly within the 'city of light', Paris, with which these authors (except Borges) experienced their major confrontation, another variant of the mythical quest was taking place. This corresponds to the surrealist envisioning of the quest for the 'philosopher's stone', the 'golden understanding' or the marvellous, expressed in texts I have already commented upon such as Mabille's *Mirror of the Marvelous*, Breton's *Nadja*, Aragon's *Paris Peasant* or René Daumal's *Ascension to Mount Analogue*. Although this is obviously not a theme exclusive to these two literary approaches, both Latin American literature labelled by critics as pertaining to the 'Boom' -particularly those which enact Carpentier's concept- and surrealist prose, coincide in their mythical representation of the quest.¹⁷ As is supported by Martin's comments regarding the post 1960s Latin American writer's use of myth, 'the myth, Romantic in origin, Surrealist in focus, rebellious in orientation, is in essence about the relation of the New World to the Old. It tells of discovery and conquest, endlessly reproduced and repeated, and of desperate struggles, usually fruitless, to resist, rebel and liberate, to overcome solitude and attain some kind of collective unity and identity' (9).

Garro's novel, while maintaining the debate around American (Mexican) identity as central to the protagonist's quest, moves stylistically and aesthetically into a mode that also brings the text into relationship with surrealism. Therefore, the novel will be analysed against this common background between the surrealists and the aforementioned Latin American writers, to see how it represents, as all these narratives did, an individual (hi)story within universal myth. However, unlike the aforementioned surrealist and Latin American texts, and very much like the pictorial work of Varo, Garro's depiction of the mythical quest employs several tactics to recover the female subject's right to participate to the entry to knowledge from an agent/subject position and allow a place for woman's experience within this often all-encompassing masculine literary world.

¹⁶ Many of these quests can be seen to metaphorically enact a labyrinth. The jungle in Carpentier, Paris in Cortázar, Comala in Rulfo. Another prominent novel evoking this image is García Márquez's *El general en su laberinto*, not to mention Borges' numerous labyrinth metaphors and Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad*.

¹⁷ As Borges has pointed out, 'también se le ocurrió que los hombres, a lo largo del tiempo, han repetido siempre dos historias: la de un bajel perdido que busca por los mares mediterráneos una isla querida, y la de un dios que se hace crucificar en el Gólgota' ('El evangelio según Marcos', *Informe* 122). Borges' quote signals the two master narratives that have impregnated western imagination, the *Odyssey* and the Bible.

My analysis will be divided into three sections. The first constitutes an exploration of the text's surrealist aesthetics through the surrealist mode envisioned by Paul Ilie as characteristic of Spanish fiction. Even though Garro does not abandon what Bungard has called 'la fuerza irracional y trágica del destino que en un contexto mágico mítico paraliza al sujeto' (144), she disposes of the magical-mythical pattern emerging from indigenous modes of knowledge and Mexican history employed in *La semana de colores* to enter a sphere of the absurd and the grotesque that presents overtones with the world of irrational surrealist juxtapositions. In the second part, I look into the text's representation of an experience of clairvoyance, which simultaneously serves as a catalyst for the narrative's development. This experience can be understood as an epiphanic moment that, in essence, works analogously to the revelatory moments described by both Carpentier and Breton. It also presents obvious parallelisms with the ideas put forward by Varo in paintings such as *Nacer de nuevo* (1960) *La llamada* (1961) or *Luz emergente* (1962). That is, it constitutes an experience of awakening through which reality is widened, letting Consuelo attain a glimpse of a truer and more 'authentic' existence. In the third section, I will touch upon how Garro strategically places an emphasis on the need for female agency and autonomy as essential qualities if one is to understand the meaning of life, destiny and death. Hence, this analysis is relevant in as far as it shows how Garro's use of symbols and metaphors responds to the structure of the mythical quest as expressed by Latin American writers of the so called 'Boom' as well as presupposes a form of dialoguing with European surrealism which, permeated by patriarchy, did not take into account (real) women's psychic, social and emotional experiences.

THE SURREALIST MODE

At the loss of her parents, Consuelo leaves Mexico and begins a return trip to the town where she was born in Spain. The reader does not know anything else about her, although the objective of her trip seems clear: gathering information about her past will make her understand why her present is contained within the notion of defeat: 'era un detective del pasado que buscaba sombras que le dieran la clave de su derrota' (9). When she arrives at her destination, this quest is materialised into something more tangible: to look for the causes of the death of her family. The rest of the plot constitutes her surpassing of the obstacles posed by the town's inhabitants

and culminating with the protagonist's arrival at her destination, her 'Ithaca', the house by the river.

The opening pages describe an unspecified town in northern Spain with 'ríos plomizos como espejos líquidos' (8), houses with 'ventanales de vidrios empañados' (10), 'árboles amables envueltos en la niebla, un puente romano tendido sobre un río invisible y una casa desdibujada por las ramas y la bruma' (13).¹⁸ In a corresponding fashion to the setting, Consuelo's past is arranged by a 'sucesión de casas extrañas, rostros desconocidos y palabras no pronunciadas' (9); her memory is anchored to the imprecision of blurred photographs. It is noticeable how in these introductory pages, both the scenery and her memories are described in conjunction, as reflections of a reality that is cloudy, invisible, unknown or non-said. Both are potentially untrue and misty, obscured by the drizzle, the fog and the shadows. This is a descriptive style and a situational opening that seems located half way between the fantastic and the gothic (Stoll, *Gótico* 1011). On the one hand, there are features pertaining to the gothic such as 'a heroine ruined by her own innocence [Consuelo], the secret-fortress that functions as a counter city [the Jail], the out-law hero that swears revenge on the world that has cursed him [Consuelo]' (Foucault 1632). The secret-fortress is embodied in the town's jail, which genuinely functions as a labyrinth, symbolic of the town itself: 'ante ellos se abrió una enorme boca negra cruzada de pasillos colgantes estrechos [...] y abajo de los puentecillos, un mundo negro y profundo mostraba puertas de hierro cerradas herméticamente' (20). In terms of characterisation, Consuelo operates as both the hero and the heroine of the gothic, blurring the stereotypical gender-based characterisation of this genre. That is, she is both the seemingly ruined and innocent victim, just as she embodies the outlaw hero who swears for revenge: "'Tú y tu hermano ahorcaron a mi tío" se dijo Consuelo, y prometió vengarse' (97). The steady feeling of the uncanny and the impression on the part of both the reader and Consuelo that something terrible might suddenly happen, intertwines the gothic with the feeling of uncertainty felt by the reader that, according to Todorov, was characteristic of the fantastic (*The Fantastic* 25).

¹⁸ While the narration never says which region or town is it, there are sufficient clues to locate geographically the town Garro is describing. The region is Asturias and the town Cangas de Onís, close to the Picos de Europa. The clues to locate this place geographically are given by the continuous references to autochthonous products (cider, apples, anís, fabas) by the proximity of the towns of Oviedo, Covadonga, Gijón and Ribadesella and by the speech of the characters, who occasionally express themselves in the Asturian dialect. That the town is Cangas de Onís is clear by its proximity to Covadonga and by the fact that it is the only Asturian town with a roman bridge like the one described in the novel.

An illusory principle floats in the atmosphere as well as in Consuelo's mind, tying up with the notion of pathetic fallacy characteristic of the romantic tradition. This simultaneously implies a fusion between the subjective and objective planes of reality that complement each other: the landscape and her memories, the external and the internal. Now, how is this fusion achieved? Because the reader attains contact with the presented reality from a wholly subjective point of view (Consuelo's) it would seem as if her subconscious was emerging into the description of the landscape and therefore that hers is the narrative voice. However, from the very first line it is apparent that an unknown, external, third person narrator is telling the story. This narrative method is central to the reader's perception of the aforementioned fusion of objective and subjective reality as well as for the subjective effect. That is, the fact that an 'external' voice narrates events filtered through Consuelo's eyes, feelings and impressions, indicates the use of an equiscent narrator (Todorov). That is, a narrator who possesses (fixed) internal focalisation (Genette 194).¹⁹ This mainly indicates that both character and narrator share the same knowledge, the same space, that both are cognitive subjects, that is, subjects *who know* the story's development (Genette 195).

It is partly due to such narrative technique that the reader shares a similar impression of unreality and uncertainty to Consuelo, perceiving the narration as emerging from her subjective point of view. Through overcoming the dialectic between the external and the internal as well as through the merging of the protagonist's unconscious with the course of the narration, this narrative voice, besides reminding readers of the fantastic, also refers back to the surrealist mode. In his study about surrealism in Spanish literature, Paul Ilie comments how 'there are several ways for determining whether a work is surrealist. Probably the most infallible is the subjective effect it has upon the observer, the feeling that he is in the presence of a strange, disturbing world' (5). The disturbing effect of Consuelo's narration partly relies on this effect of estrangement in which there lies the suggestion of the extraordinary. In Chapter One I have shown how, even though Breton mentioned that 'only the marvelous is beautiful' (*Manifestoes* 14), he, like Carpentier, 'cuando hablaba de lo maravilloso no consideraba que lo maravilloso fuese admirable por lo bello sino por lo insólito' (Carpentier, *Ensayos* 146). Garro

¹⁹ Focalisation makes reference to the one who 'sees' or perceives. That is, to the narrative mode a particular narrator adopts so that we are able to perceive the story in a determined way. When the focalisation is fixed-internal (or equiscent) the reader only perceives events through the consciousness of the main character (see Genette 193-5).

keeps here these two key meanings. That is, while the objects and landscape described denote a certain beauty, the world in which they are contained is not extraordinary for that beauty, but rather because that beauty is menacing and paradoxically grotesque. This threatening atmosphere, comparable to surrealistic nightmares, also fits with one of the most common envisionings of the journey through the labyrinth. According to Martin, 'one associates it with an underground quest, in the darkness, through spiraling corridors, in which one may easily get lost, downwards towards some intimidating centre; nocturnal, the space of our worst dreams but also the arena of our greatest triumphs and discoveries, including- perhaps above all, our identity and the meaning of our life' (26).

The reader lacks a number of paradigms such as exact geographical location, temporal frame or delineation of the characters' personality in order to place the textual space within a real context, but the reader similarly lacks the parameters to understand the narration as logical. All the inhabitants of the town behave in a strictly incongruent, irrational fashion, suddenly throwing readers into the realm of the absurd, yet an absurd that is uncanny altogether due to the protagonist's impression of a constant threat. The reader's perception that s-he is in the presence of a disturbing world alongside with the description of a people that lack all logic by speaking nonsensically and acting through continuous contradictions, intensify the surrealist echoes of the novel. Paul Ilie comments how: 'the odd sensations of uncanniness, incongruity, and absurdity are all part of the aesthetic experience of surrealism. A more objective criterion, however, is the technique of irrationality involving a new type of illogic based on free associations [...]. The result is a work of art filled with unusual encounters, dissimilar planes of reality [...] an incongruous or grotesque world' (5).

Nonetheless, it is not only with the surrealist mode that the text dialogues. The goal of Consuelo's quest is to achieve integration, the utopic realm where knowledge of the self resides. This integration not only works at the spiritual level, but at the level of identity based on geographical and cultural dislocation. Gerald Martin establishes the quest for identity as 'the central problematic of Latin American culture and the central theme of Latin American literature' (31), using the labyrinth as its dominant metaphor. Throughout the whole story, Consuelo is 'en la frontera final' (86) in the middle of the bridge, of the ocean. In order to reach her ideal, she needs to cross that bridge, to overcome the obstacle which is both based in a universal experience (reconciliation between the cosmos and oneself), and on a

historical experience which is a consequence of a reality that is basic to political organisation (reconcile herself with a community or society from which she was detached due to the Civil War). As has been mentioned, the hesitation between Europe and America has been ever present in Latin American novels since the 1920s, a choice that is seen as preordaining a series of subsequent choices that become determinant of how race, class, nation and gender construct and reconstruct individual and collective identities (see Martin 25).

Like Carpentier's narrator in *Los pasos perdidos* and like Horacio Oliveira in Cortázar's *Rayuela*, Consuelo is an anti-heroine, equally alienated from her surroundings and wishing to penetrate into a 'truer' realm in which her life is to acquire meaning. Like the protagonists of those two novels, she aims for the discovery of a new, improved self within a different, more 'authentic' level of reality, and she also expresses this search through a conflict between American and European identity. Novels such as García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* and Asturias' *Señor presidente* depict the course of Latin American history in a circular manner, as a repetition, as a tragic reiteration of elements that, through a mythical pattern, return to destroy its inhabitants over the centuries (see Martin 27). Garro's novel enacts similar patterns to these two works in reference to the circular structure, the depiction of a tragic and violent caricature of the Spanish Civil War in conjunction with the personal history of the protagonist as a nightmare in which the very same curses and dejections come to haunt the town, the country and its people.

STARING AT THE BRIDGE

Consuelo's finding of the old Roman bridge has two possible readings. The first, as a supernatural experience in which two opposing dimensions, the real and the unreal, are juxtaposed. The second, as the subject's perception of the real happening through a different, amplified lens due to the heightened emotional state in which she finds herself. That is, one reading will comprise an encounter with a supernatural ambit in which the existence of an actual parallel world is implied, and the other suggests an event that takes place through a phenomenological perception caused by her emotional state, sensing an amplification of the parameters of reality. In the latter case, the phenomenological experience of perception can be seen as analogous to Breton and Carpentier's revelatory moments. That is to say, a parallel dimension is suggested, yet exclusively through the subject's (un)consciousness, which can thus be read as the perception of the extraordinary within everyday reality. The symbolism of a bridge is transparent, crossing to the other side. It is also

an image that Garro employed in 'La culpa' to refer to the idea of crossing to a different dimension, transferring Laura to the mythical space of the past. As Consuelo proceeds to cross, she hears an undefined voice: 'Alguien la llamó por su nombre: ¡Consuelo! ... ¡Consuelo! Se detuvo sobrecogida, se apoyó en el pretil y escuchó la noche oscura mecida por las ramas de manzanos' (13).

The origin of this voice remains unclear, although it is feasible to attribute it to an otherworldly nature, establishing a link between such voice and the realm of the dead (Stoll, *Mythic* 163). On the other hand, the nature of this voice can be understood as coming from her own mind, as if both the voice and the image of the house were provoked by *her desire* to hear the voices of her dead relatives and enter the house by the river. Read this way, the experience is not supernatural, but constitutes a commerce between objective and subjective forces. It is therefore equivalent to the surrealist experience of the *rencontre* in as far as a daily object is capable of triggering new associations between the subject and the world. That is, in that the scene has an object to stimulate the affective desires that are located in the unconscious and that these sudden desires are released by the visible content of the object itself. Similarly, as in the surreal encounter, the object acquires significance because Consuelo is able to associate it with her past, her childhood. According to Breton, within the *rencontre*, the surrealist subject immediately associates the encounter with her-his own destiny (in terms of 'objective chance') through the linking of this event to other previous events in his life (*Mad Love* 13), filling the object or *trouvaille* with significance. Yet, for Breton, a conscious desire that is primarily sexual rules the encounter (*Mad Love* 20).

It is in desire that Consuelo locates the voices and the sight of the house by the river, equally, the encounter with the bridge is ruled by a 'magic circumstantial' character which leads to the sight of the marvellous or luminous image: 'De repente, frente a ella apareció la casa junto al río, brillando como una gran rosa marchita' (13). Yet, Garro avoids all references to sexuality, there is not erotic desire in this scene, but it is the desire for achieving integration with her past, that ultimately triggers the sight of the image. Considering the voices not as supernatural but as coming from her subconscious, the source of this encounter can be understood through the Freudian basis of surrealism: 'beneath the pressure of our interior repressions we create within ourselves a whole fantasy life which, by carrying out our desires,

makes up for the insufficiencies of our actual existence' (Breton, *Manifestoes* 160). This fantasy life is one of unreality, one in which Consuelo's desires are fulfilled through the evocation of the extraordinary but in which Garro strategically employs different symbols and images to surrealism in order to trigger the revelatory experience and the sight of the 'luminous phenomenon'.

This moment of epiphany logically triggers several consequences for the plot's development. On the one hand, it establishes an anticipation of the action, for Consuelo already designates the bridge as an 'arco del triunfo' (13). This suggests that, as the equiscent narrator, she knows that her final obstacle before reaching her goal is the crossing of that bridge. On the other, it presupposes an image of synthesis between Consuelo's desires and the surrounding reality, between the real and the ideal. That is, between the town and the house, the labyrinth and the centre. As Umanzor has commented, Garro gives the house 'la connotación de paraíso pero como centro de equilibrio y seguridad' (127). Not only the appearance of dissimilar planes of reality is implied in this scene, but it is also charged with symbols that refer to her personal circumstances as a frontier-character, as a 'paria' (9), as someone in the middle of a bridge. It is here that the discourse of American identity presents itself as central to the novel and therefore to Consuelo's divided self. Her round trip across the Atlantic symbolises her particular frontier between two times, in which two different worlds, Mexico and Spain, simultaneously work as symbols for two realities, the living and the dead, and for two emotional states, a divided condition and a wish for unity. Finally, the semantic relevance of the scene relies on how it is through that experience that Consuelo has seen the image of her ideal, the 'centre of the labyrinth' or the marvellous realm. The scene signals a rite of passage, an entrance to another plane of reality, the suggestion that within that house a different type of existence can open up. Yet it is also made clear that, even if she can 'see' the marvellous, the utopic space, she does not yet have the key to open the door of the house. Explaining how the subject can gain access to the marvellous, Mabile expresses a very similar idea to the vision expressed in Garro's novel: 'while the elements offer plenty of obstacles to overcome in order to win the great secret [...] the true test of the hero is death itself. To die and be reborn, that's what is required of him' (154).

CROSSING THROUGH DEATH

No sabemos qué sea realmente morir, excepto que es el fin del yo-el fin de la cárcel (Paz, *Búsqueda* 55).

And if you should die, are you not certain of reawakening among the dead? (Breton, *Manifestoes* 13).

Critics have presented various and differing opinions about Consuelo's death. Prado considers that Consuelo 'no muere nunca, permanencia en la atemporalidad del infinito' (*Escenario* 52). Anita Stoll reads it as the reunion with the spirit of her own people, a rebirth within death (*Mythic* 165). Mark Frisch concludes similarly, reading it as her reencounter with peace and unity (187). Umanzor argues that it shows the creative value of nostalgia, as she recovers her desired past (137), and Galvan suggests that death allows her to enter in contact with her family roots (136). On the contrary, Julie A. Winkler interprets it as the result of her failure to act and reads it negatively, 'for after all, it is only after death that her situation improves' (132). My interpretation of her death shares the positive aspect given by Prado, Umanzor, Galvan, Stoll and Frisch, although arriving at this conclusion through a different route. My analysis starts from the view that death is the main reason for Consuelo's return, death is the marvellous realm, the 'centre' or the absolute she came looking for, and therefore her death will be interpreted as a conscious election made by an active subject, as an act of free will.

This interpretation is mainly given by one key structural feature of the novel. Namely, by the fact that, once the reader reaches the final scene, the opening of the novel acquires full significance. That is, in the first pages of the novel, the whole development of the story is outlined as a tragedy to be lived by a *fated* character. Since, as commented, Consuelo and the equiscent narrator share the same awareness and knowledge of the plot's development, one assumes that from the very beginning Consuelo is aware of the final obstacle she has to surpass before achieving her 'centre of knowledge'. Thus, she knows how 'las tragedias se gestan muchos años antes de que ocurran', how 'el germen trágico está en el principio de las generaciones', how 'todos giran en la infinita ronda que nos refleja y engendra la tragedia' (7). Stoll has commented that the novel has a powerful symbolic level, which is created 'through the use of elements of the age-old myths: archetypal symbols, supernatural events, circularity and ritual repetition' (159). Equally important for the symbolic level seems the equiscent narrator's establishment that her story is a tragedy that evokes those lived by Cain, Nero, Helen of Troy, Cuauhtémoc and Oedipus (7); figures that are automatically transformed into symbols referring to the subsequent development of the story in terms of tragedy,

violence, defeat, treachery and deceit. The references to these historical figures invite us to consider both the brutality of evil and the nature of this in the novel, as they stand as allegorical figures of the different characters. Equally important is that all these historical figures have become mythical, subject of many works of art and literature and employed to represent universal human qualities as well as the fact that all of them represent painful modes of death.

Cain killed his brother Abel and Ramona and Pablo, who stand as the brothers of Consuelo's uncle, kill him in a similarly treacherous manner. These two characters are also evoked in the figure of Nero, as they are those who, during Consuelo's childhood, provoked the fire in the house by the river. Although Consuelo's story is not defined by love, her tragedy parallels those of Helen of Troy and Oedipus, for the action takes place in a town in which all inhabitants are at war against one another, including fathers and sons and caused by Consuelo's arrival, albeit not by her beauty. Yet, the most important of these figures is Cuauhtémoc, as it comes to symbolise Consuelo herself. The inclusion of a significant Mexican historical and quasi-mythical figure within a group of Western references might be understood as emphasising the novel's contrast between European and American modes of knowledge and identity. Cuauhtémoc was the last Tlatoani of the Mexica Empire, and his story has become an example of stoicism and a symbol for Mexican patriotism: 'Cuauhtémoc, the modern culture hero, has appropriated all of the symbolically tragic personality that the outside world still attributes to Moctezuma' (Gibson 105).

After being defeated by the Spaniards, Cuauhtémoc asked Cortés to kill him, choosing death rather than seeing his city disappear and let the conquistadors know where Moctezuma's treasure was (Gibson 107). Thus, his parallels with Consuelo are not only latent in that she is the last Mexican survivor in the Spanish town and refuses to let the treasure of her family lie in the hands of the other inhabitants, but mostly, and as it shall be shortly seen, in their conscious death wish. Of all the historical/mythical figures presented, Cuauhtémoc's story is the one that best adapts to Consuelo's characteristics, mainly because he symbolises the defeat that marks the life of Consuelo, and both will find the answer to that defeat by asking the Spanish to kill them. Finally, like Cuauhtémoc's story, Consuelo's is defined by vengeance and violence, suggested in the way in which both figures pass away. Finally, the fact that Cuauhtémoc is a historical figure signifying the fall of Tenochtitlán, works as a

symbol of resistance to the town and to her Spanish identity, significative of how her divided condition is primarily related with her Mexican past and even with Mexican history. Almost like a *mestiza*, she cannot look anywhere for her origins except to an act of violence.

All allegorical figures are linked by the notion of tragedy. According to Cavell, one of the most frequent patterns found in tragedy is 'that our actions have consequences which outrun our best, and worst, intentions [...]. The reason consequences furiously hunt us down, is not merely that we are half-blind, and unfortunate, but that we go on doing the thing which produced these consequences in the first place' (309). Cavell locates in tragedy a repetition that can be comprehended through Freud's *death-drive*. According to Freud, the subject tends to unconsciously repeat or remember a traumatic experience (the fire, escaping to Mexico) or to adopt a destructive behaviour in order to overcome her-his trauma (Consuelo's return to the scene of the crime). This is what Freud names 'compulsive repetition', contravening the pleasure principle. Unconscious repetition supposedly allows the subject to return to a state of transience that Freud compares with the inanimate, pre-organic state that preceded life and that he also compares with death (Freud, *Pleasure* 22-31). The pre-organic state that preceded life associates the notion of death with that of paradise, which Consuelo in the novel identifies with her previous life, the life in the past embodied in the house by the river. The house is therefore representative of death, but also of a resurrection into paradise, and 'ir en busca de su paraíso perdido es prácticamente ir en busca del árbol de la vida y de la inmortalidad' (Umanzor 132). The quest for immortality is also the alchemical quest for the 'elixir of life'.

In his alchemical writings, Jung envisions this alchemical quest through the notion of the labyrinth. Thus, as Martin has commented, 'for Freud and above all Jung, the labyrinth is, archetypically, uterine, symbolising a simultaneous longing to return to the maternal origin and fear of regression to the preconscious world of chaos; or more historically, the site of a journey from a dark, enveloping matriarchal consciousness into the light of knowledge and patriarchal civilization' (26). Garro's envisioning of the quest strategically answers to this metaphor of the labyrinth by presenting an independent and solitary woman who precisely journeys through it to attain a way out of patriarchy. Her notion fits in with the idea suggested by Varo's

Nacer de nuevo. In the painting, visionary powers and clairvoyance were ultimately associated with the female understanding of her own body and creative capacity, yet moving away from maternal connotations and placing the emphasis on her artistic creative capacity, in which the knowledge of her art and her identity triggered her rebirth. Garro's, while suggesting Catholic associations that Varo's iconography lacked, also associates the idea of finding the 'centre' with her protagonist's resurrection, in which the search for a pre-organic state is not associated with the womb of the mother, but with a sacred or magical space in which the light of knowledge shines due to the integration of her divided condition.

Therefore, Garro propagates a reverse discourse to Freud's unconscious *death drive* by making this conscious, turning it into a source through which Consuelo will be empowered. Consuelo is fated and thus required to repeat in her own flesh the tragedy that occurred to her family, where the employment of circular time within the narrative reinforces such repetitive pattern. The novel establishes a time that is 'circular e idéntico a sí mismo' (7) that 'como un espejo reflejando otro espejo, nos repite' (7). Remembrance becomes a key tool in Consuelo's quest, but her memories are as circular as the time she inhabits. That is, they go from present to past with no linear or chronological order. Like she did in 'La culpa', Garro separates her character from the chronological time of the story and allows her an entrance into mythical time. Thus, just as there is a 'coexistencia de todos los niveles históricos en México' (Fuentes, *Tiempo* 10), so past, present and even future coexist within the personal history of Consuelo, connecting her once more with Mexican identity and the symbolism of Cuauhtémoc's figure. Her internal time is contrary to occidental reason, partaking in the indigenous cosmovision and placing her outside chronology, which is symbolised in the novel by the character of the watchmaker, a threatening figure who moves his head 'como un péndulo' (58) and whose voice sounds like a 'tic-tac' (61). The watchmaker is as oppressive to her freedom as chronological time is, for he 'poseía el secreto de la hora de la muerte de todos los vecinos y también la suya' (31). Representative of linear time, he desires to fit her into such a temporal pattern. Yet, as Laura in 'La culpa', Consuelo is looking for the moment in which time will stop, the moment in which, as Laura, she will become

eternal. Only when linear time stops, will she cease to be 'una sombra flotando en ciudades sin memoria' (7), only there is she to find her '*consuelo*', and thus herself.²⁰

Accepting that Consuelo starts her search being aware of her internal circular time, her decision to start a quest towards spiritual rebirth and attainment of self-knowledge therefore involves choosing her own death. Her knowledge is suggested from the onset: 'enfrentarse al reflejo del pasado produce el exacto pasado y buscar el origen de la derrota produce la antigua derrota. *Consuelo lo sabía*' (7, my emphasis). This is acutely important in order to perceive her actions as the product of a personal stratagem rather than as a victim of others' actions or as a victim of circumstances. Umanzor sees her trip of return as essential for female agency, because through it, it is proved how 'una mujer puede encontrar su propia identidad y consecuentemente su temporalidad sin necesidad de la ayuda de un hombre como tradicionalmente se piensa' (135). Galvan sees Consuelo's agency in the figure of the detective, as her main opportunity to be defined as a clever and active subject (135-6). While this is certain, it will be suggested that her main agency comes from the figure of the quester itself. Consuelo has no current family bonds or ties, no social or professional liabilities that limit her in any way. She is free to do whatever she wishes. Therefore, her decision to go back to Spain, return to the town, remain there, and start a search for her past while being aware that the reflection of the past produces that same past, involves a conscious *death wish*, where death turns, as mentioned by Mabile, into the main obstacle to be surmounted before winning access to the 'great secret'.

Reading the end straightforwardly as Consuelo's death (Winkler 132), presents Consuelo with no agency at all. That is, she is negatively presented as a victim of the town's evil and economic ambitions. While interpretations will obviously vary across different readers, staying in the threatening atmosphere of the town is merely a decision of her own, confirming that her actions are the result of her free will. What the reader needs to understand is what her return and therefore her quest and crossing through death ultimately imply. Her return has been read as a need for 'conocimiento para buscar esa identidad tan indefinida' (Bradú 24), as a desire to

²⁰ One could obviously interpret this negatively, as Consuelo being the victim of other's deeds, but the aforementioned reference to her internal time and the points that will be subsequently described show the novel's concern for female agency.

find her identity and acquire knowledge of her past (Stoll, *Mythic* 160) or as the urgency to solve the mystery of the death of her family to reaffirm her family bond (Frisch 191, Kaminsky 129). I will add that, besides signifying a return that achieves meaning through her finding of a stable identity, it also signifies a way to transcend existence and attain that lost time and space, the roots that presuppose her reconciliation with humanity.

The answer to the implications of her quest is only given in the final scene, which is charged with symbols that look back to the most significant episodes within Consuelo's quest: the Roman bridge, the house by the river, the sky, the light, the febrile eyes of Ramona, the silence. All symbols become hieroglyphics meant and written to multiply the meaning and intensify Consuelo's arrival at 'el corazón tibio del oro' (103). Her ultimate step is to betray the laws of nature, reality and time, for in order to understand what she is, she ultimately needs to 'cruzar el tiempo y hablar con sus abuelos muertos' (9). Simultaneously, the personal implications of that enlargement of time and reality are her acceptance of the fluctuation of different identities within her persona, reconciling the Mexican with the Spanish. In this case, her death experience involves a transgression of representational boundaries and the means to come face to face with her destiny, which allows her to be reborn with new knowledge. That is, knowing throughout that she is fated yet not being able to fully understand her destiny and therefore her true self, she converts that which is inevitable, her death, into a source of power, into her means to find a new space in which she finally comes to terms with what she is both universally and historically.

This knowledge implies that instead of having one unique, fixed identity, she can now endorse a fluid representation of her different selves. Death is deliberately constituted as a utopic dimension in which each definition of herself could not exhaust the possibilities of new creations. After her death, Consuelo achieves a consensus between all her modes of being. All her identities, rather than being stable, are fluctuating freely within her. She does not need the static, binary definitions of 'blue' or 'red', 'fascist' or 'communist', 'Spanish' or 'Mexican', she is none of those, but could be all of them: 'a Latin American must face that s-he is the both part and the product of many cultures, but at least two' (Martin 28). Within the chronological time of the town, she is a labelled persona, locked in her 'Veronda'

identity, represented by and for others, observed and commented upon, the favourite object of the town's gaze: 'Consuelo se sintió una intrusa observada por todos' (10). Simultaneously, she did not know what a 'Veronda' identity implied. For Consuelo, who spent all her life in Mexico, her identity was not given, it had to be discovered or invented. Before entering death, there were two Consuelos always at war between Mexico and Spain, America and Europe. She abandons that permanent conflict in the Edenic space of the house, which is the twin of death, and in her rebirth, she has learnt that she has the eternity of the infinite to reinvent herself. If Consuelo's quest involved the knowledge of her true self and identity, she has now found something better, the freedom of the infinite prolongation of being. The constant dialectic between the real or objective and her ideal or subjective, the synthesis that was insinuated in the bridge scene, has finally achieved consummation. She has finally gained access to the forbidden dimension, escaping from 'the labyrinth of solitude'.

It is in the 'golden centre' where Consuelo 'se siente maravillada' (Prado 51). Like surrealist descriptions of the marvellous by Breton, Péret or Eluard among many others, the image is described with a vocabulary of light and glowing properties: 'en el salón los candiles de cristal lucían encendidos y las sedas amarillentas de los muebles brillaban con destellos cegadores' (103). The reader apprehends this image and explores it in aesthetic terms, understanding the charge and function of its symbols. It thus becomes clear that Consuelo's vision involves a new access to knowledge that dissipates the shadows, the fog, and the colours black and grey pervading the whole narration. It reveals to her a new way of seeing: 'Consuelo ignoraba que el esplendor de los colores fuera tan variado, cada color contenía todos los colores y sus matices se convertían en rayos de oro con vetas celestes' (103). While, as happened with the sight of the shining house by the river in her moment of epiphany at the bridge, the text employs a vocabulary that has obvious surrealist affinities, Garro strategically stresses her difference from these. Thus, unlike the surrealist conception of the 'seer', she is not the mediator between man and the marvellous, she does not open man's eyes to 'see', but like Varo's female questers, Garro revindicates woman's visionary gifts as useful tool to have her see the marvellous for and through herself.

There is yet one more retreat from surrealist aesthetics in the representation of the 'luminous phenomenon'. In *La casa junto al río* and unlike 'La culpa' or 'Era Mercurio', love is not the entrance to the marvellous realm, but *death*: 'la muerte es sólo cruzar la frontera maravillosa oculta en una habitación, un camino, en la mitad del mar' (10). As such, it has a regenerating and recuperative potential that, as I will comment in the next chapter, parallels the experience of Claire in Boullosa's novel *Duerme* or that of Moctezuma in *Llanto*. As in Boullosa's text, Consuelo's death experience is also characterised by the transgression of representational boundaries, by violence and by a piercing change within the subject. It can be seen, to use Benjamin's definition of surrealist experience, as a revelatory moment that, even if violent, ultimately produces integration. More importantly, as it happens to Consuelo, it allows 'the true image of the past to flit by' (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 255). It represents a simultaneity that one cannot possess, that of being dead and alive, that of being in two spaces, inside the house and lying on the bridge, in the time of the present and in the time of the past. For this very reason, it becomes comparable to the surrealist transcendence of reality to a superior level, to the sight of the extraordinary and the wish to comprehend the principles that underlie our existence. Yet, at the same time, it is different from the surrealist mode of enabling this realm, and this is mainly achieved through its couplings with death. Therefore, while employing a surrealist aesthetic she integrates those images within an approach to death more in consonance with Mexican culture and its literature, reminiscent of other texts in which the protagonists speak to readers from the beyond, such as the aforementioned *Duerme* and *Pedro Páramo*. In a similar way to Garro's novels, these narratives see in death a possibility for subverting the status quo as well as for attaining self-knowledge.

Part of this knowledge is provoked by the fact that, for the first time in the whole story, she establishes herself as observer, both of the town and of her own self. Her death experience endows her with the power of the gaze: 'se acercó a la ventana, corrió un poco la cortina de seda y levantó apenas la cortina de muselina blanca y miró' (103, my emphasis). This is the first time in the novel that Consuelo possesses the ability to look, and she looks at her murderer, but she does it smiling: will Ramona be prosecuted, consummating the revenge that Consuelo promised at the beginning? Meanwhile, she contemplates her own body on the bridge, becoming her own spectator. She is now able to look in the mirror and see what is actually there. She becomes different to herself, another Consuelo that she has left behind, in some

other plane of existence. She becomes a witness of her own story, making it clear that she was the subject and not the object of the narrative. Now that she has understood her destiny, one can say that she looks at the text from above. She has won the game, for she needed the hand of the same Cain (Ramona and Pablo) in order to die and complete her circle. '¿Acaso no había venido a España en busca de sus muertos...?' (103). The three dots indicate a new silence, that which invalidates any ending, it is open, for the last word is not given, and so the circular is confirmed, the possibility of transcending reality and existence is made manifest.²¹ According to Mora, Garro's characters view death as the 'solid home' the only state which allows them [...] to complete the apprenticeship of humanity begun in life and to obtain the total freedom desired' (*Thematic* 94). The silence in the house becomes representative of the silence of the dead, but this rather acquires positive connotations. Only the mute sound of light and the blazing sparkles of colours are left: 'this is the point, the marvellous limit, where the word breaks off, defeated, and the pure act triumphs. Beyond this threshold, no word sounds...' (Mabille 292).

²¹ Ana Bungard comments upon this aspect in regards to Garro's *Testimonios sobre Mariana* arguing that the three dots at the end of most of the testimonies, contribute to the text's possibility to go back over the same topic once more (142).

CHAPTER FOUR: CARMEN BOULLOSA, BODIES OUT OF HISTORY.

SECTION ONE: *LLANTO, NOVELAS IMPOSIBLES*: THE IRRATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF HIS/HERSTORY.

Myth alone is true for all time and the truth of history lies with myth (Levi-Strauss, *Look, Listen, Read* 19).

Carmen Boullosa's *Llanto: novelas imposibles*, portrays a historical scenario that has become part of many Mexican novels, the Spanish Conquest. It follows a complicated and irregular pattern. Indeed, it is not simply one novel, but at least four. First, there is the main plot where three women in contemporary Mexico City encounter Moctezuma II. Second, nine novel fragments narrated by multiple internal and fictionalised authors report the difficulties of writing the main plot. Third, there is a narration in which it is made explicit how certain bodies wish to transcend their dust particle condition, being carried by a wind that stands as a metaphor for history.¹ Finally, there are some fragments named 'Otra Voz' that concentrate on the different historical versions available of the death of Moctezuma.² In each version, the name of Moctezuma is spelled differently, suggesting the inconsistency of historical records and variations in the concept of his historical persona.

Its reception has been abundant and diverse. Critics like Carrie Chorba have approached the novel as 'historiographic metafiction', while stating the novel's search for 'the lost root of Mexican national identity or *Mexicanidad*' (171). Anna Reid has started from the same premises but focuses on the search for historical memory and orality (*Operation* 81-4) or on the novel's re-writing of the Mexican conquest (Reid, *Reescritura* n.p.). Other studies have read it as a text that exposes 'la imposibilidad de novelar personajes históricos y fundacionales de una identidad' (Castro 171) or as illustrating 'el deseo frustrado de un encuentro con el otro, cuya existencia inaprehensible [...] está lapidada por las formas falocráticas de una memoria canonizada' (Croquer-Pedrón, *Historias* 41). It has been read as a modern

¹ This sub-novel recalls oral culture, recalling indigenous ways of gathering historical knowledge.

² The first voice makes reference to an anonymous Aztec figure who carried Moctezuma's body from place to place in order to find a site to bury him. The next ones make reference to the multiple voices of the Aztec town placing all their confidence in Moctezuma. The last ones are again a multiple observation of Moctezuma's burial through the use of first person narration.

depiction of the fall of Tenochtitlan (Gac-Artigas 134), as the impossibility of recovering a past world due to its incompatibility with modernity (Pfeiffer 497), or as an attempt to write history from an indigenous perspective (Ortega 31-6). Many of these and other studies have looked at *Llanto* through the lens of postmodernism and feminism (Fick, Tompkins), in which the novel is seen as contributing to the debate on postmodernity, recovering a debate around identity in what is now supposedly a 'world without frontiers' (Tompkins 780).

I will look at *Llanto* from a different angle; arguing that, in its ability to break with canonical modes of historical and literary representation, the novel seeks to represent a double perspective on Mexican historical experience: an experience of loss and an experience of awakening. Both are consequences of two different reactions triggered by the same supernatural event: the re-appearance of Moctezuma in contemporary Mexico City. Firstly, it will be explained how the modern women face the Aztec past, asserting that their experience is characterised by a historical awakening that leads to knowledge. Secondly, there will be an analysis of Moctezuma's experience, contending that this is typified by a pervading feeling of loss. Finally, I will show how both types of experiences are relevant for readers in as far as they instigate a reflection upon the transformation of Mexican civilization and the legacy of the Aztec past at the turn of the twentieth century. Throughout the analysis, it is my primary concern to show how *Llanto* illustrates a stylistic and thematic use of surrealist aesthetics to reveal an extraordinary aspect of Mexican history and therefore, how Boullosa's novel strategically enacts surrealist experiences while employing a literary imagery characterised by *lo real maravilloso americano*. The American discourse is given by the novel's survey of Mexican identity, culture and history, its polemical confrontation between modern and ancient cultures, the industrialised city and the 'primitive' natural world, its mythical structure, circular time and novelistic enactment of the Nahuatl cosmogony. Thus, while the way in which a second level of reality emerges is understood through the surrealist notion of the encounter or *rencontre*, this second reality is a chronicle of Mexican reality, fictionalised or 'destroyed' by employing the vocabulary that Carpentier attributed to *lo real maravilloso*. Nonetheless, Boullosa's novel presupposes a revision of Carpentier's cultural concept by realising a double approach towards the Latin American problematic regarding the constitution of knowledge within the metropolis as well as by deliberately stressing the historical

importance that women have had for the social understanding of identity in contemporary Mexico.

To express how these female voices are made audible, I will carry out a parallel reading of the novel that focuses on a debate revolving around the entrance of Mexican women into historical records and displaying the impossible 'making herstory' within Mexican society. Boullosa's novel will be seen as performing a revisionist gender perspective on the Mexican historical and cultural past. While the first reading of the novel centres around the main plot, this second reading is instigated by the sub-novel which narrates the wandering of dust particles, those bodies who did not attain materiality and who have become a murmur, an absence that only gains presence through 'another voice' that compels the fictional authors to write. These 'silent' voices, metaphorically expressed as dust particles travelling with the wind, refer to the role indigenous women played in history and recover, as Garro did in 'La culpa', one of its more representative figures, La Malinche. In this parallel reading, the novel tactically displays the key role women have played in order to understand the experiences of history described in the first reading, and the consequences these have had for the consolidation of Mexican identity. That is, 'La Malinche se transforma no solamente en la madre de la nación mestiza sino también en la forjadora de la nueva identidad "universal" implicada en el adjetivo "nuestra"' (Franco, *Malinche* 202). In this way, Boullosa's novel touches upon a historical and cultural discussion within modern Mexican society through the employment of a form and a narrative method that bring together, yet strategically contest, surrealism and Carpentier's cultural concept.

THE APPEARANCE

The body of a sleepy Moctezuma appears in the middle of Mexico City on the same day of his death, except that we are now 468 years ahead. In one of the parallel stories, a fictionalised author explains the reason why she has chosen such an awkward materialisation: 'Si elijo a Moctezuma como personaje para novela, es porque él queda exactamente en la orilla del precipicio, mirando que el lugar donde iba a poner el pie era convertido en nada' (38). This scene shows a Moctezuma contemplating the demise of his mode of cultural knowledge, which is why, besides the relevance his persona has had for Mexican history, he has been elected as a novelistic subject. Namely, because he is on the edge between two phases of Mexican history, the Aztec and the Colonial: 'se trataba del fin de una manera de concebir el mundo. Del exterminio de un modo de ser. De la frontera de su cultura

con tal exterminio' (97). Moctezuma's death and the subsequent fall of the Mexica Empire inaugurate a new form of historical experience characterised by colonialism, imperialism and *mestizaje*. Perhaps more importantly, it represents the birth of what contemporary Mexicans are today. Now, Moctezuma is a figure who, by the characteristics of his historical persona, lends itself to excess: 'habría muchos excesos, excesos antinaturales, excesos de Tlatoani' (67). The reference to excess implies the internal authors' awareness of the need to overstep European rationality in their historical reinvention, since for Nahua society this type of reason was indeed unknown.³

Moctezuma does not arrive alone: 'pegajoso, sale o empieza a salir arrancado por una estampida de imágenes' (14). Such images, functioning as his umbilical cord, are images of pre-colonial and colonial Mexican history meant to divulge official history and social life as 'it happened'.⁴ The way they are aligned presents overtones with the surrealist *corps exquis*. Because they are taken from several historical sources and therefore composed collectively and later on re-arranged in an incoherent way, they evoke the communal composition of this surrealist game of automatic writing, especially considering that they are placed in the text so as to resemble a poetic body that aims to show the intervention of collective consciousness in writing. Furthermore, Boulosa is concerned, as the surrealists were, with the arbitrary character of those images. However, the collective consciousness that has intervened in the 'estampida de imágenes' refers to a specific history, and not to an account of shared dreams. Boulosa does not slip back into the mysterious and abstract quality of those images, but looking closer one appreciates how they have been ordered in a dialectical tension that exhibits important historical inconsistencies. Namely, they display the impossibility of knowing which sentences reveal the 'true' version of historical data. Moctezuma arrives surrounded by a fragmented historical discourse which expresses doubts, uncertainties and contradictions that blur the distinction between prose and poetry, uniting the content and form of the narration. These contradictions disclose, as Chorba has argued, how unreliable historiographic narrations can be (175), or as Reid has noted,

³ This obviously has echoes in Boulosa's own vision of literature and history: 'I needed to transform history into fiction: characters and events had to be worked throughout, elaborated, fine-tuned and adapted to the imaginary world of the novel [...]. My novels use historical scenarios, but they're not at the service of history: they are neither memoirs, nor testimonies. Like all novelists, I like reality, and I also like to betray reality by correcting its flaws, ultimately by reinventing it' (Boulosa, *Bomb* n.p.).

⁴ Concretely, these are a series of fragments from Hernán Cortés' *Cartas de Relación*, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España* and Tzvetan Todorov *La conquista de América, la cuestión del otro*. (see the novel's acknowledgements 122).

how historical sources are divided, 'por una parte tenemos la visión de los vencidos, y por otra de los vencedores' (*Reescritura* 3). These historical images also denote an absence: there is no documentation about indigenous women, except for a brief excerpt of the abuse received by Moctezuma's favourites.

THE ENCOUNTER

Between waking and sleeping, Moctezuma yearns for the company of a woman: '¿Por qué ninguna me auxilia? [...]. Si alguna mujer me acompañara, sería posible dormirme [...] una mujer para tomarla de sus pechos y sentir que tiene un corazón aún' (25-26). Not far away from where he is lying, Laura is longing for the presence of a man: 'Yo dije lo del pene doble porque era lo que había dicho toda la noche [...] lo único que ese día quería y con toda mi alma era un hombre que me hiciera el amor' (42). Both Laura and Moctezuma, who are in a partially conscious state, are wishing for the appearance of someone to ease their emotional needs, and both wishes are partially related to erotic desire. Now, as explained in Chapter One, the *trouvaille's* power derives from its ability to embody the subject's desires and, for Breton, this desire is, like in this scene from *Llanto*, somewhat conscious and primarily sexual. The *trouvaille*, ruled by 'objective chance', is manifested to the subject in a different form than the one expected, and the discrepancy between the expected and the encountered generates an association between that situation and others within one's life, making the experience meaningful and changing the subject's perception of the world (*Mad Love* 10-20). The scene in the novel therefore corresponds, in its essence, to the surrealist notion of the *rencontre*. That is, objective chance structures the encounter between Laura and Moctezuma, as it presupposes a convergence of necessity (they needed a man and a woman respectively and found it: destiny) and liberty (the encounter was determined by chance). Both of them, turned into living *trouvailles*, present a discrepancy between what the other was expecting and what they've actually encountered (a primitive man for the modern woman and a modern woman for the primitive man), which is precisely what makes their encounter so meaningful.

It is also feasible to associate this scene with other fortuitous encounters, such as that which takes place between the modern narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* and the 'primitive' Rosario, as Boullosa also alters events into a representative system full of meaning for her characters while stressing the extraordinary as a Latin American cultural event. However, neither in Carpentier nor in Breton's account of the fortuitous encounter, are women represented as the subjects whose desire is able to

produce the *trouvaille* (Moctezuma). Neither have they been represented as spectators of the revelatory moment. In *Llanto*, the women have been given the agency of 'watching' before Moctezuma actually realises that he is alive. At first, the unfolding of the narration devises the women as the only active subjects. Moctezuma seems indeed an object appropriated by the female spectator: '¿Adónde lo llevas?' [...]. ¿Adónde va a ser? Lo llevo conmigo, donde yo vaya, es mío' (48). The type of emotion originating in the women's minds emerges from some sort of bewitching that incites a desire for contemplation, bringing about a strange fascination in all three: 'había en él, no sólo en los objetos que lo rodeaban, algo que nos parecía ajeno, no está mal si uso para describirlo la palabra extraordinario, eran extraños sus gestos, extraña su voz' (57).

Nonetheless, we soon appreciate that Boullosa's manifestation of the fortuitous encounter incorporates a calculated gender balance in terms of power relations. Although the sight of Moctezuma resembles at first the finding of a thrilling (Mexican) *trouvaille* insofar as he embodies the exoticism of the primitive or natural man, he is never denied, (as happened with the natural, earth-woman Rosario in Carpentier's novel) his subjectivity or agency. The main stimulus for shock is not the beauty of his body, even if this is beautiful, neither his 'sexo secreto' (Paz) or the potential 'authentic' love he might be able to give. They are so astonished by the out of place historicity of the figure, that the sexual need and the associations with love automatically become secondary: 'No sé qué vi en él que me volvió el alma al cuerpo [...] Y, lo más importante, olvidé todo en relación al amor, olvidé cuanto había llorado, y me olvidé a mí' (47). The sight of Moctezuma produces a powerful impression on Laura, on her memory and feelings. This impression implies pleasure, for her soul goes back to her body, an integration takes place within her which makes her forget about all her problems, losing herself in a pleasurable feeling. This is exactly the same effect that, according to Breton, was obtained from the experience of the *rencontre*. However, while dialoguing with this surrealist notion and implying the same effect, Boullosa's text favourably rejects some of its basic causes. Namely, the objectification of the subject and the idea that the most important encounter of all is that of the beloved person, for Laura forgets everything in relation to love, and so does the astonished Moctezuma, who has no time to think about sexual desire at the sight of modernity. The text moves therefore away from the focus on love and desire to place it in historical discrepancy. At the same time, Boullosa strategically places an emphasis in the description of the female

subject's attainment of pleasure through a revealing vision, which serves to indicate how both 'objects' of experience are indeed active subjects; by virtue of the fact that both parts observe and are observed, both generate desire and are generated by the other's desire.

When Moctezuma awakens, the modernity he faces is so unreal to him that he thinks he is dreaming. Yet, the women are not the ones who have integrated waking and sleeping. The marvellous reality he faces is not embodied in their essence or body, but in the modernity that surrounds them: their clothes, objects, language and car. The actions that follow this moment of 'seeing' are focused on physical sensations. The characters' experience after the initial shock is described as a synthesis between words and the body, making collective the effect of the encounter: 'El efecto de sus palabras describiendo un tiempo que ellas no habían tocado, se unió al gusto de la mano fresca que acariciándolo le curaba la ardiente piel y olvidó el pánico, tanto que pudo haberse dejado caer de nuevo por la cuesta del sueño' (48). This is a verbal yet tactile scene; an image of harmonious fusion that recalls the tactile connotations given to the surrealist image.⁵ On the one hand, it is the 'touch' of modernity, signified through the woman's hand, that awakens Moctezuma into the present and thus into a new way of conceiving life. On the other, it is the 'touch' of the past, the man's hand, which makes the women fully awake, eliminating their hangover, and providing them with an extraordinary vision of their everyday reality. It thus functions as a revelation, an awakening that reveals another way of seeing.

As I have explained in Chapter One, this experience is analogous to that of the surrealist who sees 'the image', or to Carpentier's revelation of *lo real maravilloso americano* in Haiti. It is also analogous to Remedios Varo's images of clairvoyance or to Elena Garro's description of Laura and Consuelo's experiences with light in the middle of the bridges, allowing the protagonists to deepen their realities. As Garro and Varo did, Boullosa deliberately expands both the surrealist and Carpentier's revelatory experiences. The clairvoyance resulting from this encounter is not a manifestation of erotic desire as the surrealists wanted to see it, but is more in tune with the manifestations of historical and cultural discrepancies that one finds in Carpentier, like the angel maraquero or the Black Immaculate conception. Boullosa

⁵ We have seen in Chapter One how when explored through aesthetic representation, the image is often bestowed with a palpable and tactile quality so that besides appealing to logic and reason, it also alludes to the senses.

plays with and parodies both notions for, on the one hand and like Carpentier, she is representing a historical and cultural discrepancy that is existent and real in Mexico City. (The convergence of two distinct temporal frames in the lives of its people, the cohabitation of indigenous groups and their 'magic' beliefs within modern values and industrialised society). On the other, the way it has been conceived and presented to the reader stresses its quality of a literary fantasy, indeed purely surreal. The modern characters, bounded by occidental reason, are astonished at this encounter, they do not possess the magic mentality of the Nahuatl cosmogony in which this event would have been possible and therefore do not share the faith Carpentier implied in his term. The extraordinary event is furthermore rationalised by the fictional authors as a fabrication, stressing its unreal character. As Mattalía has commented, 'el seguimiento escorado de las líneas narrativas [...] intentan resaltar su aparente heterogeneidad textual, la apropiación de voces 'otras' ficcionales y documentales que [...] devienen en un salvajismo artificial que lo convierte en heredero de las ficciones modernas' (296).

TOUCHING THE PAST: HISTORICAL AWAKENING

Latin American writers of the 1960s sought to place their 'novelística' within the universal projections of the European and the North American novel, searching for new narrative techniques and structural alternatives to make the enigmas of their expanding modern civilization comprehensive and appealing at worldwide level (Rodríguez-Monegal, *Boom* 74). Simultaneously, there was a comprehensible desire to move away from European aesthetics, which only seemed feasible by the creation of a common, specific language: 'Aceptación de giros sintácticos y de modismos esencialmente latinoamericanos. Forja de un nuevo idioma sin rechazar aquellos vocablos, tomados de otros idiomas que se nos han colado en el habla cotidiana por acción de la técnica' (Carpentier, *Ensayos* 62). Within this context, the exploration of the city replaced the 'indigenista' and 'nativista' landscapes of the novels of earlier decades, giving way to a new literary landscape in which the city became the main reality, yet which was still being contrasted with the rural, now rather 'abnormal', setting. The confrontation between urban and rural settings is by no means limited to the fiction of this continent, and one cannot obviously generalise to include all its writers. However, one can safely say that, in the last forty years, that is, from the sixties onwards, as cities started to convert themselves into massive megalopolis due to the vast migration of people from towns and villages, the reality of Latin American countries changed so significantly that to express their reality was to

express their new urban culture (see Martin 166-7). This was soon addressed by Carpentier in 'Problemática actual de la novela Latinoamericana' (1964):

La gran tarea del novelista americano de hoy está en inscribir la fisonomía de sus ciudades en la literatura universal [...]. Acaso por lo difícil de la tarea, prefirieron nuestros novelistas durante años, pintar montañas y llanos. Pero pintar montañas y llanos es más fácil que revelar una ciudad y establecer sus relaciones posibles-por afinidades o contrastes- con lo universal. Por ello, esa es la tarea que se impone ahora al novelista latinoamericano (*Ensayos* 205- 210).

Yet, it was not only the new emerging cities and their conflict with rural settings that were going to forge that explicit Latin American language, but the method, form, novelistic structure and technique through which this reality was going to be expressed. Many considered that the new method was to turn to a mythical structure (Rodríguez-Monegal, *Boom* 79). According to Carlos Fuentes 'hoy la novela es mito, lenguaje y estructura. Y al ser cada uno de estos términos es, simultáneamente, los otros dos' (*Nueva novela* 20).⁶ On the one hand, many texts that were canonised by critics as an example of *lo real maravilloso americano* such as *Los pasos perdidos*, *Cien años de soledad*, *Casa de campo*, and *Hombres de maíz*, explored this extraordinary reality looking at the intersection between the Latin American natural wonders and primitive folklore and the lives of the modern man. All of these novels partake, in one way or another, of a mythical structure. On the other, some of these (*Los pasos perdidos*, *Casa de campo*) portray an ambivalent relationship to a rather alienating city that, in its modernisation process, either becomes destructive and reductive of the human condition or encompasses a space for misery, hypocrisy and authoritarian politics.

Boullosa's text presents a pastiche of what, during the last four decades, were the techniques, methods and alternatives to express an explicit Latin American reality. On the one hand, *Llanto* pays tribute to the societal organisation of ancient indigenous civilisations by presenting modernisation and industrialisation as debasing for the human subject. On the other, it also reclaims the modern city as a place of positive experience, as a space for 'seeing' and gaining insight, avoiding the 'Latin American delegitimization of metropolitan models' (Chanady 136). Martin argues how for the writers of the 1960s, 'life in a great modern conurbation was recent enough in origin to be perceived as essentially non-American experiences' (167). Instead of depicting the novelty of Mexico's discovery, the impressive

⁶ Lamb also mentions how this communal language enterprise was sought through a going back to 'el mundo mítico, ancestral e histórico en Latino América con otra perspectiva real y mágica' (101).

dimensions or beauty of its natural landscape, Boullosa attributes those remarkable dimensions to the city and its objects that with its chaos, urbanity and mestizaje, also differ in every possible way from the European conception of the city. She denies the implicit *mysterious beauty* that one could find in the French surrealist 'city of light' and she stresses her work's difference from European models by picking up specific figures and scenarios of Mexican history, reclaiming the modern city as a source for the American experience.

How does she recover the city as a realm infused with the presence of the marvellous, as a place for *American* knowledge? Disquiet is one of the first responses we find in the female spectators:

testigos de que el tiempo puede romperse, las mujeres miran desconcertadas cómo ni la muerte existe y salen disparadas de la cuna acogedora de su amistad, hacia la frialdad inhóspita del desconcierto. Saben su pequeñez, su estrechez de miras, el campo común que han cultivado para entenderse se disuelve en nada (45).

At the sight of an event that is genuinely distressing, everything, even their own existence, dissolves. The effort of thinking, which relates to a progressive movement of the mind, generates a conflicting interior feeling of uneasiness in which their mind becomes like a *tabula rasa*, for at the sight of Moctezuma, all their previous understanding of the world becomes void of meaning. The uneasiness felt by the women can be compared to Freud's *uncanny* in the sense of the return of what has been repressed. In other words, the recognition of a familiar past that returns to haunt the subject. This matches with the fact that in Mexican history, Moctezuma's death and the historical moment this symbolises is a past that has also been falsified and repressed: 'los presagios fueron hechos para que la historia no pareciera una cuna de cadáveres, para que la comunidad indígena se explicara su presente no como algo totalmente desconocido a sus propios ojos, sino como algo que vieron venir y que por lo tanto, de alguna manera, formaba parte de su pasado' (96).

Hence, one likely interpretation for Moctezuma's appearance is the internal narrators' will to confront contemporary Mexican society with its repressed historical past, in order to avoid its suppression, or to use Fuentes' words, to highlight how 'debemos de recordar abiertamente o no tendremos futuro' (*Nueva novela* 16). Even though the initial result of the encounter appears negative in as far as it is distressing, it has nonetheless positive consequences. That is, Moctezuma stirs up a new order of reality for the contemporary women who will now look at

their historical past and understand their present in a completely different form. He thus functions in the same way as the sight of the marvellous did for the surrealist and for Carpentier, as a revelation and an amplification of the parameters of reality capable of changing one's life and understanding. After walking through a Mexico City that has suddenly been altered into a wonderland by the presence of Moctezuma, Laura, Margarita and Luisa will no longer see their reality and assimilate their history with the same eyes. For the women, the city becomes a place for knowledge, for a different understanding of history. In a certain manner, it constitutes a new Latin American scenario insofar as it does not place the rural setting in opposition with the modern city, neither does it articulate its process of transformation nor compare Mexico City with other European conurbations, but places all that is perceived as essentially Mexican experiences within it. The marvellous makes its presence felt in the middle of the city, stressing that in modern culture there is no need to go all the way to the Amazon jungle to find the time frame discrepancy, the reversal of time and the specific vocabulary of Latin America.

By 'experiencing' the city with Moctezuma, the women start acquiring an entirely new expertise concerning their historical past and through this knowledge, they are able to connect in a fresh manner with their pre-columbian history. After the initial shock, the women start 'seeing', gaining knowledge: 'Margarita empezó a creer también, yo claro que creía, soy antropóloga, conozco bien el arte indígena y he visto muchas piezas, pero nunca cosas como las que él traía consigo [...] ni en los museos ni en las colecciones privadas [...] en ningún sitio las he visto' (63). Moctezuma's appearance in the city disrupts their occidental reason, deepening and enlarging it. Yet, the extraordinary does not exactly function like Carpentier's definition of *lo real maravilloso americano*, because this event does not presuppose any faith, the women are surprised and shocked at his presence, and as I have already mentioned, there is no magical mentality provoking their acceptance of the event. In this sense, Moctezuma and the perception of reality he brings along still function like a surrealist discovery insofar as it presupposes an experience of shock leading to an *état de surprise*. As well as by the fact that the reader is constantly reminded that this is all a literary construction by the fictional authors. Nonetheless, Boullosa keeps her text from placing, as I have shown through Benjamin and Sartre's critique of surrealism, an emphasis on a histrionic notion of the mystery. Rather, like Carpentier did in *El reino de este mundo* or Garro in 'La culpa' and in *La casa junto al*

río, she fuses the marvellous with the historically concrete, the fall of Tenochtitlan, the chronicles of the colonies, leading the reader to a direct knowledge of the reality presented. Unlike surrealist's encounters, the result of these women's encounter is far from being an image of aesthetic consolation, but it ultimately presupposes a historical way of knowledge that produces a criticism of the present time based on the disruption it creates with the past.

In fact, comparable to Benjamin's historian, Boullosa 'establishes the conception of the present as the time of the now' (*Illuminations* 263). This is not an obvious, self-contained statement, it means that the novel does not content itself with 'establishing a causal connection between various moments in history' (*Illuminations* 263) but that it grasps the 'constellation' that modern Mexico has formed with its own past from the present time. That is, the text places the past into a contemporary context and explores the relevance that past has for contemporary time, right now, in the lives of these women. From here, both reader and author infer that it is impossible to grasp historical past as it really was (*novelas imposibles?*). Yet the women, as inhabitants of a space transformed by the presence of the marvellous, are able to grasp this past, *they can literally 'touch it'* as they touch Moctezuma, assimilate it as they digest his discourse, offering them the possibility of reconsidering their historical heritage and the importance this might have for their present time. Their experience with Moctezuma becomes a means to point out how the past, although irrecoverable, is still alive, how it can be revisited and reworked, and Boullosa does not, like in *Los pasos perdidos*, 'Viaje a la semilla' or *Casa de campo*, use the technique of regressive time, but makes the past converge with the present into the modern temporal dimension. The women's historical experience can thus be interpreted as a collective discovery, a historical awakening: 'nueve veces cincuenta y dos años después de la caída de Tenochitlán, presenciábamos, así, un verdadero descubrimiento' (87). It urges both characters and readers to compare past and present, memory and history, to reconsider Moctezuma and the past he represents, not as dead, or at least not as 'muerto del todo, pues pervive en la referencialidad de la historia' (Eltit 58).

TOUCHING MODERNITY: HISTORICAL LOSS

Ciudades Luces, faros de la Cultura, ágoras del Saber, cunas de la Civilización (toda cuna acaba oliendo a meado (Carpentier, *La consagración de la primavera* 201).

The positive aspect of the women's experience is nowhere to be found in Moctezuma. When he awakens, a reorganisation of thought seems to be produced

in his mind. The words used to describe it recall the associations established between the sight of the surrealist image and a vocabulary of electricity and light: 'Un rayo hiere esta frase en el centro [...] ¿Qué veo, se pudo preguntar en pánico [...] se afloja el cuerpo en la manera del miedo [...] después, abrirse, desagradablemente [...] Una construcción hiere el cielo. Brilla y es monstruosa' (49). His surroundings constitute a devastating and utterly violent sight for Moctezuma, as his emotions reveal a negative contact with the external world he is facing. He feels 'Miedo, angustia, congoja, tristeza, y en el fondo de esto, escondido como en el fondo de un cajón revuelto, una ligera sombra de alegría: "estoy vivo", una sombra que de asomar era de bulto aplastada por el miedo' (49). Hidden within, there lies a shadow of happiness related to his discovery that he is a living subject, that he has a consciousness, but even in this newly acquired subjectivity he is overwhelmed by fear, provoked by the incomprehension of the world he sees.⁷ His lack of understanding is signified through Mexico City's modernity: 'miraba la disposición de la calle, los otros autos, el camellón al centro, los edificios, los aparadores, la gente [...] los letreros de los anuncios' (57). The apparatus of industrialisation and modernisation causes Moctezuma a passion of astonishment, an effect of defamiliarisation: 'sus pupilas se habían vuelto huecas de la impresión. Si alguien lo hubiera mirado a los ojos, no hubiera podido comprender tanta sorpresa atónita de un golpe, el hoyo que había formado en la mirada el asombro' (53).

If Moctezuma constituted the *subject* of experience for the women, for Moctezuma these objects of experience are the objects of the city. Everything that surpasses his rationality is related to technology: traffic lights, cars, electricity, the phone or photography. One finds this idea of defamiliarisation in front of technology in novels such as *Cien años de soledad*, where society is astonished by the introduction of the daguerreotype, the train or even a block of ice. Within surrealist texts like *Nadja* or *Paris Peasant*, we often find that (even if there is no surprise at all in front of technology) there is an emphasis on how there are the city objects, including the women that wander around it, which become the main objects of experience through a similar process of defamiliarisation. The only thing that García Márquez's novel and these surrealists' texts share regarding this aspect, is that the defamiliarisation effect that these objects exert upon the observer is enriching in one way or another. That is, it deepens the subject's surrounding reality or amplifies

⁷ Boullosa herself commented how 'Moctezuma quite suddenly became a stranger in his own world [...]. He lost everything because of his inability to understand the events unfolding around him' (*Bomb* n.p.).

her/his knowledge of the world. Defamiliarisation is not portrayed in Moctezuma's situation as an entrance into a reality beyond the sensuous realm which can produce knowledge or make the subject 'see', but is conceptualised as an experience of impossibility; there is no means for Moctezuma to achieve integration with the external world he is facing. Contrary to Fuentes' 'Chac Mool' whose wig, make up and other paraphernalia have made him the strangest survivor within the modern world, Moctezuma's restlessness comes from the inadequacy of his imagination and rationality for understanding the world he is seeing. Unlike the women's experience, his is characterised by despair and terror rather than awakening, knowledge and the gaining of insight. He tries to associate what he sees with the only rationality he knows, that of the gods, but Laura answers him that 'nuestros dioses han muerto, lo que ves lo hemos hecho los hombres' (85). Thus, although his mentality is magical, he is also shocked at the result of his encounter, finding himself in a constant state of surprise, where the text plays once more back and forth between the outcome obtained from surrealists' experiences and the vocabulary of *lo real maravilloso*. In the effort to enlarge his comprehension, Moctezuma's rationality plunges back into itself, and it is rearranged into an emotionally moving response whose nature is utterly catastrophic: a sense of loss pervades him. His historical experience implies a painful shock that prompts his weeping throughout the whole novel: 'no pudo contenerse y estalló en llanto' (53). It is, then, that impossible encounter with modernity which, reversing the gender role of the mythical Llorona, produces the 'llanto' of Moctezuma and of the fictional author which gives its title to the novel. One crying at the sight of what he has lost, the other crying about the impossibility of knowing, and therefore narrating, the 'real' dimension of such loss.

In contrast with the previous depiction of the city as a place infused with the presence of the marvellous and thus as a place for gaining knowledge of the Mexican historical experience, in Moctezuma, Boullosa conceptualises modernity and urban spaces in terms of alienation and devastation. The marvellous maintains its meaning as extraordinary, but moves beyond both Carpentier and surrealism to trigger a negative outcome for the subject. The text describes a negative experience of the man of the past who has come to look at the present with a critical distance. Moctezuma feels an emotional regression towards the past: 'en su pregunta había un ligero tono de desesperación [...] le preguntó cómo podía ser esto Tenochtitlán, que no había lago, que no había canales, que el aire incluso era distinto, y alzando la

cabeza al cielo [...] dijo: al cielo entonces lo habéis cubierto con manta fina' (64). The only thing Moctezuma is able to experience in the face of modernity is the memory of a lost paradise, the golden age of the Aztecs, and in an act of empathy with him, one fictional narrator rationalises modernity as a space for the human subject's destruction: 'Hemos devorado gran parte del planeta con la boca maquillada de la civilización [...] sí que el siglo veinte se parece a la época de la conquista [...] el modo de vivir de la modernidad, arrasan al hombre de ayer, nos arrasa a nosotros' (97-8).

In *La otra voz*, Paz considers modernity as the build up of failed utopias, as a continuation of the conquest project (126). Through a use of circular time, he connects the end of the twentieth century with the time of the conquest, giving our present time the quality of a resurrection of repressed realities: 'Vivimos una vuelta de los tiempos: no una revolución sino, en el antiguo y más profundo sentido de la palabra, una revuelta. Un regreso al origen que es, asimismo, un volver al principio' (Paz 126). Paz is obviously referring to modern men and thus his words do not apply to Moctezuma, but they do express concisely the effect that the fictional authors hope the novel might have on the modern reader, as it did on the modern characters. Perhaps, the fictional authors want to make readers acknowledge, as did the women through their experience with Moctezuma, the negation of the past on which current Mexican society is built: the denial and forgetfulness of the indigenous legacy that constructs their modern world. The internal authors' connection of the end of the century with the time of the conquest, as well as their digressions regarding technology and the modern age instigated by Moctezuma's experience, become relevant for readers insofar as it reflects upon the transformation of civilisation, the remembrance of realities we have buried over the span of history and the possibility literature has to help them re-emerge; connecting once more with Paz's text: 'Resurrección de realidades enterradas, reaparición de lo olvidado y lo reprimido, que, como otras veces en la historia, puede desembocar en una regeneración' (Paz 126).

PARALLEL NOVEL: HERSTORY

Debe haber otro modo de ser que no se llame Safo/ ni Mesalina ni María Egipcíaca ni Magdalena ni Clemencia Isaura [...] Otro modo de ser humano y libre. Otro modo de ser (Rosario Castellanos, *Poesía no eres tú* 134.)

Towards the end of the novel, in a scene in which Laura is washing Moctezuma, she recalls the chronicle's description of his wives in the initial pages. After the bath, they go to bed together. One of the authors narrates how what happened in Laura's

bed cannot be expressed with words, but that the intensity of the image alone is enough to have utmost meaning: 'las palabras sobran [...] pero si se advierte que la luz es luz y la oscuridad es oscuridad y que tanto luz como oscuridad pertenecen a un mismo elemento descabellado' (103). This spectacle embodies an image of synthesis, a suggestion of perfect integration between the two bodies: 'inmóviles e impecables en la exasperación de la cercanía del final [...] perfectos, divinamente perfectos en el lienzo que nadie podría comprender sólo por verlo' (103). As a consequence of such fusion, both Moctezuma and Laura disappear. Instead of reading this disappearance negatively, as Pfeiffer ('Moctezuma' 503) or Mattalía (297) among other critics have, I will interpret her disappearance as having a positive effect. It constitutes an experience of ecstasy through the sexual act which enhances pleasure, transport and the freeing of both individuals: 'los dos encontraban alivio: él del dolor del parto en el que un trozo rebelde de tiempo lo había gestado y ella de la incomodidad natural de la vida' (103). In an echo of Laura and her Aztec husband in Elena Garro's 'La culpa es de los txacaltecas', Laura and Moctezuma disappear.⁸ Moctezuma is freed from the burden of modernity, from his catastrophic contact, coming back to his time. Laura transcends her materiality and is thus liberated from the burden of her body to become something bigger, part of all things and part of a desire to transmit history: she becomes part of the dust particles that, in one of the sub novels, are travelling with the wind.

There are sufficient clues to predict this resolution from the start. Before encountering Moctezuma, Laura felt that 'tengo el cuerpo devastado, el alma rota [...] hasta que ya no es nada más que viento' (42-3). She became whole when she met the Tlatoani, that is, she became whole while gaining historical knowledge. The entrance into the marvellous realm, be this surrealist or *Americano*, is supposed to free the individual by leading him to access a greater knowledge through an experience of integration. This is exactly what happened to Laura, 'porque él no raptó a Laura, él le abrió la puerta al tiempo, rompió para ella la puerta estúpida de su constitución individual dejando irse hacia el cielo, y el mar, y las estrellas, las barracas, las yerbas, las piedras, arena, aire, vacío, calor, sonido, nada' (109). As Laura disintegrates into these elements, she starts communicating with a new system, the natural world and thus the world that rules the Nahua cosmogony. This

⁸ Speaking of this disappearance in particular and of *Llanto* in general, Margo Glantz comments how 'la novela me remite a una doble referencialidad, la primera sería *Final del juego* de Cortázar, los juegos infantiles, el hormiguero, las galerías, los soplos, la administración de los venenos. La otra sería la de Elena Garro de 'La culpa', el final de la infancia y la traición, pero la traición vinculada a la épica, a la pérdida del reino' (Glantz, 'Boullosa' 11).

is not the stereotypical association of woman with nature, but a cultural conversion that Laura undergoes and which is made plausible by the novel's conception of time. For this conversion to be possible, one fictional author mentions how she chooses for her novel the idea of Nahua time, a conception without which Moctezuma's reincarnation would have not been possible:

novelaría la cosmovisión nahua: manera tan distinta de ver el mundo que es simplemente fantástica [...] en la fantasmería del mundo nahua es posible la reaparición de Moctezuma II [...] incluso con dos mujeres que se incineraron con él, pero que no resisten el paso, que se hacen arena apenas desaparecen. Porque el ciclo del tiempo se repite (67).

It is due to this repetition in the cycle of time that it is possible to consider, as happens in Garro's 'La culpa', Laura's return to the past and therefore her entering into mythical time, embodying one of Moctezuma's wives converted into dust particles. In this way, their encounter in the present comes to corroborate the element of 'objective chance': it was destiny ruled by a game of chance, as she was indeed one of his wives in the past.⁹ Boullosa's representation of time corresponds to the American vocabulary and vision, presenting similarities with Paz's Aztec time as eternal return in *Piedra de sol*, and particularly in the suggestion of entering mythical time through the sexual act, Carlos Fuentes' conception of 'Tiempo Mexicano' illustrated for example in 'Chac Mool' and *Terra nostra*. However, something crucial differentiates Boullosa's text from her male counterparts, and this is the strategic gender perspective that, like Garro, she has added onto this mythical time structure.

As a contemporary woman, Laura becomes a symbol for the fusion of the two cultures and different times that populate contemporary Mexican society. Now, who is the Mexican paradigm for the coalescence of two cultures, as well as the paradigm for contemporary Mexican women? La Malinche. According to Octavio Paz she is 'la Eva Mexicana (*Laberinto* 225) and therefore 'un ser excéntrico al margen de la historia universal' (*Laberinto* 203). Laura becomes a metaphor for La Malinche who is, like the dust particles, 'hueso y polvo [...] que pierde su nombre, no es nadie ya, se confunde con la nada, es la Nada. Y sin embargo es la atroz encarnación de la condición femenina' (Paz, *Laberinto* 224). After her disappearance, Laura's voice comes back to tell us how 'yo no debí hablar en ninguna de estas páginas, mi recuerdo soy, mi recuerdo danzando y *traicionero*, indomable [...] no

⁹ This also corresponds to Paz's envisioning of Aztec time. Thus he says how 'El azteca era tan poco responsable de sus actos como de su muerte. Espacio y tiempo estaban ligados y formaban una unidad inseparable [...]. Y este complejo de espacio-tiempo poseía virtudes y poderes propios, que influían y determinaban profundamente la vida humana. Nacer un día cualquiera, era pertenecer a un espacio, a un tiempo, a un color y a un destino' (*Laberinto* 191).

hay garganta que soporte mi voz, no hay garganta y *mi voz no suena, es el silencio*' (99, my emphasis). Laura becomes part of the 'hueso y polvo' excluded from universal history, she has become someone who has lost her voice and therefore she is no one, she is nothingness. However, this is a silence and an absence that runs through this novel reclaiming presence by whispering in the ears of the authors. It becomes 'la otra voz', the voice of inspiration, informing the authors of how to write about Moctezuma's death and therefore about that moment of Mexican history which has given birth to what contemporary Mexicans are: 'el polvo se transformó en la manera que el escritor tuvo de entender lo que el polvo le dice (36).

The fragments of the fictional authors who inform us about the travelling of the dust particles are nine, as nine are the muses. According to Reid, 'cada fragmento es como una reflexión de las musas acerca de la imposibilidad de recrear el entorno de Moctezuma' (*Reescritura* 135). If the dust particles are the scattered voices of the muses who are inspiring the author, the author realises that while Mexican women maintain that muse-like status, that mythical nature, they will not play a real role in history, their voice will not be heard. As Margo Glantz has put it, 'ser mexicana sería un desclasamiento definitivo, caer en el no ser: la existencia se define por una esencia negativa que en el caso de la mexicana es un camino hacia la nada: ser mujer y mexicana no sólo implica marginalidad, implica también desaparecer' (*Malinche* 282). And so in the novel, 'para ellas despertar fue desaparecer' (11).

How can the author listen to a murmur that did not have a mouth to speak? How could the body of woman as myth, as 'ídolo' get a legitimate place in history? It could not: 'y sin dejar de llorar pienso en la novela que yo hubiera querido escribir sobre este encuentro, la novela que las musas me decidieron imposible' (120). Because a part of history has been concealed in the shape of a negative myth, when the wind of history finally transmits its message is too late, the message is lost: '¿Qué palabra dijo que lo volvió a la nada? Dijo la palabra Fernando' (117-8). The message is the name of the first Mexican, born of Doña Marina and Hernán Cortés, but history cannot deliver it because 'ser hijos de la malinche supone una exclusión muy grave, no seguir el cauce de la historia, guardar una situación periférica' (Glantz, *Malinche* 282). Boullosa, as Garro did in 'La culpa es de los txacaltecas' touches upon the role women had played in Mexican history, embodying in La Malinche the symbol for the fusion of the two cultures and placing it as a central

problem for Mexican identity. Humanity in general and Mexicans in particular might continue to repress what they do not want to remember, 'porque el pasado que ella representaba estaba sellado para siempre, permaneciendo sellado e incomprensible' (117). In this way, 'el viento que representa a los dioses que no pudieron encarnar, las mujeres que no pudieron cruzar el tiempo [...] se estrelló en nada' (118), corroborating the nothingness expressed by Paz and confirmed by the previous words of Laura.

In the sea, the wind is about to drown and disappear, but a vision saves it, the vision of a spider that stands for the pubic hair of a woman who was enjoying sex in that place (115). However, a woman enjoying sex implies that she is owner of her own desires and according to Paz, 'ser ella mimada dueña de su deseo [...] es ser infiel a sí misma' (*Laberinto* 172). Yet in the novel, 'el vello púbico fue [...] a dar al mar y en lugar de hundirse, por su carácter de objeto con vida aunque sea objeto muerto, flotó sobre el mar y fue llevado hasta ahí' (116). As it continues travelling, the wind finds the rest of the fragments 'encontró dos piernas [...] los dedos desunidos y unidos esperando que el cuerpo que los había perdido apareciera en el medio del océano [...] el cuerpo descuartizado, el cuerpo incompleto' (116-17). That is, history finds the scattered body of woman. She is Moctezuma's favourite, she is Laura, she is the 'Mexican Eve', la Malinche, her vagina transformed into a mythical spider, her fragments devoid of subjectivity, waiting for the body to be whole. Interestingly, while referring to a very specific Mexican reality, history and culture, this scene lends itself to multiple connections with a surrealist aesthetic. To begin with, the fragments of a woman's body scattered in the sea presents us with a perfect and quite familiar surrealist image, as does the notion of her sex being compared to a spider.

In Carlos Fuentes, *Diana o la cazadora solitaria*, the narrator uses a metaphor taken from Buñuel to signify the female genitalia which finds an echo in Boullosa's metaphor: 'Luis Buñuel traía la idea del sexo [...] como costumbre de animales [...]. "El sexo" iba diciendo "es una araña peluda, una tarántula que todo lo devora, un hoyo negro del que nunca sale el que se entrega a él"' (173). Second, the notion of the muses as inspiring the authors to write, and the fact that some of these fragments have been named 'la otra voz', coincides with the name Paz has given to surrealist inspiration: 'Al imaginar, disolvemos sujeto y objeto, nos disolvemos nosotros mismos [...] Cada vez que oímos "la otra voz", cada vez que se produce el

encuentro inesperado, parece que nos oímos a nosotros mismos y vemos lo que ya habíamos visto. Nos parece regresar, volver a oír, recordar' (*Búsqueda* 62). Out of the inspiration provided by the women whose subjectivity is disintegrated in dust particles and out of the unexpected encounter between Laura and Moctezuma, readers find a similar surrealist dissolution between object and subject in the 'objeto con vida aunque sea objeto muerto' that we find in the sea. Therefore, these disintegrated women have returned to work like 'the other voice', as an inspiration to the fictional author to write herstories.

In fact, the spider denies its objectified surrealist condition and the silent and nothingness qualities of the Mexican mythical woman and comes back, like Garro's Laura in 'La culpa', to reclaim a proper subject voice. Hence, despite the negative connotations, *Llanto* suggests a final stratagem to open a door for hope. The wind of history takes the dust particles to the sea, and this is where the fragments are waiting for the body to appear. Now, Gilbert and Gubar comment upon the sea as 'lying beyond the limits of the cities where men make history, one of those magical shores that mark the margin where nature and culture intersect. Here power can come from outside, from the timelessness or from the 'Great Time' that is free of historical constraints' (102-3). *Llanto's* mythical time is free from historical constraints and its seashore is definitely magical. The narration creates a connection between the body of history, the body of woman and the body of the novel: all are scattered, fragmented, deceitfully treated, all need to be re-written, not into the nine fragments, not as the nine muses, but into a whole body, searching for an alternative mythology. The dissolution of woman into the sea marks another rebirth, another cycle that will glue the scattered body that the wind of history finds in the ocean. Hence, the fragmented, mythical, muse-like female body so dear to the surrealists, so explored by Paz, represents here a journey towards rebirth, an emergence of an alternative history out of patriarchal culture. A body that has indeed taken shape with the ink used to write this novel: 'si *exagerara*, diría que el polvo, la ceniza, la arenilla se transformó en tinta, en tinta solamente' (36). One author has understood the unarticulated voice of those who have been represented in forgetfulness and has taken the task of demythologising the ascribed meaning of La Malinche by asserting her communicative role and simultaneously highlighting how this demythologisation is essential for the present problematic regarding Mexican identity. Thus in contrast with Paz's words 'He olvidado tu nombre, Melusina/Laura, Isabel, Perséfone, María/ tienes todos los rostros y ninguno'

(*Piedra de sol* 60) this text stands as an echo of Castellano's call for another way to be: 'Debe haber otro modo de ser que no se llame Safo/ ni Mesalina ni María Egipcíaca ni Magdalena ni Clemencia Isaura [...] Otro modo de ser humano y libre. Otro modo de ser' (*Poesía no eres tú* 134).

In this fictional space, 'aquello que no pudo sostenerse con cuerpo o memoria de mujer ahora se había convertido en lo que deseaba hacer historia' (36). That is, if all Mexicans are 'hijos de la Malinche' (Paz, *Laberinto* 202, Glantz, *Malinche* 282) there is a need to re-evaluate woman's role in order to comprehend current national identity issues. Thus these metaphorical, textual and body fragments can be read as a metaphor for the inconsistency of the language in which women have been forced to tell their stories. The rebirth of woman's history enacted through the sea connects with the rebirth of the repressed memories of the Mexican past embodied in Moctezuma, hoping to arrive at that acceptance of the past that constructs and determines us. It is also through the sea and in relationship to a circular and mythical structure that another woman comes to Mexico, the protagonist of the novel I will examine next, *Duerme*. Like these scattered women, Claire's story takes the form of the chronicle to open a debate around the difficulties posed by Colonial identity and historical experience that was started in *Llanto*.

SECTION TWO: *DUERME*, THE METAMORPHOSES

El delirio ha renovado el origen mítico de la mujer y del hombre / ¿Qué puede esperarse? Ahora será diferente todo comportamiento (Boullosa, *La Delirios* 16).

Historically located at the height of the Spanish expansion in the New World, *Duerme* illustrates the period of Mexican history that comes about as a consequence of a key event narrated in *Llanto*: Moctezuma's death and with it, the fall of the Mexican empire and the inauguration of the colonial historical period characterised by *mestizaje*. The novel narrates the arrival in sixteenth-century Nueva España of a French pirate, a woman in disguise named Claire Fleurcy. Kidnapped by a Spanish earl to stand for him and save him from the Gallows, Claire is at her arrival kept in captivity. Among the people attending her, there is an Indian woman who, soon after she discovers that Claire is a woman, decides to save her life.¹⁰ The main plot of the novel narrates her adventures in colonial Mexico City and as she did in *Llanto*,

¹⁰ Boullosa explains the creation of Claire in an interview with De Beer: 'You might recall that in *Son vacas, somos puercos*, there is a character on the ship who dresses as a man who wants to participate in the adventures of the new world. Cheating a bit with the time sequence I took this character and have her arrive in Mexico City in the XVI century' (185).

Boullosa adopts here the role of the chronicler. As Carlos Fuentes has commented, *Duerme* is 'parte de la crónica no escrita de las Indias que pertenece al enorme no dicho y no escrito del continente Americano. Carmen Boullosa le da voz mediante una estratagema maravillosa, que es la nominación' (*Reforma* 34).

The majority of studies on this novel coincide in analysing the complexities of 'hybrid identity' (Piroto-Quintero, 'Cuerpo' 267-75, 'Strategic' n.p.) from a postmodern perspective. Giovanna Minardi has examined it in terms of masquerade and loss of identity, placing the novel in the discursive context of postmodernism (153-61). Domenella has considered it as a literary example of 'fluctuating identities' within the wider context of the Mexican novel (14-20). Taylor has sought the relationship between the body and the city as the novel's means to challenge colonial power ('Geographical' 225-40). Many have focused on its sources, flagging up the text's parallelism with Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (Sepúlveda 77-9), the influences of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the story of female pirate Mary Read (Gutiérrez, 'Vertiente' 145-51).¹¹ Some have focused on the significance of the epigraphs as indicators of the wider historical and cultural background (Ulloa and Álvarez Ulloa 103-11), others on the diversity of novelistic language (Estrada 147-56), on the problems of memory and historiography (Kroll 105) and on the implicit textual relations between the female body, cross dressing and the Mexican nation (Seydel 162-9) (*Oropesa* 99-100). The majority of these studies also focus on the intertextual aspect of the novel, as well as on the fusion of various novelistic genres such as the chronicle, the fairy tale (*Sleeping Beauty*), the myth, the fable, the novel of adventures and the picaresque (Ortega 131-36).

While it is certain that the text presents as a core issue how the markers of gender and race constitute identity, these are not explored through realistic patterns of thought. The present study places an emphasis on the certainty that the only way in which gender and race acquire a transgressive value and contest the status quo is through the introduction of a second level of reality that opens up after the protagonist's death experience. Now, departing from an understanding of this experience in surrealist terms, and analogous to the reading of *Llanto*, I will examine how *Duerme* employs a stylistic and thematic use of surrealist aesthetics to elaborate a representation of the culture, the history and the (marvellous) reality of the

¹¹ The story of the daughter of a prostitute who enrolls as a soldier in Flanders. This is explained by Lisabeth Paravinsi-Gebet in 'Las Aventuras de Anne Bonny y Mary Read: El travestismo y la historia de la piratería femenina en el Caribe' (see Gutiérrez, *Vertiente* 150).

Mexican part of the Americas. In *Duerme*, the surrealist experience does not take the form of the fortuitous encounter, but it is rather understood through Walter Benjamin's definition of surrealist experience as *profane illumination*. Rather than submitting to surrealist theories, the novel playfully deals with them while simultaneously articulating why elements of Mexican indigenous communities and folklore might have been appealing to the European surrealists, specially to those like Michaux or Artaud, who spent periods of time among indigenous tribes. The dialogue between the two aesthetic approaches, the surrealist and Carpentier's, is established by the same elements that founded this dialogue in *Llanto*. That is, from the way in which a surrealist experience triggers the description of a world characterised by the indigenous cosmogony, circular time, a mythical structure and a reference to magical modes of knowledge. However, as she did in *Llanto*, Boullosa playfully and strategically combines, merges and 'destroys' both the surrealist and Carpentier's approaches towards a marvellous reality, providing a parodic revision of surrealist love, mestizaje, the mythical woman and colonialism while inviting us to reflect upon the complexity that these notions have both for literary creation and Mexican colonial identity.

TEXTUAL FOUNDATIONS, MAGICAL RITES

The discovery of a female body under the French man's clothing provokes an interesting reaction in the Indian woman who is attending Fleury. She perceives this improbability as a fact, that is, instead of thinking that Claire is wearing a disguise, she rather accepts the unlikelihood that 'este hombre es sin ropas mujer' (20). The Indian assumes that s-he is still a man, or that Claire has a non-fixed, double gender identity. In response to this awkward combination of identities in her, that the Indian, Doña Inés, decides to save her life: 'Usted que no eres hombre ni mujer, que no eres nahua ni español ni mestizo, ni Conde ni Encomendado, no mereces la muerte' (28). Claire's body already looks like a crossroads where different genders, languages, races and social classes meet. The Indian's woman perception of Claire's multiple identity is central to the novel, for it is this otherness which *causes* the experience that will ultimately transform her persona, moving her body and therefore her autodiegetic narration into a different reality.

Soon after her discovery, the Indian woman performs a ritual on Claire:

Me clava con todas sus fuerzas la piedra en mi pecho desnudo, el izquierdo [...]. En la herida abierta deja caer agua del cántaro [...] y, a pesar de forzar los bordes de la profunda herida a una posición que la

debiera hacer sangrar más, la sangre deja de brotar. Veo como una vena, en un gesto excepcional, bebe del agua a tragos (20).

Through this ritual, Claire's blood has been substituted for the purest water in the Valley of Mexico, water that has not been touched by the Spanish and that has closed 'la puerta que le correspondía para entrar al mundo de los muertos' (128). The ritual is the first phase of Claire's death experience, which will be consummated at the gallows, where she actually confronts death and becomes fully aware of her transformation and its effects. In Chapter One and throughout the last section of the Chapter on Varo, I argued how the surrealist marvellous possessed two levels of definition, the trance experience of revelation and its subsequent conversion into art or its employment for the transformation of human consciousness and society. It was then concluded that it was both internal and external to the subject: as a human condition and as an aesthetic representation. *Duerme* illustrates these two phases. First, an epiphany or *profane illumination*, (consequence of the magical ritual) and second, the use of both ritual and experience to construct a marvellous creation (Claire's unreal body and the text) which, as we shall soon see, not only transforms her consciousness but also aims for the transformation of society itself.¹²

Now, the text places the source of Claire's experience in the Nahua cosmogony, reconstructing the indigenous culture prior to the Spanish invasion. Claire's experience refers to an event whose reality conforms to the magical indigenous vision, which is deeply related to Mexican culture and which simultaneously alludes to one of the oldest myths the conquistadors created around Latin America. The water on the one hand is closely related to Mexican culture, as Mexico itself means fountain, or 'manadero' (Ulloa and Álvarez Ulloa 104).¹³ On the other, it holds an important mythical charge, evoking the myth of 'La Fuente de la Eterna Juventud', which next to 'El Dorado', was one of the most famous legends that inspired many explorers to venture into the lands of the American continent (see Carpentier, *Ensayos* 120). Using these mythical motifs that, as seen in the first chapter, constituted the basis of the first discourse of Americanism, and historically recreating the colonial era in which Hispanic reality starts to merge with the Nahua cosmogony, *Duerme* can be seen to enact the vocabulary of *lo real maravilloso americano*.

¹² In fact, towards the end of the novel, Claire's consciousness has changed in a way in which she has become fully politically compromised and wants to start a revolution against the Spaniards, presenting more surrealist echoes in terms of the poetic praxis desired by the French movement.

¹³ According to Ulloa and Álvarez Ulloa, the epigraph of Cervantes de Salazar introduces the reader to a wider cultural context, showing how water has historically had great importance in Mexican culture (Ulloa 104).

Boullosa plays once more with surrealist experiences as a way to make visible the extraordinary aspect of Mexican cultural and historical reality. This simultaneously shows the interconnectedness of both notions, since, while the sources that cause Claire's metamorphoses lie far away from any European background, these nonetheless present the form and effects of an experience that was appealing to, and described by, surrealism. That is, on the one hand and like in *Llanto*, Boullosa's fictional employment of the indigenous cosmogony does not exactly refer to Carpentier's concept, for Claire, like the modern women of twentieth-century Mexico City, is bounded by western rationality and therefore, lacking 'faith', experiences the ritual with surprise and shock. This, together with the metafictional aspect of Claire's narration and Ocejo's overtaking of this narration in the last chapters, emphasises the text's artificiality as a literary construction, what rather corresponds to the surrealist emphasis on constructed objects. Yet, readers do find Carpentier's American empathy in the form of the Mexican chronicle, in the depiction of indigenous forms of knowledge, 'primitive' magic, and in the representation of a divided reality that is deepened in a new aspect through the indigenous cosmogony. The collective indigenous community have faith, they accept and indeed cause the extraordinary. As the novel advances and Claire's body metamorphoses, her rationality changes accordingly, and she gradually starts sharing the Nahua cosmovision. Hence, the two approaches towards the marvellous converge in Boullosa's representation, a fusion that can be seen as symbolised in the water. The water 'es agua de los lagos de tiempos antiguos [...] el agua tiene de cada lago, dulce o salado, de cada canal, aquí revueltas' (28). The water signifies synthesis, mixture and therefore, as Ulloa and Álvarez Ulloa have noted, it becomes a metaphor for *mestizaje* (108), but also of the combination within Mexican society of seemingly contradictory beliefs, chronology and religions as result of the mixture between the indigenous people and the Spanish. These contradictory beliefs, as I have already pointed out, is one of the key aspects of Carpentier's terminology. On the other, it has the effect of provoking that state so much yearned for by surrealism, the blurring between the conscious and the unconscious, a state of lucid dreaming into which Claire is transported: 'Ya no sé si tengo los ojos abiertos o cerrados, sólo alcanzo a percibir una luz móvil [...] veo con dificultad, borrosamente, todo se me desdibuja' (20).

Up to this point a narrative tone has been establishing itself. The oneiric and the tactile permeate the tone of the whole narration. However, what is the narrative itself based on? According to Mojica,

The exchange of French blood for Mexican water is perhaps the single most important narrative device on more than one level in the novel. It is an all-unifying device both anecdotally and hermeneutically. Indeed, in order for the story to proceed, the enabling flow of this water is necessary, since it is in its miraculous powers that Claire finds what she needs to withstand death on the gallows (556).

If we accept that the magical ritual and Claire's confrontation with death at the gallows constitute two phases in the creation of her unreal body and therefore of her 'autodiegetic narration' (Estrada 147), then it is the combination of these two stages that constitutes the foundation of the text as it is presented to readers. That is, the narration surges forth from Claire's need to explain to herself what has happened to her: 'Y no consigo dejar este gesto de poner en palabras cuanto me va sucediendo. ¿Para qué lo hago? ¿Para qué narrarme a mí lo que va sucediendo?' (21). Like *Llanto*, it presupposes a self-conscious act of writing and as such, it highlights its quality as a literary construction. Hence, as happened to the surrealist subject after experiencing surreality, or to Carpentier at the sight of *lo real maravilloso americano*, the protagonist uses her experience as a source of literary inspiration. Firstly, the magic serves the exigencies of the plot, for there would be no narration if Claire were to be dead and neither would we have the same narration were Claire not a living-dead. Secondly, it is through those magical acts that the text is able to present us with a supra reality, where the combination of *lo real maravilloso* with surrealist experiences functions as a subversive strategy; for it is the construction of this marvellous body that makes possible the novelistic transgression of gender and race as determined by the status quo.

THE AWAKENING OF THE DEAD

According to Walter Benjamin, 'where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the *individual past* combine with material of the *collective past*. *The rituals with their ceremonies* [...] kept producing the amalgamation of these two elements of memory over and over again' (*Illuminations* 159, my emphasis). Undergoing this experience, 'the true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an *image which flashes up* at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again' (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 255, my emphasis). Now, while Claire is being hanged, an image of Mexican *past* history flits through her mind, the old city of Temixtitlan: 'veo en mis ojos cerrados la ciudad antigua [...]

la camino de aquí a allá [...] con asombro [...] visito el palacio del Tlatoani [...] pasan por mis ojos escenas de grotescas batallas. Veo en ellas a los españoles, sus armaduras, los trajes de los guerreros indios' (34). However, the contents of Mexico's pre-columbine collective past are in this experience combined with Claire's individual memories:

Recuerdo a Mamá [...] la veo haciéndome usar ropa de varón desde muy niña [...] y me veo viéndola muerta [...] veo la manera en la que abusan de mí cuando [...] él descubre que soy mujer [...] *en el relámpago* [...] me veo como si yo fuera otra [...] y me veo desdibujándome, como si fuera a irme de mí para siempre (35, my emphasis).

Claire's vision shares here the same characteristics as Benjamin's definition of experience: death made Claire to 'live' a moment composed of individual and collective memories with no major distinction drawn between them, as both are fused in her consciousness at one single moment: when she is swinging on the scaffold.¹⁴ Furthermore, the text employs the language of light ('relámpago') to describe the quality of Claire's experience. In Chapter One I have shown how, consistent with a vocabulary of light, Benjamin explained the shock experience as *profane illumination*, an experience of intoxication that, although violent, has positive connotations of integration for the subject. Claire is condemned to a violent death, yet this provokes, like Benjamin's experience, a sudden change that simultaneously has a pleasurable effect of integration, of synthesis: 'He vuelto al tamaño de mi cuerpo [...]. El agua sigue corriendo por mis venas como el viento que corre en un pasaje. Su suave paso reviste mi cuerpo y mi memoria, agrupando todo de manera distinta, las cosas, los sentimientos, las partes de mí misma' (33-4). Like Benjamin's, Claire's experience is characterised by the transgression of representational boundaries, for it has indeed transgressed the boundaries of death. It also seems to have the same effects upon the subject, for this experience is going to develop Claire's subjectivity as well as make her acquire a revolutionary consciousness.

Now, when Benjamin came to use the vocabulary of awakening to refer to the changes produced in the subject by *profane illumination*, he developed this notion of awakening from surrealism, proclaiming that the writings which announce the *profane illumination* most vigorously are Breton's *Nadja* and Aragorn's *Paris Peasant*.¹⁵

¹⁴ This happens once more in the text: 'Aunque parezca inverosímil artificio, me ocurren en el mismo lugar y momento tres diversos sucesos. Pero no es artificio, es la verdad... Las tres las vivo al mismo tiempo, pero ¿cómo puedo contármelas?' (51)

¹⁵ How this modelling has been produced has been extensively commented upon by Cohen. She asks why, given Benjamin's libidinal notion of critique he uses a term that, within the metaphors of the Enlightenment, means a world where relations are contemplated in complete clarity, where the subject accedes to things as they are. Given that this is not Benjamin's intention, she explains his use of the term as an adoption from Surrealism's utopian

He thus argues: ‘Can it be that awakening is the synthesis whose thesis is the dream consciousness and whose antithesis is the dream? Then the moment of awakening would be identical with the ‘Now of Recognizability’ in which things put on their true Surrealist face’ (Benjamin, *N 3a*, 3).¹⁶ Benjamin does not suggest that awakening is the same as waking, but rather a ‘moment that, in its access to repressed processes, must be conceived of as close to the form of experience that reigns in the world of dream’ (Cohen 54). Claire’s vision also appears as a dream consciousness that accesses the repressed processes of Mexican history (the fall of the Mexica empire) as well as her repressed childhood memories (her mother’s and her prostitution). Besides, it is an experience that has changed her forever, for after facing death she has become eternal. She has put on her ‘true surrealist face’, but in her case, and as happened to Consuelo in Garro’s *La casa junto al río*, this is a surrealist face deeply connected with Mexican culture. First, the coexistence of the living and the dead is in Mexico a common practice, as ‘Día de Muertos’ well symbolises. Second, as Taylor has noted, Claire’s experience of the Aztec city recalls Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s description of the conquistadors’ arrivals in Mexico city, ‘taking up a common trope of colonial writings on Mexico city’ (232-3). Third, Boullosa refers back to the Mexican literary canon, as her protagonist recalls the ambiguity and otherness of Juan Preciado, the living-dead narrator of Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* who, although in a very different way, also spoke to readers from the beyond. *Duerme* establishes in a distinct, yet equally fruitful way to Garro’s *La casa junto al río*, a relationship between surrealist experience and the vocabulary of the Latin American marvellous reality, as her surrealist experience of ‘awakening’ not only interlinks with the collective dream of Mexican history, but also with its contemporary literature and colonial chronicles.

This experience of awakening constitutes a pathway for the narrative’s exploration of gender and racial identity. As we have seen in *Llanto*, Boullosa does not use ‘surrealist experiences’ as a way to give birth to images of aesthetic consolation and this is why they indeed reflect the political praxis Benjamin wanted to convey in his notion of *profane illumination* in a way in which surrealist experiences and images failed to do. As I argued in Chapter One, Benjamin’s idea of transcendence cannot be embodied in the pretensions of art for art’s sake, but rather

representations of individual transfiguration, and of his representation of the products of the superstructure as a dream (Cohen 52-4).

¹⁶ “The Now of Recognizability” is the moment where the surrealist recognises the repressed experience surging from the shock encounter that can also transfigure a drab Parisian street (Cohen 55).

in that which is tangible, that has a history, 'for histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further' (*Reflections* 190). We have also seen how this was Benjamin's main critique of surrealism and how Carpentier overcame it in *El reino de este mundo* by rooting the magical within the real, the historically specific. Boulosa realises a similar enterprise to Carpentier insofar as she places the mysteriousness, the impossible and the marvellous within an identifiable historical and social context that endows her narration with credibility and allows the reader to get in direct contact with the historical reality of the chronicles. Furthermore, this marvellous context equally engages with a tangible political discourse, as the creation of Claire's marvellous body serves to explore important concerns regarding racial and gender identity, the construction of colonial power and the relevance all these issues have within contemporary Mexican society.

Claire's *profane illumination* first involved the collective memory of Mexican history, more concretely that of pre-colonial times and the Spanish invasion. This is the collective historical moment when the discourse of *mestizaje* and bastardisation was born in Mexico. Secondly, she saw how her mother dressed her as a man as a strategy of survival to escape prostitution and male abuse: the individual memory where gender began to be for Claire a performative issue. Now, one might ask why is it effective to explore identity through a non-realistic narrative? On the one hand, the magical ritual eliminated Claire's biological functions: she does not age, she has no blood, she cannot die. It has blurred all predictable existing relations between biological sex, gender, race, pure blood, and identity. The surreal experience of *profane illumination* has divested Claire of her material reality, her body has been transformed into a cultural product whose content is now marked by her death experience at the gallows (the Aztec past and gender performance). Through this imaginary mechanism, the narration creates an effective position from which to demythologise existing ideological constructs underlying not only 'race' and gender, but as I shall now examine, as a stratagem to contest the vision of a marvellous reality (be this surrealist or American) that is rooted in the associations between love, nature and the female body.

PERFORMING *AMOUR FOU*

Claire abhors the idea of being a woman. When her mother dies she begins to carry out 'el mismo oficio de mamá, con las piernas de la misma forma que ella, también abiertas siempre' (35). As a low-class woman in European Baroque society

who has taken up prostitution, she feels '*sucia* [...] siempre yo aparte, *otra*, distinta, repudiada, repulsiva' (36, my emphasis). Her female body has become an object of consumption and exchange, a commodity that Claire wishes to eliminate. Since she enlists as a pirate, Claire's femininity is rejected by her as 'the abject', as that which has been disqualified from the body (Kristeva), dismissed as dirty, rendered by Claire as the other (see Butler 133):

Yo me siento humillada así expuesta. Creí que ya lo había vencido, que nunca más volvería a ser esta mi desgracia, el cuerpo expuesto, ofrecido (como si él fuera mi persona) al mundo";Yo no soy lo que ves!", quiero gritarle. [...] Ella ve que no soy lo que quiero ser [...] Por más que lo rehúya será siempre mi condenación (19).

Claire's identification of her body as the abject establishes its own boundaries, shaping her subjectivity and identity. In order to survive, Claire adopts the strategy of dressing and acting as a man, a decision that already presents gender as a category in process, a disguise and a metamorphosis. This is now further complicated. The surreal experience resulted in a simultaneity one cannot possess, being dead and alive. Yet, it also becomes the embodiment of Claire's desires, the elimination of the biological woman within her. Without blood she has no menstruation and therefore she cannot possibly give birth: 'Recuerdo que hace mucho que no sangro, hace muchas semanas que no hay sangre menstrual en mis ropas. Meses. Desde que estoy en México' (111). Hence, her body is revealed to be a cultural (undefined) body, 'a receptacle for different inscriptions' (Pirrot-Quintero 'Cuerpo' 264). Her corporality is now transformed into the type of body Judith Butler designates as 'a body which is not a 'being', but a variable boundary [...] a signifying practice within a cultural field' (139). Now, as the previous quotation points out, this happens 'desde que estoy en México', and thus the text places once more an emphasis on the importance of Mexican geographical surroundings and specific reality for the construction of Claire's mythical body.¹⁷

Claire's body not only suggests gender as a 'corporeal style',¹⁸ but her separation between an inner and outer gender-marked psyche -that is, her inner marked psyche on the one hand, and how her gender is being read externally by others- establishes an interesting dialogue with a key surrealist precept. First of all, external and internal reality only make sense on the basis of a mediating limit which aims to

¹⁷ In this respect Taylor's comments are insightful, as she mentions how the water transferred into Claire's body is a 'geographical fluid', a 'fluid that is or represents the city itself' ('Geographical' 231).

¹⁸ Term used by Butler to describe gender as an act, both intentional and performative, where performative suggests a contingent construction of meaning (139).

produce coherence within the subject. This coherence is determined by 'cultural orders, which sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from *the other*' (Butler 134, emphasis hers). In daily life, one needs such coherence to attain emotional and psychic stability. Namely, we need a boundary that differentiates ourselves from our own image in the mirror or from the woman who is walking down the street, giving coherence to our mind and body, constituting us as a person. One of the main aims of surrealism was precisely to erase that boundary. When in the chapter on Varo I referred to surrealist painting, it was explained how most surrealist images were often characterised by breaking the Cartesian divide between mind and body, as well as by blurring the barrier between consciousness and unconsciousness, the inner and the outer, subject and object.

Interestingly, Butler argues how 'drag fully subverts the distinction between *inner and outer psychic space* as well as it effectively mocks the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity' (137, my emphasis). Claire's transvestism subverts and blurs the distinction between the external and the internal, for her body has now many layers, one superimposed on the other. In certain situations she talks like a pirate, not matching with her momentary identity as an educated Spanish earl. In others, she appears like an Indian woman while being white, or she behaves like a man while being a woman. In all cases, her external actions are never in accordance with her internal identity. In short, there is never coherence between what *she looks like* and how she *acts/talks*, between how she *feels* and what *she is*. In fact, since her experience has erased her biological body, this coherence will never exist: the difference between the inner and the outer has no mediating boundary within Claire.

The same rejection of dualistic formulations between an inner and outer psychic space that concerns surrealist images is evoked here, as well as the emphasis on the mythical body of woman, but in this case is strategically employed to suggest drag, a mockery of the concept of a true gender identity. Thus, like the representation of androgyny and gender masquerade discussed in Varo's art, Boullosa's text contests notions that have been of primary importance for surrealism, the breaking of the Cartesian divide, the mythical woman and the figure of the androgyne as a means of talking about body politics. Boullosa avoids falling into an abstract, alchemical notion of the androgyne, as she is now referring to a tangible reality, which belongs to a history and the lives of certain people. This might be the situation of

transvestites, hermaphrodites or transsexuals, real subjects who do not necessarily act accordingly with what they 'are', or who look at themselves in the mirror and realise how what they see is not what they 'are' or feel. Boullosa thus inflects with a gender marker the creation of a marvellous reality through a narrative tactic that displays 'the reconceptualization of [gender] identity as an *effect*, that is, as *produced or generated*' (Butler 147, emphasis hers).

The novel continues to explore this 'crisis of male and female categories' (Garber 17) in relationship with love and classical mythology. When Claire is ill, her room is turned into a theatre stage. There, her friend Ocejo performs the play inspired in the eighth song of *The Odyssey* (Gutiérrez, *Vertiente* 149).¹⁹ Yet, the myth that gives name to what we today understand as 'hermaphrodite' and which becomes the main corollary of Ocejo's rewriting, can be found in Book IV of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Hermaphroditism is presented by Ovid as a punishment that Aphrodite and Hermes inflict on those who bathe in the magic fountain.²⁰ Ocejo's and therefore Homer and Ovid's myths work as a metatextual allegory for Claire's narration. Nonetheless, while Homer and Ovid place an emphasis on punishment for adultery and see gender ambiguity as a doom, Claire's narration overlooks adultery and presents gender ambiguity as a tool to escape punishment and death. While in Ovid's there is a sense of the water losing its purity and weakening the subject by making men half-female and women half-male, in *Duerme* gender transgression is what incites the Indian woman to save Claire and fill her with the purest of waters, serving to strengthen Claire and endowing her with a freedom she did not enjoyed before. If the old myth scorns androgyny, adultery and hermaphroditism, Boullosa's text parodies such scorning through its theatricality and revindicates the positive connotations these might have for the subject.

The Italian woman who plays the part of Aphrodite in Ocejo's myth continuously mentions her desire to be Iphis. The myth of Iphis and Ianthe is also

¹⁹ Aphrodite and Ares are caught in bed by Helios, who tells Hephaestus (Aphrodite's husband), about his discovery. Hephaestus thus weaves a net 'fina como la tela de araña, y resistente como la Armadura de Aquiles' (104) to capture the couple and inflict a punishment on them. Aphrodite is 'atrapada, presa, humillada, expuesta' (105) at the sight of the male gods. Now, from Homer's version we know that her punishment was to offer her body to other men, among them Hermes, a union from which Hermaphrodite was born.

²⁰ Hermaphrodite caused passionate desire in a nymph called Salmacis, a love he refused. One day that he was swimming in her pool, she chased him and pulled him to the depths of the pool, asking the gods to unite their bodies. They thus became a single body with two sexes. Aphrodite and Hermes, hearing the cry of their son, decided that 'whoso in these waters bathes a man, emerge half woman, weakened instantly' (Ovid 85). Interestingly, as happens with Claire's water, this water is described by Ovid as pure, limpid; 'crystal clear' (83).

found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (220-3).²¹ When Iphis grows up she continues to dress as a man to save her life from her father's hand. Soon, a marriage is arranged between her and Ianthe, and she falls in love with her future wife. Iphis looks for examples in nature in order to find a passion similar to hers but 'cows never yearn for cows, nor mares for mares.../ a female never fires a female's love' (Ovid 222). Observing how her passion appears 'contrary to nature' and compelled to 'love as every woman ought to love' (Ovid 222) Iphis asks the gods to transform her into a man. Boullosa's re-writing of this myth has a clear-cut interpretation. Like Iphis, the Italian woman was confused at her erotic wishes, aware that her female body was the cause that her desires were falling outside the 'natural order of things'. She also sensed the obligation of becoming a man to 'love as she ought', revealing her entrapment within a system of compulsory heterosexuality.

Now, if Ovid's Iphis metamorphosed into a man, Boullosa's rewriting allows the two women to become sexually intimate: 'antes de que me diera cuenta, ella me estaba propinando caricias donde menos debe tocarse a nadie' (114). The scene leaves clear that the Italian is no longer ashamed of her erotic desires, affirming that hers is not an 'unnatural passion' or confusion, but that women can actually feel sexual desire for other women and consummate it. Iphis' myth refers to Claire's own life, since both used transvestism as a strategy of survival, but it is also an allegory of the Italian woman's life, who cannot openly display her lesbianism in sixteenth-century Italian/Mexican society and that is now escaping her internment and make herself erotically self-sufficient. Ocejo's metatextual rewriting of these myths serves to parody, on the one hand, the notion of a fixed gender identity said to be rooted in nature and the biological body, and interestingly, it does so from a male perspective. On the other, it shows how an apparent 'fixed' gender identity is in many cases a consequence of compulsory heterosexuality. Boullosa's parody, written from a critical distance, evokes the mythical pattern that we have seen as characteristic of the novels of the 'Boom', evoking some of the oldest versions of the marvellous that I have discussed in Chapter One, Greek mythology and the fairy tale (*Sleeping Beauty* and *Puss in Boots*). However, her deliberate choice of a mythical pattern serves to re-write the archetypal vision of the mythical woman and her

²¹ Ligdus and Telethusa are about to have a child. However, Ligdus threatens to kill the child if this is born female: 'si por casualidad es una niña tu hija, devuelvela de inmediato [...] a la oscuridad de la muerte' (115). Telethusa is advised by the goddess Isis to play false her husband's order and following her instructions, she dresses Iphis as a man: 'Nazco mujer, pero varón me anuncian, para arrancarme de la precoz tumba' (115).

role within heterosexual love, while simultaneously endowing fluidity to fixed corporeal categories.

The two myths serve to translate into allegorical language reflections in the domain of love, and more specifically the way it is conceptualised, establishes several correlations with Breton's *amour fou*. Throughout the previous chapters, it has been argued how in both surrealist and twentieth-century Latin American prose, one often finds the idea of woman's love as the 'ventana al absoluto' (Paz), the ultimate enigma, the marvellous answer to the mysteries of life and existence. Perhaps the sole difference was the 'form' the object of desire took. That is, the appeal to culturally different women. In opposition to the modern, city woman of Breton's *Nadja* or Aragon's *The Libertine*, we have seen Carpentier and Paz developing a metaphor of woman in consonance with the American landscape, culture and folklore, such as the reductive distinction drawn between Mouche and Rosario in Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*, between Pola and La Maga in *Rayuela*, or woman as Aztec goddess in Paz's *Libertad bajo palabra*. These representations of woman, as different as they might be, all ascribe to the essence of *amour fou*, that is, to the idea that 'because of the feeling it provokes, love alone opens the door to the unknown [...] what the intelligence learns can remain separate from love, but true understanding, true knowledge, cannot' (Mabille 34).

Trying to understand this obsession with woman's poetic representations, I arrive at the conclusion that it must come from the romantic belief that one day the poet will meet the woman of his dreams, her presence coming out of nowhere, as a gift that is brought to him with unsettling signs to be interpreted. It must come from the belief that when this happens, she will open for him the doors of the great mystery: 'Eva y Cipris concentran el misterio del corazón del mundo' (Darío in Paz, *Laberinto* 203). Now, within surrealist love, one finds two approximations, the romantic and the scientific. The first incorporates the belief that the fire of love possesses a life-changing potential, surging forth in the romantic encounter with the right person. The second is the scientific conception that can be found in a book like *The Selfish Gene*.²² That is, that a man has to find the perfect woman, the perfect

²² Dawkins' theory in his best selling book, comes to say that 'We are survival machines--robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes. (10) [...] whole classes of organisms may be better at evolving than others. Of course, the evolving that we are talking about here is still the same old evolution, mediated via selection on genes' (40). This idea is similar to the chicken-egg argument, if we consider the egg first and thus the chicken as the egg's means to make more eggs. Dawkins considers biological organisms as 'vehicles' or 'vessels', where genes are the ones who form such organisms in order to acquire molecular resources and keep on cloning themselves.

genes, to continue the propagation of the species. The woman acts thus as the vessel where he can place his seed, enhancing the evolution of genes and procreation. This idea is also found in Breton's *Mad Love*. The book, while stressing all throughout 'the overwhelming power and frightening effect of surrealist love as it partakes of the arational marvelous' (Caws, *Mad Love* 14) ends with the famous letter to Breton's daughter Aube in which love is actually conceptualised in the vein of the scientific vision. Thus he says how 'this blind aspiration towards the best would suffice to justify love as I think of it, absolute love, as the only principle for *physical and moral selection* which can guarantee that human witness, *human passage*, shall not have taken place in vain' (117, my emphasis).²³ Is that the meaning of life, the great secret? Maybe so, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of my study. In both cases, the romantic and the scientific, love articulates the wonder of being, of feeling alive, of escaping from solitude and thus of attaining a sense of communion with the surrounding world. Yet, while love might pursue beauty, truth, creativity and desire, it does not *necessarily* have to pursue procreation, since not all types of love conform to the heterosexual rule this scientific conception embraces, nor do all couples decide, for that matter, to procreate.

Boulosa's novel responds knowingly to this dual conception of love. Looking first at the romantic approximation, one finds the demythologisation of the love goddess par excellence, Aphrodite. She comes to represent a symbol of passion, beauty, femininity, sexuality and desire; she is the embodiment of love in its feminine form, mentioned on innumerable occasions by both Latin American and surrealist poets. According to Gilbert and Gubar: 'her sea birth places her between the earth and the sea. Naked yet immortal, she moves with ease between natural and supernatural, human and inhuman, nature and culture [...] she is associated with sunset and sunrise, the liminal hours of awakening or drowsing that mediate between night and day, dream and reality' (113). As a figure related to water, beauty, immortality, the supernatural, dream and awakening, not only the Italian woman is evoked in this embodiment, but one can easily recognise Claire's characteristics. Now, Claire's sexual inclinations are never made explicit until the end of the novel, and although she could now be bisexual, the only thing readers know at this stage is that: 'Verdad es que yo nunca he amado. Nunca' (114). Similarly, the Italian has not been able to learn how to love: 'Otras cosas he

²³ Elsewhere he comments how 'you have gone from nonbeing to being by one of these agreements [...] you were thought of as possible, as certain in the moment when, a love deeply sure of itself, a man and a woman, wanted you to be' (*Mad Love* 119).

aprendido también, pero no a amar' (113). Even though she is the perfect embodiment of *amour fou*, as she possesses 'el poder magnífico de atraer el amor y el deseo' (105) and with her beauty she has compelled everyone to 'entregarse al *amor furioso*' (105), the result is that every man has fallen dead after loving her: 'no hay uno sólo que no caiga vencido por el brillo de mi collar de amor' (105). Although it is true that in all religions and mythologies the goddess of love appears coupled with the goddess of death (Carpentier, *Ensayos* 143), the love of Boullosa's Aphrodite is deliberately presented as furious precisely because she has not learnt how to love, because society has not let her love as she wanted, that is, to love other women.

Absolute love is parodied, in its romantic and scientific conception by the goddesses of love and death, who turn it into *Amor Furioso*. The Italian Aphrodite gives death to those who love her because she herself is not capable of love, for society will not accept her type of 'unnatural passions', and her overwhelming beauty is thus of no use to man. Claire, as the second embodiment of Aphrodite, has never loved before and by denying her female identity, she parodies, through transvestism and her masculine attitude, the notions of feminine convulsive beauty found in the surrealist notion of love. Even when she finally falls in love with Ocejó, she continues refusing to exhibit stereotypical 'femininity' and still dressing as a man, instead of being his muse, she decides to become his economical provider. Both representations of Aphrodite escape the dictates of patriarchal culture that underlie the romantic idea of heterosexual love and the image of woman as a key to the absolute and the realm of erotic pleasure. Championing an alternative signification of woman within the erotic balance, Boullosa's *Duerme*, like Garro in 'Era Mercurio' or Varo in *Los amantes* and *La despedida*, instead proposes Iphis as a more suitable myth to incarnate the romantic vision of love, an active and determined woman who, like Claire and the Italian, trespasses the borders that erase, but at the same time accentuate, the differences between the masculine and the feminine.

Another of the literary, quasi-mythical figures that Claire recalls is Sleeping Beauty. Through its rewriting, the text also responds to the scientific discourse that permeates surrealist love. Mabille states how there have been many interpretations of this fairy tale:

For some, Beauty symbolizes the earth put to sleep [...] she represents the lost wisdom of ancient brotherhoods, the flame hidden under the bushel that a predestined hero will one day manage to uncover [...]. One can see as well [...] in the woman's body, the egg cells, the vehicles for carrying the life of the species, waiting hidden, sleeping, for the arrival of their male counterpart (252).

One can easily recognise here the view of love that was years later to be rationalised by Dawkins, where woman plays the role of the container where the genes can continue propagation. Now, Claire is a very atypical Sleeping Beauty; she cannot produce offspring, her biological functions are dead and thus she cannot transmit the 'life of the species'. Ironically, she mentions how the only child she can give birth to, is her constructed male identity: 'Se ha muerto el único hijo que yo querría tener, me lo han matado en mi propio cuerpo [...] yo, sí, yo soy mi propio hijo, Claire vuelta varón' (19). Quite ironic too is the fact that the two women who embody the idea of 'convulsive beauty' and are associated with the love goddesses capable of generating sublime love, turn out to be a sterile transvestite and a reassured lesbian. Both symbolise a type of woman that has confidence in her erotic authority and who are not willing to play the role of that 'obscure object of desire' provider of pleasure. Surrealist love and indeed all types of conventional, courtly and poetic love are ridiculed by a gender discourse which not only mocks the idea of woman as beautiful object to be worshipped, her femininity as source of true knowledge, but which also shows how such conceptions are encapsulated in a constraining system of compulsory heterosexuality.

It is not only in relationship to surrealism that these myths are to be interpreted, but also in relation to other Latin American novels, that not coincidentally, also present in form, theme and structure, a relationship with the Parisian movement. In the previous chapters as well in the section on *Llanto* I commented how, in the search for a specific common vocabulary that differentiated the Latin American novel from the European and North American one, writers turn to new narrative techniques that, seeking to endow the novel with a universal character, made the mythical structure widespread (Rodríguez-Monegal, *Boom* 79). Claire, like the protagonists of Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*, Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* or Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, incarnates a mythical or symbolic figure associated with universal qualities (Sleeping Beauty and Aphrodite). In the previous section we have seen how many Latin American writers employed a mythical pattern due to the quality this had to speak more openly to readers, enabling them to be easily

identified with the characters through the myths' ability to explore universal human nature. The aforementioned novels, although they all deconstruct the myths they are alluding to in order to challenge the status quo, all refer to myths (Sisyphus, Jesus Christ, Oedipus) that without exception, represent a metaphor for the masculine side of identity. Boullosa's exploration of human nature through a mythic pattern is deliberately used, like Varo's female questers or Garro's characterisation of Consuelo and Laura, to open up a discourse that explores the modern complexity of sexual relations, employing the mythical structure to provoke the reader's consideration and therefore reaction towards a current debate regarding 'fluctuating gender identities' (Domenella 14). Although Boullosa shares with Fuentes, Carpentier or Rulfo the compromise with history and society, her novel denotes a visibly different expression or account of a marvellous reality. Her transgression and 'destruction' of reality possesses a gender intent, her use of mythical and symbolic universal figures is arranged so as to elaborate a response towards a complexity that, while universal, appeals directly to debates around femininity, the poetic representation of woman, compulsory heterosexuality and gender identity.

MEXICO'S MELTING POT

Claire's experience of *profane illumination* not only has consequences in the domain of gender, but also in that of race and colonial discourse. *Duerme* describes two modes of cultural knowledge: the Nahua and the Spanish. After Claire's experience of awakening, she starts perceiving elements that relate to a different ontology. The first event she observes is an indigenous man communicating with the natural elements: 'El agua de la laguna, tan retirada de nosotros, al oír su llamado empezó a acercarse, más, más, más, más, hasta que levantó a las barcasas y llegó a nuestros pies' (55). Later, in what appears as an echo of Remedios Varo's magic weavers, she contemplates how the mantle that an Indian woman is embroidering acquires its own life: 'tiende el bordado en sus piernas y en cuanto pone en él la aguja, cuanto hay en la tela se despierta: los pájaros mueven las alas, suspendidos, el sol brilla, las hojas de árbol son mecidas por el viento' (90). This is not a surrealist marvellous creation, but is now related to *lo real maravilloso americano* in as far as it is referring to the magical mentality and faith that permeates the Nahua world's vision. Significantly, Claire is no longer surprised at these extraordinary events as she was before, but her experience has also provoked her steady acceptance of these arational happenings. As she attains full knowledge of the Nahua cosmovision, she assimilates these as marvellous yet real. Her acceptance

of the extraordinary therefore can be also understood as presupposing the novel's gradual shift from a European, surrealist understanding of the marvellous, to the American vision of *lo real maravilloso*. European ontology does not conform to the world of the Nahuas, and Claire learns about this through a new sensibility that challenges her western parameters of rationality. Once more, this is a consequence of the magical ritual and her experience of awakening, for the water has not only erased the biological woman within her, but also the white European subject. Since the ancient water of the Valley of Mexico runs through her body, Claire has become a 'seer'.

Most important, the new power Claire has acquired to perceive the mystery underlying the external world is not given to others, but used for her own self to access the Nahua cosmogony as if it was now part of her own past and culture. After the experience of awakening, the marvellous reality is not only internal to her body and gender identity, but connected with 'race' and with how this affects the life in the Mexican colony. Therefore, it also presupposes a transformation in her consciousness of a socio-political nature. Claire becomes aware of how:

El mundo se divide en dos: el viejo y las tierras nuevas. La luz y la oscuridad. El silencio y los sonidos, lo blanco y lo negro. El agua y la tierra. El bien y el mal. Los hombres y las mujeres. Los europeos y los de las otras razas [...]. Reto a cualquiera que vista como yo ropa de india y luego me dirá en cuánto se dividen los seres. "En dos", me contestará, "los blancos y los indios" (57).

The formulation of a segregated system unveils the interaction that exists between two separate groups that rest on distinct cultural and historical identities. The core issue emphasised here is, as with gender, that of biological difference. Yet in this case the text does not make exclusive reference to the construction of the subject's identity, but to the construction of a city, and possibly of a nation: 'la ciudad misma donde estoy estancada se divide en dos: 'los magníficos palacios de los españoles [...] y las casuchas en desorden de los indios escondidas tras ellos' (58). Claire connects the markers of 'race' and class as definitive in the construction of the city. Above all, her statement claims a magnificent order for the rich rulers and a chaotic disorder among the poor indigenous people. Her thoughts are in this sense illustrative of the way in which the discourses which together constitute 'race' and class draw attention to national boundaries. It specifies who 'owns' the city and thus the national community and therefore who advances reasons for segregation and

domination. Racial and class differentiation become here the foundations on which the limits of the city as well as its distinctiveness is being established.

On the one hand, the Spanish crown has carefully constructed an image of the indigenous people as a homogeneous group: 'todos los indios en esta casa nos llamamos Cosme por igual, para no confundir a Don Enrique' (38), showing how the 'racial' stereotype designed by Spanish colonial discourse has been created to control and submit the Indians in facilitating the construction of a 'white' managed nation. According to Fuentes, 'este anonimato, este mestizaje en defensa de la integridad a través de no tener nombre, es la maravilla del libro de Boullosa' (*Reforma* 35). Indeed, Claire continuously questions the integrity of the Indians, observing how they accept the rules of colonial discourse: 'Verme vestida de mujer india la hace creerme un ser sin ninguna importancia. Si volviera a mi traje de varón blanco me hablaría con respeto, sería mi fiel criada, daría por mi la vida' (76). Claire's transformed consciousness has been a consequence of the Nahua ritual and her death experience, that is, through the experience of the marvellous Claire has undergone a revelation with regards to the social situation in terms of colonial identity. Boullosa's stratagem therefore succeeds, if only at the textual level, in instigating a social and political transformation of consciousness.

Concerning the rules of the colony, Claire ultimately has become aware, and with her the reader (who establishes a direct relationship between the magical narration and the real historical setting) of how the 'othering' of indigenous people is essential for 'creating images of the outsider but equally essential for constructing the insider, the (usually white European male) 'self'' (Loomba 104). This consciousness refers back once more to the political and poetic praxis with which Benjamin sought to endow the surrealist *profane illumination* and Claire always refers back to the clairvoyant experience she had on the Gallows to express the comparison between the colonial present and the precolumbine past: 'cuando ellos no habían llegado a arruinarnos, nuestras calles estaban trazadas en orden perfecto. Las vi en la horca' (58). Like in *Llanto*, the surrealist experience enables the reader to see a criticism of the past based on the distance it creates with the present, for the colonial past is turned in this story into an experience in the living body of Claire, filled with the presence of Benjamin's 'now-time'. While Benjamin and Sartre criticised surrealist images for their 'quietism', Boullosa's representation of experience, through its direct connection with the historical, renders individual

action possible, at least virtually, within the novel, presenting the same revolutionary potential that *lo real maravilloso americano* exerted in a novel such as *El reino de este mundo*.

That is, Claire soon realises that this 'black or white' system has a loophole, that there should be many other tonalities in between, that the existing segregation cannot possibly constitute the unity of any city: 'digo que el mundo está dividido en riguroso dos, y aunque es verdad, la verdad me hace mentir. Si acaso mi atuendo de india es verosímil, lo es por un solo motivo, por el tres. Ven mi porte de blanca, mi ropa de india, y dicen, "es mestiza" (58). Claire's newly acquired 'racial' identity verbalises 'race' as another category in process, another corporeal suit, undermining the conception that fixed racial parameters are the basis in the construction of a city or a nation. As happened with gender, biological determinism is undermined by showing 'race' as both construction and sustenance of colonial discourse. Claire's attentiveness to the contradictory and diverse groups within the city becomes crucial for the idea of *mestizaje* Boullosa proposes. That is, an idea in which she emphasises the performative aspect of 'race' through clothing and transvestism: 'se ha dicho en palacio que todo aquello que distinga al indio del español debe permitirse, y que en cambio el escándalo de las indias con guantes y vestidos castellanos debiera impedirse' (78). This is a good example of how colonial discourse presents the subject with the decision between the 'either/or' (Bhabha 40) and of how it can even work through mere clothing, as happened with the soldiers' perception of Claire as an Indian simply because she was dressed like one. Thus, the Indian women wearing Spanish clothes should be avoided, in other words, bastardization, *mestizaje* should be avoided.

Later on, Claire opposes the European and the Indigenous systems of knowledge in religious terms. According to Christianity, the Indians should be feared because their rituals do not conform to the parameters of reality understood in occidental culture: '¿Qué pensar de una raza de quien se cuenta que, en una de sus ceremonias horribles [...] la mujer a quién habían abierto el cuerpo y sacado el corazón se levantó, caminó unos pasos y dijo 'me duele mucho'' (125). This similarly suggests how Occidental reason, expressed as religious difference, has become an index for oppression regarding ethnic and 'racial' differences. As I have explained in previous chapters, the magical aspect of indigenous religions was also one of the reasons why many surrealists turned to Latin America, and why Mexican culture

appealed to many surrealists, seeing their theories confirmed in this continent and in the indigenous way of cultural knowledge. Through her magical transformation, Claire has become aware of the possibility of blurring such parameters: 'Y yo, ¿no soy acaso también hija de la raza? La única francesa que lleva agua en las venas, la mujer de la vida artificial, la que sólo puede vivir en la tierra de México' (125). Her body suggests the irrelevance of the dialectic of colonial discourse, for in her case the concept of 'mixed-blood' ceases to have meaning, she has no blood.

¿Y COMIERON PERDICES...?

Thus far, the fusion of Aztec rituals, the conquistadors myths, Greek and Aztec mythology as well as the western fairy tale, make the content and the structure of the novel match: the heterogeneity of sources matches Claire's heterogeneous identity as well as the various perspectives the text offers upon different issues. Claire's unreal body also complements the unreal text and finally, to be in a novel is indeed to be immortal, as it is to be sleeping, a 'virtual figure waiting to be awakened by the reader' (Boullosa in Quintero, 'Strategic', n.p.). A metalepsis is produced at the end of the novel and Ocejo, in a self-reflexive act of writing, finishes Claire's story. In Ocejo's ending, Claire has organised a group of resistance so that 'todos los españoles desaparezcan de estas tierras como si se los hubiera tragado la tierra' (145). Her intention is to found a new Mexican nation freed of colonial power: 'Seremos la mejor nación, ejemplar entre todas' (145). This sentence is reminiscent of the rhetoric of the Mexican Revolution and therefore of a future time frame.²⁴ Boullosa's text thus establishes another connection with Carpentier's associations between the Baroque and *lo real maravilloso*. According to him 'el barroco [...] se manifiesta donde hay transformación, mutación, innovación [...]. Las revoluciones son radicalmente (de raíz) barrocas [...] toda simbiosis, todo mestizaje, engendra barroquismo. Las revoluciones son sucesos épicos, en las que lo imposible se torna posible, constante de lo americano que expresa el carácter revolucionario, real maravilloso, de su historia' (*Ensayos* 139-41).

Besides Ocejo's fictional construction, there is the 'real' ending, in which Claire lies sleeping seven miles away from the city. While most critics have pointed out

²⁴ Conversely, Ocejo's vision suggests that once colonisation is done, there will always be traces. He expresses the Mexican problematic in Greek terms: 'Si el Euro se retiró hacia la Aurora, el reino de los nabateanos, [...] si el Céfitro quedó próximo al Occidente y las riberas donde se pone el sol [...] ¿qué vientos corresponden a estas tierras?' (145). The way the winds harmoniously move together and mix with one another work as an allegory for the geographical movements of the human race, calling for heterogeneity. Yet, he asks, '¿Hacerse esta nación en lengua mexicana?' (146) leaving the question open for the reader.

that Claire's body functions as an allegory for Mexico City, I would suggest that Claire's body becomes an allegory for Ixtaccíhuatl (Mujer Dormida), the volcano that lies at the same distance from Mexico City.²⁵ A new myth of the volcano can be seen in *Duerme*, one in which Claire's body represents a historical continuum. The references to the future time of the Mexican Revolution, to the indigenous past in the magical cosmogony and the present time of Baroque society unite in the text past present and future, suggesting a reversible, circular time, which, like in *Llanto*, can lead to regeneration. Claire, as the volcano, overlooks a city which is, as she was, in continuous metamorphosis: 'Así es México, así lo sera siempre, que así le gusta, destruirse para parecer una que no es ella' (141). The text raises here the same difficulty as that outlined in *Llanto*. Namely, the already mentioned debate around how a multi-racial nation attempts to be coherent with that of a multi-racial population. That is, how 'el mexicano no quiere ni ser indio ni español. Tampoco quiere descender de ellos, los niega' (Paz, *Laberinto* 207). As a metaphor for the Volcano, Claire symbolises the indigenous descendance that is sleeping, a sleep that is the twin of death: 'Carmen propone otro método para vencer y acelerar la historia, que es el sueño. Un país despierto es el México mestizo, pero sólo porque otro país duerme, que es el México indígena. Este sueño indígena es el precio para no morir, la alternativa a la muerte' (Fuentes, *Reforma* 35).

Claire might stand for the indigenous legacy neglected by the contemporary Mexican, an indigenous Mexico that is sleeping in the museums, yet an indigenous legacy that one can dream of, that can be awakened, as Moctezuma was awakened in *Llanto*, in order to understand the legacies of Colonialism in modern times. Finally, she also represents the sleeping Mexican woman, Ixtaccíhuatl (Mujer Dormida), 'la mexicana que simplemente no tiene voluntad, su cuerpo duerme y sólo se enciende si alguien lo despierta' (Paz, *Laberinto* 173). She represents a Mexican woman who has put her transgressive gender values to sleep, but who one can hope to awaken. (If that happens, supposedly her conceptions about gender roles, sexuality and femininity will ideally be those Claire stands for). Both the indigenous legacy and the Mexican woman are already there, like Claire, 'bebiendo todo con los ojos, los oídos, el tacto, ávida, temiendo nunca despertar' (130). Groups

²⁵ The most frequent interpretation is that Claire's body functions as an allegory of Mexico City: 'Su cuerpo se configura como alegoría del México colonial con su multiplicidad de facetas, sufriendo y padeciendo el destino del país entero y de sus habitantes' (Seydel 169) or ' el cuerpo de la protagonista parecería continuar en el cuerpo de la ciudad, fundiéndose ambos y resultando ser uno mismo' (Salles 142).

that can nevertheless wake, if only virtually, every time the novel is read, every time it makes readers consider that there is a different way of looking at things.

CONCLUSION: GENDERING THE MARVELLOUS

No podré renunciar jamás al sentimiento de que ahí, pegado a mi cara [...] hay como una deslumbrante explosión hacia la luz, irrupción de mí hacia lo otro o de lo otro en mí, algo infinitamente cristalino que podría cuajar y resolverse en luz total sin tiempo ni espacio. Como una puerta de ópalo y diamante desde la cual se empieza a ser eso que verdaderamente se es y que no se quiere y no se sabe y no se puede ser (Cortázar, *Rayuela* 381).

También se le ocurrió que los hombres, a lo largo del tiempo, han repetido siempre dos historias: la de un bajel perdido que busca por los mares mediterráneos una isla querida, y la de un dios que se hace crucificar en el Gólgota (Borges, 'El evangelio según Marcos', *Informe* 122).

Throughout this study, I have shown how the main unifying feature between *lo real maravilloso americano* and surrealism is a shared emphasis on a phenomenological experience of perception or revelatory moment that is later on translated into art and literature and which is characterised by revealing a deeper dimension of reality to the subject who undergoes it. I would like to conclude by suggesting that both experiences of the marvellous as well as the way in which these have been expressed through verbal and visual language, possess a mythical structure that goes back to one of the great master narratives of Western history: the search for knowledge, love, freedom, the inner self of man, grace and communion. Surrealism has named it *le merveilleux* and Carpentier *lo real maravilloso*, and they coincide as well as separate themselves from other enactments of the same quest in escaping from an over-totalising Western rationalism as the only path to take in order to reach that moment in which the self feels integrated with the world at hand. For the purposes of this study, I have focused on the role that woman has played in shaping this mythical structure and epiphanic moment, suggesting that the surrealist exaltation of woman as myth, muse and metaphor pervaded the literary imagination of many of the writers of the so called 'Boom'.

A common thread can be discerned in Chapters Two, Three and Four. This common thread refers to the fact that neither Varo, nor Garro, nor Boullosa have renounced this search for the 'origin', self-realisation and knowledge within existence as well as to the fact that each of them has placed an emphasis on a clairvoyant moment or experience that is characterised, like Carpentier's and the surrealist, by escaping from the parameters of Western rationality. Each has sought different paths to undertake this quest and express the epiphanic experience: Hermetic, mystic or Gnostic channels, the road through love, Classical or Aztec mythology, death, identity and history. All refer metaphorically, even if in very

different forms, to the Ulyssean or Thesean variants of the quest traditionally explored by their male counterparts, particularly in direct dialogue with the distinctive approach that surrealism and the literature of *lo real maravilloso* have undertaken. However, within their 'Ulyssean' images and narratives, Penelope is taken out into the world, she does not weave to await her husband, but to see and create reality. Ariadne does not use her threat to guide Theseus, but herself. The final step to take in order to conclude this study is therefore to discern, within their different modifications of this search, the common strategies of response that draw significant and meaningful connections between the three women. This will help us to conclude that they have indeed created a counter aesthetic of 'revisionist mythmaking' that foregrounds the female dilemma within surrealism and *lo real maravilloso americano*, while strategically reassessing the role woman has played in relationship to love, myth, history and creativity.

To underscore the analogous counter aesthetic that is found in these three women, I will propose here to return to some of the literary and visual images that have been analysed throughout the whole study. Yet, as mentioned in the introduction, I am not seeking a common language between the three of them, but similar strategies of response that are able to endow woman with a different role and representation within surrealism and the literature of *lo real maravilloso*. Finally, in bringing together their images and conceptualisations, I aim to demonstrate an evolution of both surrealist and Carpentier's ideas over the years that separate Varo from Boullosa and by extension, if these women are taken as representative figures, of the cultural interchange between Mexico and surrealism.

MYTHICAL WOMAN? THE GAZE IS AT STAKE

Analysing Varo's art as well as Garro and Boullosa's narratives, we have seen how, along their paths, their characters experience fortuitous encounters, momentary revelations and clairvoyant experiences equivalent to those described by Carpentier and Breton. However, all three seem of the opinion that if woman is to see the 'luminous phenomenon', they first need to extinguish the image that has left her in darkness. Varo's paintings such as *Au bonheur des dames*, *Tailleur pour dames* or *Visita al cirujano plástico* all present us with a similar thematic, and this is the old dilemma stated by Berger (*Ways of Seeing* 46) and also by Paz: 'la mujer [...] no se siente ni se concibe sino como objeto, como "otro" [...]. Su ser se escinde entre lo que es realmente y la imagen que ella se hace de sí [...]. Su feminidad jamás se expresa, porque se manifiesta a través de formas inventadas por el hombre'

(*Laberinto* 344). These paintings, which have been read against surrealist constructions of 'femininity', critically assess how woman has been mainly conceived of through her external appearance, and thus how she often employed 'resources' like clothing or other types of bodily transformations such as plastic surgery, to make her image fit with what is expected of her, to be beautiful. This same problem, albeit expressed through a different discourse, is addressed by Boullosa in *Duerme*. Like Varo, she presents femininity through theatrical allusions that highlights its performative aspect. Similarly, both employ surrealist experiences or images and, in the case of Boullosa, these experiences are also related to the magical mentality of the indigenous community and therefore in direct relationship with Carpentier's elucidations on *lo real maravilloso americano*.

As I have shown in my analysis of *Duerme*, the body of Claire is transformed into a cultural receptacle where different layers or inscriptions are superimposed on one another. A magical rite blurs all predictable existing relations between biological sex, gender, race, pure blood, and identity. Similarly, she uses transvestism to hide or show her 'femininity' and 'masculinity' at will. In the case of Varo, the half-human half-bicycle women, the woman with three breasts or the woman who divides herself into two transparent selves, are all surrealist images, yet they suit perfectly the purpose of Varo's critique of canonical surrealism.¹ Hence, surrealist images and experiences together with the suggestion of *lo real maravilloso* (in *Duerme*) serve both Boullosa and Varo as a strategy to highlight how the image of woman that the masculine gaze constructs stands between what she is and how she conceives of herself, calling for action against this notion. Likewise, they suggest that she is not a unique dream object in man's creative fantasy, but rather a multiple active subject.² Although gender blurring and transvestism is less frequent in Garro's narratives, in 'Era Mercurio' she represents the female protagonist with characteristics that allow reading her as a gender ambiguous being, connecting through allusions to Classical myth with Boullosa's *Duerme* and through alchemical couplings with Varo's *Los amantes* and *El encuentro*. Varo, Garro and Boullosa employ alchemical, Classical and surrealist mythology, particularly that surrounding the figures of the Primordial Androgyne, Gradiva, Aphrodite and Mélusine to counter their employment by their male counterparts. Gender blurring,

¹ Namely, to show how woman can become mechanised, objectified or a 'monster' if she submits herself to certain ways of seeing, or contrarily, how can she play a surrealist trick on the masculine gaze.

² As symbolised by the transparent selves of the painting *Tailleur pour dames*, in the androgynous character of most of Varo's figures and in the multiple metamorphoses that Claire undergoes.

transvestism and female agency are employed as tactics to make viewers and readers rethink stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity by showing gender categories as produced rather than as given. The fact that all three draw from a reversal of archetypical myths that have pervaded the imagination of both surrealists and several Latin American writers, strengthens the suggestion of a multivalent transatlantic dialogue in their work.

COOKING AND WEAVING

A large number of Varo's paintings deal with the process of creation, examples of which are *Bordando el manto terrestre*, *La tejedora de Verona*, *La tejedora roja*, *Creación de las Aves*, *Armonía* or *Música solar*. In these images, she uses surrealist metaphors for creativity (alchemy and the occult), but also enriches this discourse adding a wider range of symbols and myths to suggest the process of creation that can be seen to enter in dialogue with Mexican culture. These are, like weaving, activities that had been historically and culturally associated with women's stereotypical domestic tasks, and together with Leonora Carrington, Varo reappropriates the kitchen as a place for alchemical transmutation (Assa 213-27).³ Now, on the one hand, one only has to walk through Mexican towns of different states to see how weaving is one of the most widespread occupations of indigenous women, be this Aztec or Mayan. Weaving and cooking, forms of creative acts and to a certain extent forms of art in their own right, have been revindicated by many Mexican women writers as subversive tools.⁴ Both cooking and the image of the indigenous weaver is treated extensively in the poetry and 'cuentística' of Rosario Castellanos, particularly in texts such as 'Lección de cocina' or poems like 'Economía doméstica' and 'Tejedoras de Zinacantán'.⁵ Most famously, Sor Juana created a 'filosofía de cocina', where the kitchen was envisioned as a place for philosophical reflection and a laboratory for experimentation: 'Bien dijo Lupercio Leonardo, que bien se puede filosofar y aderezar la cena. Y yo suelo decir viendo estas cosillas: Si Aristóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito' (459-60).⁶ Many years later, cooking was also envisioned as a magical and empowering tool by Laura Esquivel in her best-selling novel *Como agua para chocolate*. On the one hand, Varo's frequent recourse to weavers in her paintings and the idea of using the kitchen as a 'magical' space

³ Varo also wrote a number of magical recipes such as 'Recetas para ahuyentar los sueños inoportunos' or 'Para provocar sueños eróticos'. These are compiled in *Recetas, Sueños y Otros Textos* (107-13).

⁴ Of course, this is not exclusive to Mexican women writers and artists, but this is the cultural archetype of relevance for the study.

⁵ Castellanos takes an ironic stand in most of these texts and poems and in 'Tejedoras de Zinacantán', weaving is like in Varo significantly associated with destiny and magic. The texts correspond respectively to *Álbum de familia*, *En la tierra del medio* and *El rescate del mundo*.

⁶ The quote corresponds to 'Respuesta a Sor Filotea'.

shows a choice of imagery and thematic that has long been associated with Mexican culture, even if not exclusive to this. On the other, they present a similar choice of alternative imagery to Boullosa and Garro, where both weaving and the space of the kitchen acquire extraordinary dimensions respectively.

Thus, in 'La culpa es de los txacaltecas' the kitchen was turned into a magical and protective space, mythical as it was outside chronological time, and a space which constituted Laura's door towards communion and integration. Like Varo, Garro uses the kitchen strategically to subvert the status quo and suggest a different type of artistic inspiration. The suggestion of an alchemical and mythical space (Aztec) of the kitchen unites notions of relevance for both surrealism and Mexican culture, while simultaneously establishing a different ambit from which to explore them. Now, it is true that there is hardly an image of the kitchen throughout Boullosa's literary production, except for minor references in some of her poetry, and in a theatre play, *Cocinar hombres*.⁷ We do however find images of weavers. In fact, *Duerme* conveys an image of the extraordinary which is strikingly similar to Varo's *Bordando el manto terrestre*. Once Claire has undergone her *profane illumination*, she is able to see how the work of an indigenous weaver becomes alive, creating a piece of the world (see section two of Chapter Four). Varo represents her mantle through bird's eye perspective, making it appear three-dimensional. Like the indigenous woman in Boullosa's *Duerme*, the girl's embroidery turns into a piece of the world. Through these images, both Boullosa and Varo adopt an analogous device to stress woman's creativity outside her biological functions, rejecting one of the approaches towards the surrealist marvellous in which this was coupled with the creation of human life, the propagation of the species. In this version, which I have explained through Mabille, woman was the 'Sleeping Beauty' waiting for man to be awakened, to place his seed. Her body was holding the secret of existence. Varo and Boullosa's weavers do indeed hold a key to existence, although the marvellous as creation is not coupled with the mystery of human life, but with the creation of an extraordinary reality, the creation of non-human life. Varo uses it as a strategy to escape from the status-quo (the tower), Boullosa as a method to allow

⁷ In *Cocinar hombres*, there is a metaphorical alchemical 'kitchen' even if the witches are not cooking in a kitchen as such. The idea is nonetheless reminiscent to the practices of Remedios Varo and Leonora Carrington. This is a type of theatre that can be seen to work in the sense given by Gloria Orenstein as a 'magical Amphitheatre', that is, revealing the theatre 'as an alchemical stage in an ongoing visionary process' (1). Boullosa's play critically contests the situation of Mexican women in contemporary society, presenting numerous connections with Garro's plays. As I mentioned in the introduction, Garro's theatre was explored by Orenstein as conforming to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and Boullosa's play relates to it in as far as it 'alchemically' transform the spectator so that 'he might awaken to a new vision of reality and experience the marvelous as only the surrealists have defined it' (Orenstein 4).

her 'sleeping beauty' protagonist an entrance into the indigenous cosmovision, transgress gender codes and challenge colonial rule.

LOVE

Just as Varo countered the role of woman within surrealist love in paintings like *El encuentro*, *Los amantes* and *La despedida*, whether by reversing the gender symbolism of the two encountered figures, by taking an initially androgynous point of view or by underscoring the metaphysical aspect of love, so we have seen Garro employing these devices to subvert surrealist love in 'Era Mercurio'. Through an eclectic association of the character Mercurio with Gradiva, the Roman God, Mélusine and the alchemical principle, Garro parodied the formulaic erotic female and mediator for love and beauty with an image coupled with phallic character, masculine behaviour, femininity and androgyny. The crucial idea present in both text and images is a critique of surrealist love, and both Varo and Garro counter this notion by highlighting that woman alone cannot bring the reconciliation of opposites, that the ultimate reality cannot be made available to man through her body. Varo and Garro articulate a fairer play within the couple dynamics, in which each side contributes to fill the other's absence through complementary elements. A similar stratagem was found in Boullosa's *Duerme*. Here, Aphrodite, emblem of *amour fou*, was incarnated in two female figures who were respectively a lesbian and a transvestite. Boullosa also adopted a more suitable myth, Iphis, to expose her own views on the subject. Championing an alternative signification of woman within the erotic balance, all three women suggest a different mythology to incarnate the romantic vision of love as a pathway for freedom and self-knowledge, which contests both the Mexican Eve and the Surrealist Muse while making these figures to be interrelated in several aspects. By demythologising surrealist love through the rewriting of female figures universally associated with desire while at the same time associating this notion of love with magical-mythical cosmogonies, a counter marvellous reality emerges, one that is related to both Mexican culture and surrealism, but mostly one that accounts for woman's love experience as active subject while condemning conservative and patriarchal views of it.

If Varo's own vision of love is elaborated through tropes that, whilst challenging canonical versions of surrealism still refer back to it, Garro and Boullosa's envisionings use *lo real maravilloso* as a device. That is, they also employ 'extraordinary' aspects of Mexican history and culture to construct their own vision of love, dialoguing with Carpentier's cultural concept as well as with canonical

Mexican writers, of which perhaps the best example is Octavio Paz.⁸ Both Garro and Boullosa draw from Aztec mythology to suggest the entering of woman into a circular, mythical time outside chronological, linear and patriarchal restrictions. Garro associates the entrance into mythical time with love, as her character asserts how 'el tiempo y el amor son uno solo' (*La culpa* 14). In *Llanto*, Boullosa enhances the transport to a mythical dimension through the sexual act, which might initially seem more in tune with the sexual transfiguration portrayed in *Piedra de sol* and with the surrealist emphasis on the sexual act as enhancing freedom, knowledge and plenitude. However, this moment is not evoked in a concrete female figure and her body, but rather in the pleasure the female figure undergoes. In both stories, Aztec or mythical time becomes an analogous device to free the female protagonist from the burdens of their times and existences as well as to contest surrealist notions of love, although Boullosa, in a gesture perhaps more proper of her time, incorporates an association with female pleasure and sexual enjoyment that Garro often lacks.

THE MARVELLOUS

In the majority of Varo's paintings, figures move across different surfaces of the pictorial space: the woman who in *Nacer de nuevo* enters the room in the middle of the forest, the figures that emerge from the walls in *Energía cósmica*, the woman passing through the wall in *Luz emergente*, or the eyes of a body who has disappeared in *Insomnio* (1947). Through the temporality with which Varo's paintings are endowed, I have argued that there is always an implicit past and future moment conveying a narrative flow. The viewer therefore could easily infer that the characters have disappeared from one space to emerge into the other. Now, both in Garro and in Boullosa's narratives there is a tendency for characters to disappear. As Pfeiffer has commented, in Boullosa's *Llanto* Laura 'se lleva al Tlatoani a casa [...] para fundirse los dos, deshacerse, desaparecer. Como Julia y Felipe en *Recuerdos del porvenir*, de Elena Garro, los dos amantes se difuminan de las coordenadas del tiempo y del espacio, y se entregan al goce puro' (Pfeiffer, *Moctezuma* 503). Garro's characters often disappear to enter mythical time: Laura in 'La culpa', Mercurio in 'Era Mercurio', and Consuelo in *La casa junto al río*.⁹ This is also the case for many of Boullosa's characters. Claire attains an eternal presence in

⁸ The narratives' articulation of mythical time correspond to Paz's theoretical views on the subject: 'el tiempo mítico admite la existencia de una pluralidad de tiempos. Tiempo y vida se funden y forman un solo bloque, una unidad imposible de escindir. Para los aztecas, el tiempo estaba ligado al espacio y cada día a uno de los cuatro puntos cardinales.' (*Laberinto* 358). They also correspond to certain images in *Piedra de sol*, in which he also comments upon man and woman's sexual union outside chronological time.

⁹ We could cite also the disappearance of Mariana in *Testimonios sobre Mariana*, the disappearance of Lucía in '¿Qué hora es?' or the entrance into different realities that Dionisia undergoes in 'La dama y la turquesa' as examples.

time in *Duerme*, and the Laura of *Llanto*, in an echo of her namesake in Garro's story, vanishes into the mythical time of the Aztec cosmogony.¹⁰

The unifying thread among these narratives is not just the disappearance of the characters or their crossing into another level of reality. They are also linked by the fact that in both Garro and Boullosa's narratives, these vanishings and crossings all stem from the character's feeling of alienation from the surrounding world, nostalgia for a past time or a sense of solitude. The same feeling is suggested in Varo's paintings, as hardly any character is presented in communication with others, and the majority of her images –particularly those suggesting the quest–depict a figure on its own.¹¹ This unknown space into which the characters vanish, can be understood as a utopic mythical space which once belonged to them and from which they are now detached, the centre of the labyrinth, the marvellous. Therefore, the common design of vanishing is strategically employed to suggest the entrance into or the creation of this space. According to Paz, 'El sentimiento de soledad, nostalgia de un cuerpo del que fuimos arrancados, es nostalgia de espacio. Según la concepción muy antigua y que se encuentra en casi todos los pueblos, ese espacio no es otro que el centro del mundo, el "ombligo" del universo' (*Laberinto* 356). However, 'el cuerpo del que fuimos arrancados' symbolises for Paz, among other things, the body of the mother: 'rompemos los lazos que nos unen a la vida ciega que vivimos en el vientre materno, en donde no hay pausa entre deseo y satisfacción [...] todo nos empuja a volver, a descender al seno creador de donde fuimos arrancados' (*Laberinto* 341-3). This vision corresponds to Freud and Jung's envisioning of the centre of the labyrinth, which is not very different from the surrealist or from that of many of the commented Latin American novelists.¹² This centre of knowledge, freedom and communion with the world is thus envisioned by many as 'uterine, symbolising a simultaneous longing to return to the maternal origin and fear of regression to the preconscious world of chaos; or more historically, the site of a journey from a dark, enveloping matriarchal consciousness into the light of knowledge and patriarchal civilization' (Martin 26).

¹⁰ A similar trajectory is followed by the girls of *Mejor Desaparece*, or by María Enela, the friend of the protagonist in *Antes*. Delmira too, in *Treinta años* moves back and forth, like Dionisia, from one dimension of reality to another.

¹¹ Some exceptions might be *La huída*, *Empatía*, *Les Murés*, *Visita inesperada*, *Tres destinos* or *Les feuilles mortes*, although even in these paintings in which two or more characters are depicted, there is still a feeling of detachment among the figures themselves. All are connected by the threads of destiny, cosmic lights, weaving threads or the space they inhabit, but communication or active interaction among them is never implied.

¹² I am referring to the already noted Paz's *Piedra de sol* and *Libertad bajo palabra*, novels such as *Los pasos perdidos*, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, *Pedro Páramo* or *Rayuela*, and surrealist texts like *Mad Love*, *Nadja*, *Paris Peasant* and *The Libertine*.

Now, this is also the search for the 'golden centre' that the protagonist of *La casa junto al río* undertakes, the sacred, Edenic paradise from which she felt expelled. Her symbolic quest for subjectivity is shared by Claire in *Duerme* and this is also at the centre of Laura's desire to escape her corporality and become one with a wider historical knowledge in *Llanto* and the same occurs to her namesake in 'La culpa'. That is, they all in a way constitute, like many of the aforementioned novels of the 'Boom', 'Ulyssean novels', albeit presenting Penelope and Ariadne as protagonists, not as helpers. This corresponds to the 'Ulyssean tasks' of Varo's *La llamada*, *Ruptura*, *Exploración de las fuentes del río Orinoco*, *Nacer de nuevo* or *Luz emergente*. The images suggest the woman crossing different boundaries in the same way as the characters in Garro and Boullosa's narratives cross them and disappear, conveying images that transcend the limits of reality in order to apprehend a broader knowledge of it. Even though the quest essentially presupposes the same goal as those of their male counterparts, signifying a desire of integration, of communion with the world, of death and rebirth, none of them suggest going back to the uterine, but rather coming out of it.

Thus, in *La casa junto al río* this centre was symbolised as 'el corazón tibio del oro' (103) and Varo's *Naturaleza muerta resucitando*, presents the golden light as the optical centre of the painting. This is also one of her very few images in which no human character is depicted, as if she had indeed disappeared into that mythical space once such centre was found. Reminiscent of Consuelo's rebirth, Varo's ripe fruits find regeneration in death, as their dead seeds create new life on the floor, envisioning death not as an end but as a new beginning.¹³ Like Varo's questers, the quest undergone by Consuelo in *La casa junto al río* is designed through a mythical pattern in which reaching death not only signifies the opening up of a marvellous realm, but this realm brings with it the understanding of the character's destiny and therefore of her subjectivity and identity. Claire in *Duerme* or Laura in *Llanto* yearn for, achieve or eventually inhabit the same realm. In her experience with death and resurrection, Claire acquires the necessary knowledge to comprehend the different fluctuating identities within her and therefore experiences that moment in which life and death converge, in which opposites meet, in which time and eternity have become one. Equally, Laura comprehends that her disappearance was the only

¹³ This links Varo with a similar sensibility towards death than the one found in many Mexican writers, not only in Garro and Boullosa, but also in Rulfo, Paz and Fuentes.

means to enter the eternal/mythical time. Their different ways of expressing revelatory experiences, quests and integrative moments at whose centre the marvellous resides or is seen, shows in all three figures a concern for the quest for identity, the meaning of life, the awareness of solitude, and the yearning for knowledge, of a more perfect state. If in most of the texts by the surrealists and by Carpentier's contemporaries, woman was the key, the eyes and the medium, in Boullosa, Varo and Garro's representations of women, her image is reworked, making her appear to be in full possession of her visionary powers. She does not lend her eyes to man, but uses them to see for herself.

To summarise, Varo's images do not utterly transform surrealist precepts in their essence, although she enriches the foundational movement of Breton with a broader use of sources, thematic and symbols, she abides by the theoretical basis of surrealism to compose her imaginary world. Her engagement with surrealist ideas does not entail their destruction, but rather their evolution. This is attained through two main elements. One is the role gender plays in her art, transforming and demonising the archetypal surrealist representation of woman and love. The second is the interdependence of realities that her paintings portray, leading to coherence and avoiding the surrealist shock, incongruence and '*état de surprise*' that, together with her organic imagery, narrative flow, natural images and landscapes, links her with the vocabulary of *lo real maravilloso*. It is therefore not only coherent but fruitful to partly understand her work through its connections with Carpentier, in as far as it can show how, during her stay in Mexico, her surrealist art was enriched with a sensibility and imagination that presents analogies with writers and artists living in the same country and continent, suggesting that indeed her art did not remain untouched by her Mexican experience. Although other critics have associated Varo with Carpentier (Parkinson-Zamora or Sánchez), I wanted to lay emphasis on the common literary imagination Varo shared with Mexican women writers in terms of conceptualising the quest for the 'marvellous', the repercussions this has for creativity, self-knowledge and integration and the similar strategies of response she has followed in order to visually express these. By connecting Varo with Carpentier, I have tried to show a historical point of departure from both surrealism and Mexican writing that, as seen in the introduction, started in the early 1940s, and in which Carpentier had a lot to say. Varo's art therefore helps us to understand what might be left of surrealism within Latin America, concretely within Mexican culture, today. Her inclusion into this study has sought to place her

work at the same level than that of better well-known figures representative of this dialogue such as Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington, Antonin Artaud or Wolfgang Paalen.

At the other extreme stands Carmen Boullosa. Considering that Boullosa was part of the generation of women writers that experienced an easy acceptance and promotion of their work, it is important to embed her literary production in her historical context to fully understand how and under what circumstances her work might deal with a gender re-visioning of ideas that emerged between the 1920s and 1960s.¹⁴ To give the name of *lo real maravilloso americano* or of surrealism to all types of fiction which deepen our conception of reality is a dangerous reductionism. As commented in the introduction, there seems a general critical refusal to include her work in any other category outside postmodern writing. It is not a petrified version of surrealism or *lo real maravilloso americano* that I have sought on Boullosa, but how certain stylistic, thematic and aesthetic choices pertaining to these discourses have been revived in her prose and adjusted to their modern situation. Therefore, her literature does not fall within the category of *lo real maravilloso americano*, nor is it surrealist prose. While presenting obvious affinities with both aesthetic approaches, her narratives are nonetheless constructed with a playfulness and a critical distance whose repetition of these cannot be seen to have as precise referent either surrealism or *lo real maravilloso*. However, certain aspects of her work include elements that can be traced back to both discourses as well as there are specific links with specific stylistic, aesthetic and thematic points, between surrealism, *lo real maravilloso americano* and Boullosa's work. In the construction of her imagery, she dialogues with both and yet simultaneously destroys them, creating a pastiche in which both approaches are confused and blurred. She leaves us many times with the feeling that, when one finds that 'centre' precisely there, there is a hole.

Garro constitutes a bridge between both, and it is also difficult to include her as belonging to any particular generation of writers.¹⁵ Garro's early works make specific reference to indigenous folklore and mythology as well as to concrete events and periods of Mexican history. Perhaps in a more visible way than some of her counterparts, albeit not Carpentier, Paz or Cortázar, she draws from a set of

¹⁴ 'Creo que todos los escritores nos dedicamos, por un lado, a romper con lo que es, con lo que estaba atrás, y por el otro nos dedicamos a homenajear eso que estaba atrás y nos nutrimos así [...] es cierto también que todo autor vuelve a inventar la palabra y a inventar la estructura del texto' (Boullosa, *Acercamientos* 264).

¹⁵ This is partly due to her heterogeneous body of work as well as to the significant range of years that separate her first publications (1950s) from the latter ones (1990s).

metaphors and imagery, particularly that concerning love, that are easily identifiable with surrealism. On the one hand, in many of her narratives, concretely in those written before her departure for Paris, she locates these notions within Mexican historical and cultural reality in a style that has been seen as a predecessor of *Cien años de soledad* yet has been excluded from the novels of the 'Boom' (Melgar, 'Encrucijadas' 11).¹⁶ However, as Orenstein has pointed out, 'the female protagonist of most of Garro's plays is in search of the marvellous. Her quest is often thwarted by the male protagonists who exert a tyrannical control over her desires and against whom she must rebel in order to express her inherent nature as a guide of the sources of the surreal' (112). This overview makes it clear that it is in Garro where Carpentier and Breton's approaches converge most fully, which is logical considering the temporal span of her literary production.

As I have elucidated, looking at the traces of surrealism in Garro and Boullosa's narratives can significantly contribute to the understanding of their literary work as well as towards comprehending the relevance of the legacies of surrealism in contemporary Mexican women's fiction. Examining Varo's art in connection with several contemporary Latin American texts, especially with those representative of *lo real maravilloso* shows that, even though her pictorial composition and use of classical perspective is indebted to European sources, her pictorial imagination was informed by a similar sensibility towards reality to those which permeated Latin American narratives over the last five decades. Finally, it is important to highlight that even though a coherent responsive aesthetic has been established and although this dialogues with surrealism and *lo real maravilloso*, none of the three authors is restricted to these discourses in their literary and visual work. As has been seen, Varo sometimes is more easily identifiable with the genre of the fantastic, and depending on which novel, so are Garro and Boullosa. If one wanted to find a main unifying factor between their work, then this would be the gendering of the marvellous, that is, demythologising the image of woman and the role she has played within the Ulyssean and Thesean quests in their marvellous realist and surrealist variants.

¹⁶ In fact, the title *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, could have been taken from the tavern of the same name in the middle of the jungle that the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* encounters.

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