From Disappearing Narrators to Signs of the Author: Images of the Subject in the Short Stories of Silvina Ocampo

by

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Abstract

This study proposes an in-depth study of subjectivity in Silvina Ocampo's short stories. In the first chapter of this study, I investigate the mechanisms by which self-generation paradoxically elicits the disappearance of the subject while the process of narration encounters repetition, coincidence, and cyclical movement. In these stories typical of the fantastic mode, we also observe the relinquishing of the narrating self's sense of physical and psychological density, a transformation that involves a radically changed as well as a muted, silenced self.

A similar investigation of the problems of subjectivity continues in chapter two. This time, however, the focus is on the confrontation between the bourgeois, stable subject and the unstable, mutable subject. Though the bourgeois subject aligned with civilization presupposes a stable, discrete identify, while the barbaric other connotes a destabilized, irrational self, the semantic fields of the two poles, civilization and barbarism, overlap in Ocampo's stories. While undoing traditional dualisms, the physically and psychologically destabilized self challenges the social order, the public and private spaces of bourgeois life, and the relations of power specific to these spaces.

A fluid and imprecise form of subjectivity also emerges in Ocampo's introspective work that investigates, while achieving in the process, the creation of authorial self. The contours of an authorial consciousness come into view in the interplay of the fictive metaphors of gestation, the elusive or lost masterpiece, mirrors, and the photograph. The recurring themes and images generated by these metaphors reveal signs of an authorial persona preoccupied with the complex properties of selfhood and reality and the pitfalls in their representations, as well as with the relation between the creator and her literary world.

To my parents

Carlos and María Díaz de León

and my uncle

Rafael Díaz de León

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Key to Collections

The following abbreviations will be used when quoting from Ocampo's short story collections and anthologies:

VO - *Viaje olvidado* (1937)

AI - *Autobiografía de Irene* (1948)

F - *La furia y otros cuentos* (1959)

INV - *Las invitadas* (1961)

PM - *El pecado mortal* (1970)

DN - *Los días de la noche* (1970)

ICI - *Informe del cielo y del infierno* (1970)

YASI - *Y así sucesivamente* (1987)

CF - *Cornelia frente al espejo* (1988)

RS - *Las reglas del secreto* (1991)

Introduction

Up to the moment of her death in December 1993, the Argentine writer Silvina Ocampo had maintained a steady pace of literary production that encompassed poetry, narrative, translation, and theater. In light of the amount of material penned by Ocampo, scholars of her work often remark on her relative obscurity. The Argentine critic Noemí Ulla, for example, argues that Ocampo's disdain for the usual mechanisms of notoriety, such as interviews, opinion essays, and publicity shots, have relegated her to "un lugar que debería ser más notorio en nuestro país" (*Invenciones a dos voces* 29). Furthermore, Danubio Torres Fierro notes that Ocampo's position in Argentine literature remains an ambiguous one due to her proximity to her very extroverted sister Victoria Ocampo and her husband Adolfo Bioy Casares (58). Concerning biographical information that would shed light on her personal life, one finds a number of different years (1903, 1906, 1909, and 1913) for her date of birth. Reina Roffé attributes the difficulties of finding basic biographical data to Ocampo's aversion to the strict categorization of time and space: "Tal vez por este motivo olvidó la fecha de su nacimiento y hoy resulta difícil determinarla con precisión. Sabemos, sin embargo, que nació en Buenos Aires a principios de siglo" (42).[1] Indeed in Ocampean cosmology, literary, temporal, spatial, physical, and grammatical categories are readily yielding transient circumstances. Protagonists' autonomies are vulnerable to metamorphoses, such as the deaf-mute character of "Isis" (*INV*) who transforms into a jaguar, and Mirta of "El automóvil" (*YASI*) and the gardener of "Sábanas de tierra" (*YASI*), whose passions for cars and gardening, respectively, transform them into the object of their obsession. In other stories Ocampo's preference for fluid, unstable subjects leaves the reader in a quandary concerning the gender or species of characters and narrators. Rather than experiencing a perplexity that would lead to the interrogation of reality, no deep

musings burden the narrators or characters in Ocampo's fiction. Considering Ocampo's resistance to stabilizing subjectivity, her literary work can be viewed as a life-long investigation of the processes and pitfalls implicated in the projection of selfhood.

My examination of Ocampo's fiction here proceeds from the purely literary context of the consequences of the act of narration on narrators that inhabit the fantastic setting, to the definition of and possible subversive strategies by the entities occupying the reality organized by the bourgeois paradigm of perception and epistemology, and finally, to the strategies involved in the author's self-figuration, this creation of a sense of self through her work. Before turning to Ocampo's work, it may be helpful to briefly sketch the historical, social, and cultural context out of which that work emerged.

Silvina Ocampo's career began in the 1930s in a critical yet vigorous artistic and intellectual environment whose first signs were already present at the end of the nineteenth century when two dominant tendencies characterized Argentine literature: on the one hand, a narrative body influenced by naturalism and realism, on the other, the twilight of the tradition of the *gauchesca* that continued in the popular form of the *folletín*, and the appearance of a series of short stories considered exemplars of the fantastic. An interest in a mode of literature that stood contrary to positivist theories and empirical explanations of reality was the result of a growing enthusiasm for the natural sciences. Among the writers practicing this early fantastic mode were Carlos Olivera, Antonio Agerich, and Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg, the recognized author of the first fantastic short story in Argentina. As the new century unfolded, some of today's most renowned figures in Latin American literature also published short story collections that included works within the fantastic tradition such as *Las fuerzas extrañas* (1906) by Leopoldo Lugones, and *El salvaje* (1920) and *El desierto*

(1924) by Horacio Quiroga. This new artistic sensibility, which spurned the precepts of realism and naturalism, grew in part as a response to Argentina's changing political and social scene. After four centuries of conservative rule, Christopher Leland explains, the left wing parties had finally succeeded in electing the candidates, namely Roque Sáenz Peña (1912) and Hipólito Yrigoyen (1916), who would work within their agenda. Social reforms and new economic opportunities projected a duplicitous image of progress and well-being. Attracted by the promises of prosperity, an unprecedented number of immigrants flocked to the land whose very name was synonymous with money.[2] A facade of prosperity temporarily masked an increasingly xenophobic and racist society that fully manifested its fears in events such as the *Semana Trágica* (1919), in which Jews and suspected communists were persecuted and brutally murdered. At the same time, foreign intervention in the country's economy rendered Argentina less autonomous and more dependent upon foreign interests.

After the Great Depression, although industrialization increased its pace, a series of upheavals again transformed Argentina in the thirties. "La década era infame," Julio Mafud explains, "años de crisis, de desocupación, de angustia, de tuberculosis, de caudillismos" (110). According to Carlos Rincón, the individual's perception of the world suffered as reality appeared transient and untrustworthy by "the sudden pluralization of the social environment" (166).[3] The crisis shaped a distinct Argentine culture, art, and literature. While technical advancements accelerated the mass production and dissemination of images, Rincón argues, there also appeared works of art of an ambivalent nature that sprung directly from the transformation of the "sociocultural horizon" of Argentina (166). These works did not "involve a descriptive reproduction of reality, [but did] unfold within imaginary settings and times and relate to an intermediate level of reference: a reality of images

and collective symbols as the basic screens for perception" (Rincón 166). Similarly, in the first decades of the twentieth century, the truculent events that transformed the political and social realities in the international scene pointed to systems and worldviews in collapse. In response, the iconoclastic artistic movements of these decades demanded a purging of the tenets of the past and a tentative reconfiguration of reality.

In the midst of this revaluation, the thirties witnessed the birth of the magazine *Sur*, in 1931, and the consolidation of the intelligentsia surrounding this publication. Buttressed by Victoria Ocampo's financial backing and direction, *Sur*'s gathering of writers, translators, and intellectuals represented a point of convergence for international coetaneous philosophical, social, and literary trends. At the same time, according to Carlos Dámaso Martínez, the fantastic mode gained popularity among the writers, although the most outstanding works did not begin to appear until the forties (410). Argentine writers whose literary identity grew as cultivators of the fantastic mode included José Bianco, Santiago Davobe, Manuel Peyrou, Enrique Anderson Imbert, Silvina Ocampo, Jorge Luis Borges, and Adolfo Bioy Casares. The themes of time and immortality recurred in their fiction. Their works displayed a playful, mischievous approach to the process of writing while employing narrative techniques that rejected naturalist and realist tendencies and destabilized the underpinnings of empirical reality and referentiality. As John King writes, "Borges, Silvina Ocampo, José Bianco and others directed their attack against realism and the psychological novel, with the reexamination of the formal complexities and perfection of fantastic literature and detective fiction" (64). Furthermore, parody and irony emerged as the preferred textual strategies to explore the artifice of literature and its exercise.

It was within this critical and artistically vibrant period that Silvina Ocampo began to write; she was thus schooled in the literary trends of the twentieth century. Her fiction, for example, bears the modern features of minimal plot and character development, as well as a general disregard for contingency. Ocampo's creative activities, however, began in the visual arts, not in literature. Her first contribution to a magazine consisted of a series of sketches that accompanied poems by Borges for an issue of *Martín Fierro* in 1927. Borges and she were not formally introduced until 1934, the same year Ocampo met her future husband, Adolfo Bioy Casares. Soon after the publication of her first illustrations, she traveled to Paris to pursue a career in the artistic circle of the moment. Ocampo recalled her Parisian experiences in an epistolary interview conducted by Danubio Torres Fierro and published in *Plural* in 1975.[4] The artists whom she sought out for lessons included Pablo Picasso, who told her that he received lessons, not gave them, and André Derain, who enigmatically snubbed the potential pupil by replying that painting was like love: "no se aprende" (Torres Fierro 59). Only after attending an exhibition of Giorgio de Chirico's work and feigning a deep appreciation for his paintings, Ocampo finally found in de Chirico the teacher whom she would see for a year. After returning to Buenos Aires and refusing to exhibit her Parisian nudes because of her mother's prudish censure, Ocampo abandoned painting and turned to literature, although Emilio Pettoruti rebuked her for complying with her mother's wishes.[5]

From the moment of her first publication, Ocampo steadily contributed poems, stories, and translations to *Sur* and *La Nación*, and to *Vuelta* and *Plural* in the last twenty years of her life. In the first decade of contributions to *Sur* alone, her published work included six stories, nineteen poems, and numerous translations of such diverse writers as A. E. Housman, Stephen Spender, Edith Sitwell, Walter de la Mare, Alexander Pope, and Emily Dickinson. Although Ocampo's recognition lies

in her expertise as a short story writer, her poetry collections have garnered more accolades than her prose. Her first book of poetry *Enumeración de la patria,* published in 1942, won the Premio Municipal. The next two poetry collections, *Los nombres* (1953) and *Lo amargo por dulce* (1962), earned second and first places, respectively, in the Premio Nacional competition. In the first of only two occasions in which Ocampo's short stories have been considered for recognition, the literary judges denied her the Premio Nacional in 1979 because of the characters' violence and cruelty (Ulla, *Encuentros con Silvina Ocampo* 96). The last formal recognition bestowed on her work was the 1988 Premio del Club de los Trece for the collection *Cornelia frente al espejo.*

Under the direction of her sister, Victoria Ocampo, *Sur* published in 1936 Silvina's first short story, "La siesta en el cedro," which was followed in 1937 by her first volume of fiction,*Viaje olvidado.* This collection of twenty-eight stories displaying vanguardist techniques elicited an ambiguous review by Victoria who objected to the images that seemed "atacados de tortícolis" (120). Victoria noted the deformation of familiar settings and images through dream-like states and Silvina's insistence on child-like narrating perspectives: "Cada página aludía a cosas, a seres conocidos [. . .] . Como en nuestros sueños, rostros sin nombre aparecían de pronto en un paisaje familiar, y voces extrañas resonaban en un cuarto cuya sola atmósfera era ya un tuteo" (119). Along with Victoria's attention to the volume, José Bianco, to whom Silvina later dedicated "Anillo de humo" in the collection *Las invitadas* (1961), reviewed the stories for *El Hogar.*

In 1948, Ocampo's second short story collection, *Autobiografía de Irene,* garnered words of praise from one of *Sur*'s reviewers, Eduardo González Lanuza: "De todos los laberintos lúcidos--y tanto más inextricables cuanto más lúcidos--en que abunda nuestra actual literatura de ficción, pocos más irresolubles que esta

'Autobiografía de Irene'" (56). In contrast to her first collection, *Autobiografía de Irene* contained only five stories, demonstrated a preference for narration in the first-person, presented temporally diverse storylines within and beyond the Argentine context, and offered narratological and structural complexities absent from prior work. Also, as Patricia Klingenberg observes, "The influence of Jorge Luis Borges is discernible everywhere in this collection" (*El espejo infiel* 46). Although *Autobiografía de Irene* lacked the presence of children that characterized *Viaje olvidado*, child characters and narrators returned with Ocampo's third collection and eventually became a trademark of Ocampean narrative. The next volume of stories, *La Furia y otros cuentos*, published in 1959, received a favorable review outside of the *Sur* literary circle: Graciela de Sola underscored the penetrating psychological study articulated through the ubiquitous first-person narration while identifying Atilio Chiappori and Horacio Quiroga as Ocampo's precursors. Although Sola's comments were for the most part laudatory, the review contained one ambiguous statement about Ocampo's previous collection, *Autobiografía de Irene*: "Leyendo los cuentos de 'La Furia' hemos evocado, asimismo, en algún momento, el limpio goce intelectual que nos deparara 'Autobiografía de Irene', colección de magníficos relatos que no creemos hayan sido superados" (177).

Two years after the publication of *La Furia*, Ocampo published the collection *Las invitadas* (1961). The reviewer for *Sur*, Mario A. Lancellotti, remarked on the behavior "más acá del bien y del mal" distinguishing the child characters, while observing the manner in which Ocampo had captured the middle class of Buenos Aires: "Silvina Ocampo renueva la proeza de señalarnos [. . .] el vago y tenaz relieve de buena parte de nuestra clase media" (75). In 1970, nine years after the appearance of *Las invitadas*, Ocampo presented twenty-nine stories in the volume *Los días de la noche*. Three short story collections for children appeared in the decade of

the seventies: *El cofre volante* (1974), *El tobogán* (1975), and *El caballo alado* (1976). The subsequent volume published in 1977, *La naranja maravillosa*, was intended for child and adult readers, and seven of the stories had been included in previous volumes.

The end of the next decade proved quite fruitful for Ocampo as she produced two volumes of short stories in the brief span of two years: *Y así sucesivamente* in 1987 and *Cornelia frente al espejo* in 1988. Of the twenty-three stories comprising the former compilation, three had been previously published.[6] The latter contained thirty-five stories. Her last two volumes abound with nebulous plots, ambiguous endings, cryptic meanings, fluctuating narrative perspectives, unstable narrators and characters (that change gender, person, and species), and imprecise genres. For example, because of their verse-like transcription, grammatical and punctuation liberties, and lyrical language, the stories "La fiesta de hielo"(*YASI*), "La alfombra voladora" (*CF*) and "Los enemigos de los mendigos" (*CF*) seem to be narrative poems. These features become more pronounced from one volume to the next, to the point that some work from *Cornelia frente al espejo* is rendered incomprehensible, as in the case of "El zorzal," "Los retratos apócrifos," and "Leyenda de Aguaribay." Nonetheless, her last two short story collections were the first to attract significant critical reviews outside of the Argentine literary circle, as demonstrated by *Vuelta*'s attention to her work.[7] Also, in 1988 Thomas Case wrote a review of *Y así sucesivamente* for *World Literature Today*. Commenting on her style, Case explains that Ocampo has often been compared to Henry James and that she possessed a "polished and urbane sophistication which is often brilliant for its subtle humor and ironic twists" (251). Two years later, Ana Cara's review of Ocampo's final short story collection, *Cornelia frente al espejo*, appeared in the same journal. Reiterating Case's laudatory tone, Cara praises the work's "narrative surprises and

verbal delights that only a master storyteller and seasoned artist can offer in an unburdened, refined language" (78). Yet, only near the end of Ocampo's life did her work finally enter the larger Western canon as reflected by the inclusion of "The Inextinguishable Race" (*La Furia*, 1959) in the anthology *World Literature: An Anthology of Great Short Stories, Drama, and Poetry*, prepared by Donna Rosenberg in 1992. In this anthology Ocampo's name appears beside those of Sappho, Luigi Pirandello, Federico García Lorca, Walt Whitman, and William Shakespeare.

Collaborating with writers of her time, Ocampo also produced a heterogeneous body of work. The most important and influential of these collaborative endeavors was the first Spanish anthology of the fantastic short story. In the prologue of their groundbreaking work, *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (1941), Borges, Ocampo, and Bioy Casares undertook one of the first formal inquiries into the nature of the fantastic in literature: "Pedimos leyes para el cuento fantástico; pero ya veremos que no hay un tipo, sino muchos, de cuentos fantásticos. Habrá que indagar las leyes generales para cada tipo de cuento y las leyes especiales para cada cuento"(8). Another compilation by the same authors, the *Antología poética argentina*, which focused on poetry, appeared a year later.

In 1946 Ocampo worked with Bioy Casares in her only incursion into the genre of the detective novel. *Los que aman odian* follows the investigation of a murder at a beach resort. Reviewing the novel for *Sur*, Rosa Chacel praised "[l]a fórmula acertada, la potencia magnética, la chispa" that produced a noteworthy work of art (77). Chacel also noted the authors' ability to weave with suspense and mystery an engaging plot of a master detective story: "Al llegar la trama a su desenredo, el crimen, en ese preciso momento, se reviste con todo el lujo de su misterio, y ante los ojos del lector se evade, sale sin pudor del reducto oscuro donde permanecía y se

integra a su inaprehensible universo" (76). Although this novel has been translated into French and Italian, this work still awaits critical study.

Ocampo's next major work in collaboration was *Los traidores*, a drama in verse written with J. Rodolfo Wilcock and published in 1956. Unlike the majority of her work set in a modern Argentina, the time period for this play is ancient Rome, a setting brimming with the crimes, conspiracies, and fragile alliances typical of the political scene of the Imperial Roman court. Writing for *Sur*, Ernesto Schóo favorably reviewed the work and expressed curiosity for its "unstageability" because of its highly stylized poetic language and lack of dramatic reality. According to Schóo, although this play would certainly attract admirers of experimental theatre, the actual representation of this play would be impossible in light of "la falta de 'corporeidad teatral' de los personajes" (98). Typical of Ocampo's work, the plot is sparse, characterization lacks elaboration, and reality is indistinguishable from the dream state.

At the present moment, Silvina Ocampo's literary works have been compiled in eight major anthologies. Two of the most recent ones include Matilde Sánchez's collection of diverse works and translations organized under the title *Las reglas del secreto* (1991) and Noemí Ulla's selection of short stories and poetry comprising *Invenciones a dos voces* (1992). However, in 1956, only seventeen years after Ocampo's second collection of short stories, an anthology prepared by the author herself was published with the title *Pequeña antología*. José Bianco and Edgardo Cozarinsky supervised her subsequent two collections. Bianco selected the stories and penned the introduction for *El pecado mortal* (1966), while Cozarinsky oversaw the same aspects of *Informe del Cielo y del Infierno* (1970). Ulla, one of Ocampo's major scholars, also prepared *La continuación y otras páginas* (1981). Whereas the anthologies that appeared between 1966 and 1981 consisted mainly of fiction,

Páginas de Silvina Ocampo, published in 1984, included examples of Ocampo's work in other genres--prose, poetry, drama, and translation--as chosen by Enrique Pezzoni who also wrote the "Estudio preliminar." Currently there are five short story anthologies in English, French, and Italian.

Before the decade of the eighties, only three of Ocampo's short stories had been anthologized in collections of general interest. Not surprisingly, two stories found their way into collections focusing on themes of the fantastic. The short story "La expiación" appeared in the *Antología de literatura fantástica* (1941), the collective enterprise by Borges, Ocampo, and Bioy Casares.[8] In 1960 "La red" was included by Nicolás Cócaro in *Cuentos fantásticos argentinos*. Interest in Ocampo's work, however, grew in the 1980s, as observed by the inclusion of her stories in anthologies such as *Amistad, divino tesoro* (1980), compiled by Elsa Isabel Bornemann; *El placer de leer* (1988), by Hebe Posesorski and Jaime Barylko; *Veinticinco cuentos argentinos magistrales* (1986), prepared by Carlos Mastrángelo; and *Cuentos de amor con humor* (1988), by Josep Vicent Marqués. Ocampo's fiction commonly appears in anthologies with an orientation toward Argentine literature, principally María Teresa Gramuglio's compilation, *Cuentos regionales argentinos* (1983) and Norman Di Giovanni and Susan Ashe's *Celeste Goes Dancing, and Other Stories* (1989). It also appears in numerous anthologies within the fantastic vein, notably Rodolfo Walsh's *Antología del cuento extraño* (1956), Alberto Manguel's *Black Water: The Book of Fantastic Literature* (1983), and Ramón Cañelles's *Relatos fantásticos latinoamericanos* (1987). Since 1983, Ocampo's work has drawn the gender-based attention often given a female writer, as demonstrated by her inclusion in the collections *Contemporary Women Authors of Latin America* (1983), *The Web: Stories by Argentine Women* (1984), *Other Fires: Short Fiction by Latin American Women* (1986), *Landscapes of a New Land: Fiction by Latin American Women* (1989), *Scents of Wood and Silence:*

Short Stories by Latin American Women Writers (1991), *Secret Weavers: Stories of the Fantastic by Women of Argentina and Chile* (1992), *Women's Writing in Latin America: An Anthology* (1991), and *Violencia II: Visiones femeninas* (1993).

In tandem with the general interest in Ocampo's work manifested by her inclusion in anthologies, critical attention to her writings has also increased considerably since the 1970s. References to Ocampo's prose were limited to reviews of her short story collections. Not until 1981, with Patricia Klingenberg's notable study "El infiel espejo: The Short Stories of Silvina Ocampo," did Ocampo's work undergo an intensive investigation and categorization. After an introductory chapter providing an overall view of Ocampo's literary body of work, Klingenberg identifies and examines the narrative themes, the fantastic, the marvellous, and the uncanny features, the grotesque, and the narrative and structural elements present in Ocampo's short stories. In the critical bibliography of Ocampo's fiction, one can distinguish a number of tendencies in the scope of the analysis of these short stories. Critics, such as Noemí Ulla, Emilia Perassi, Klingenberg, Enrique Pezzoni coincide in their observations of the peculiarity of the fantastic as practiced by Ocampo. Lucía Fox Lockert provides an overall view of the fantastic themes in Ocampo's short story collections published 1937-1961. While offering a similar overarching perspective of Ocampo's fantastic themes in her article "La fantasía en cuentos Silvina Ocampo," Noemí Ulla also discusses Ocampo's fiction in reference to works by Marosa Di Giorgio and Elena Garro.

Scholars who recognize the practice of the fantastic as a contentious response to patriarchy explore the representation strategies of the feminine subject within the fantastic setting. Marjorie Agosín and Cynthia Duncan concentrate their efforts on one story, "La casa de azúcar" (*F*) while María Birgitta Clark focuses on three other writers (Elvira Orphee, Armonía Somers, and Cristina Peri Rossi) of the Riverplate

and Linda Zee studies Ocampo's fiction in connection with four other authors, Luisa Valenzuela, Elena Garro, Rosario Ferré, and Amparo Dávila. Furthermore, Duncan provocatively declares that "What sets Ocampo apart, and gives her an individual identity (although that identity is denied by others), is the feminine nature of her fantastic writings" (65). In *Fantasies of the Feminine: The Short Stories of Silvina Ocampo*, Klingenberg agrees with Duncan and thus has dedicated a number of notable pages to demonstrate the forms that female resistance assumes within the fantastic to interrogate patriarchal hegemony.

Although my own analysis of Ocampo's fiction touches on the fantastic, especially in chapter one and two, I emphasize instead the undermining of bourgeois paradigms that propose the subject as a given, stable, unitary self. Moreover, my approach to the fantastic, especially in chapter one, investigates how the narratological complexities of Ocampo's work lead to the linguistic and physical erasure of the narrators. Other scholars of her work have underscored the narratological complexities of Ocampean fiction. In her article, for example, Graciela Tomassini studies structure, focalization, and the function of the narrative voice in "Epitafio romano," "La red," and "Autobiografía de Irene." Alejandra Rosarrosa develops a similar analysis focusing on "La red"; however, Rosarrosa demonstrates how the techniques of focalization in this story develop the theme of the cultural conflict between Western and Oriental perspectives. Concentrating on the narrative voice, Cristina Ferreira-Pinto astutely analyzes in the story "La continuación" the narrator's refracted voice.

In her *Fantasies of the Feminine*, moreover, Klingenberg explains that Ocampo's narrative techniques function "to avoid closure and to maintain important elements of ambiguity" (57). My work here coincides with Klingenberg's observations that "Ocampo's fictions challenge the notion of a unified subject in their incessant

dramatizing of the split, fragmented or multiplied fictional characters" (59). I build on Klingenberg's study by concentrating on the effects of the narrative strategies on the narrating self within the fantastic context in chapter one. Moreover, in chapter two I discuss Ocampo's rejection of a stable, unitary subject as a subverse response to bourgeois reality's codification of all aspects of human existence.

The perversion and / or cruelty of her child and adolescent characters have also emerged in studies by Barbara Aponte, Daniel Balderston, Helena Araújo, and Thomas Meehan. Concentrating on the common theme of the fall from inncocence, Aponte discusses "El pecado mortal" by Ocampo in relationship to *Amor mundo* by José María Arguedas and "Cigarrillos de Mauser" by Roa Bastos. Similarly, Araújo examines various approaches to the impure girl as observed in Ocampo's "El pecado mortal" and Alba Lucía Angel's novel *Misiá Señora*. While Araújo and Aponte focus their attention specifically on the characterization of the female child, Meehan and Balderston discuss a number of Ocampo's short stories that portray the child in general as a source of malevolence and depravity, although Ocampo never introduces a condemnatory tone. Taking an Artaudian approach, Balderston observes that Ocampo's aesthetics propose another form of beauty, one that is "estrechamente ligada al horror" (143).

In terms of the child, I, too, discuss this particular type of character in Ocampo's short stories, but I draw more on Blas Matamoro's observations concerning the social class depicted in Ocampo's work and the ways by which the child subverts the power structure. Thus my discussion of the child in chapter two pertains to a more general consideration of the different types of subjects that undermine the binary civilization / barbarism in Ocampo's fiction. Alejandra Pizarnik alludes to this topic when she comments that in her anthology of short stories, *El pecado mortal*, Ocampo erases the apparent contradictory nature of terms

such as innocence and perversity, childhood and adulthood, victim and victimizer (94).

The present study constitutes the first comprehensive examination of subjectivity in Ocampo's short fiction. My analysis of the subject moves from the self as it is directly portrayed in Ocampo's work to the authorial self-figuration that emerges from an examination of her oeuvre as a whole. In the first chapter I investigate the narrative techniques of structure, voice, and order that participate in the functions of paradox and irony within the fantastic setting. Consequent ambiguities and irresolutions, those sites where the text seems to veer away from becoming an aesthetic whole, are precisely where the subject, the representation of a self through language, appears and disappears. The three principal stories chosen for analysis in this chapter are exemplary in their interplay between paradox and irony: "El diario de Porfiria Bernal" (*F*), "Autobiografía de Irene" (*AI*), and "El castigo" (*INV*). Although these three stories are typical of the fantastic mode found in many of Ocampo's stories, the selected works are unique in the displayed interaction between paradox and irony within the context of the fantastic mode. The stories coincide in the following features: the presence of two narrators whose discourses cancel each other out, thus preventing their coalescence into aesthetic wholes; complex narrative structures reflecting uncertain origins and temporal incongruencies due to order and voice; a necessary biographical testimony on the part of the narrators; and the thematization of narration as the template of memory and experience.

In these stories, furthermore, the subject's apparent desire to constitute herself within language through narration generates precarious consequences. In "El diario de Porfiria Bernal," the narrator's need to tell her story culminates in her metamorphosis and consequent silence, thus exemplifying the mut(e)able self. By

articulating her life story, the narrator of "Autobiografía de Irene" perpetuates her own imprisonment through narration within the life of the text. The nameless narrator of "El castigo" recounts her life in reverse, towards the dissolution of her own consciousness; her unusual manner of narration renders her a newborn at the end of the story of her life. In all three examples, despite a consciousness asserting itself through narration, this self-generation paradoxically elicits the disappearance of the subject. Even in the process of its affirmation, the elusive and transient nature of the self proves inexorable. In light of the vanishing narrators in these stories, I read in Ocampo's titles an ironic use of the terms "diario" and "autobiografía," ostensibly optimistic terms that propose an affirmation of subjectivity. Rather than securing a discrete, unitary sense of self, the act of enunciation in these stories entails the relinquishing of the narrating self's physical and psychological constitution.

Contextualized within the discussion of barbarism and civilization in Argentine history and literature, the second chapter focuses on the confrontation between the bourgeois, stable subject and the alternate, unstable subject. Instead of reiterating what scholars have traditionally identified as the binary at the heart of the most salient ideological concept throughout Argentina's history, Ocampo investigates alternate modes of being and deconstructs the civilization and barbarism antinomy. I examine the Ocampean subject within four categories: the unstable subject; the bored subject; the sexual subject; and the child subject. Common issues, such as cruelty, homicide, suicide, incest, mental imbalance, and illness, emerge. By pitting the bourgeois, stable subject against the unstable, mutable subject, Ocampo reveals the elements of the binarism barbarism / civilization to be false; under her pen, provisional oppositions of the traits traditionally associated with the two poles of this antinomy slip out of focus.

Ocampo's stories are populated with middle-class wives and children, teachers and governesses and students, doctors and patients, married and courting bourgeois couples, musicians and painters, shopkeepers and bureaucratic functionaries. We find profiles of the lower-class in unsophisticated characters interacting with the elites in the roles of maids, seamstresses, handymen, cooks, mechanics, butchers, doormen, and servants. Within the dynamics of this engagement, the social masks fall, thus suggesting that social codes of behavior are anything but transparent and incontestable. Whereas the organization of bourgeois social reality poses an edifice of codified language and fixed social rituals that determine the self's identity, behavior, and interaction with others, Ocampo's narrators and characters transcend these strictures by resorting to alternate forms of existence through physical and mental infirmity, boredom, metamorphosis, and death. Fragile physical and psychological autonomies often undermine the supposedly predictable and reliable nature of empirical reality. In the process, Ocampo sabotages the delusive security of the domestic space in which the hierarchy of power is subject to subversion and the esteemed object can betray its owner. Here, the home becomes a source of uncertainty. Moreover, Ocampo exposes the stultifying, habitual nature of conventions that limit the manner of engagement between men and women. In working through the instability of the self in readily recognized social contexts, Ocampo debunks the moral bankruptcy behind the veneer of gentility and social masks that aim to fix reality and identity. While undoing traditional dualisms, the physically and psychologically unstable self in Ocampo's stories challenges the social order, the public and private spaces of bourgeois life, and the relations of power specific to these spaces.

In the third chapter I examine the strategies of self-representation of the authorial self in Ocampo's work. Predicated on the displacement of the biological

self by the textual self, my study of the fictive metaphors and intrusive narrative strategies in Ocampo's short stories outlines the contours of a consciousness. Her audacious infusion of her work with autobiographical details, coupled with a range of startling tangential to almost word-for-word correspondences between her interviews and literary work, point to a self-reflexive consciousness in the process of becoming through linguistic self-creation. Ocampo's obsessively investigated themes take form: the properties of creative activity, the spatial and temporal relations constituting empirical reality, the nature of selfhood, the elusive masterpiece, and the deathbed as the moment of heightened perception. An investigation of the recurrent motifs and subject matter yields four fictive metaphors that stand as strategies of self-figuration of the author in Ocampo's fiction: gestation, the unfinished or lost masterpiece, mirrors, and the photograph. Furthermore, the intrusive narrative techniques underscore the vital participation of the reader in the generation of meaning in a text. Instead of naturalizing the devices that generate a text, Ocampo at times reveals and underscores the literary artifice as the narrators intrude unexpectedly, interpellate the reader, interrupt narration, or question the reader's response to a particular scene. In conjunction with the fictive metaphors, these narrative strategies and their consequent emphasis on the literary artifice reflexively call attention to the text itself, to the act of writing. If the text survives and replaces its maker--the author--then the act of reading also leads to the transcendence of the author beyond her physical presence. As these fictive metaphors and intrusive techniques unshroud the maker of her fictional worlds, Ocampo weaves an introspective body of work that investigates the authorial self.

Notes

[1] In light of Ocampo's resistance to any self-promotion and self-revelation, we often encounter peculiar portrayals of this Argentine writer. Marcelo Pichon Rivière, for example, recalls her voice "medio gangosa, un poco trémula, algo borrosa, muy aniñada," and her eyes "como los de una chica" (2). Echoing this child-like characterization, Adolfo Cantón begins his review of her last two short story collections, *Y así sucesivamente* (1987) and *Cornelia frenta al espejo* (1988), by composing this portrait of the writer: "Es una niña que escribe cuentos de terror que ningún adulto se atrevería a imaginar" (38). Instead of discussing specific details of the collections, Cantón digresses into musings on Ocampo's personality.

[2] According to Julio Mafud, the census conducted in 1914 indicated that immigrants comprised 50 per cent of Buenos Aires's population, while the descendants of immigrants constituted the other half of the population (77).

[3] Carlos Rincón succinctly summarizes the circumstances that radically transformed Argentine society during this decade: "With the arrival on the scene of new social factors, changing values, and new demands, traditional sociocultural facts and ways of life were robbed of their strength. The systems previously underlying the exchange of goods and information gradually lost control. Culturally, this resulted in changes brought about by the rapid urbanization of consciousness and the restructuring of social communication via the mass media. Relationships to power that were frozen or blocked gave way to a mobile field of power relations where populism could find fertile soil. The 'downfall' of Europe, as experienced by the crisis-stricken periphery, was added to the problem of looking at the future directly into the sun" (166).

[4] Torres Fierro was not permitted to conduct the interview in person. The very private Ocampo agreed to respond in writing to a list of questions that would be mailed to her home.

[5] In 1940, however, some of her works were exhibited along with those of Norah Borges and Xul Solar. Julio Payró wrote a review of the exposition for *Sur*: "Los desnudos, casi en grisalla, como 'Ninfa' o 'Mujer sentada', seducen por la sobriedad enérgica de su modelado 'sugerido', por su entonación certera y, más que nada, por su rítmica disposición" (85).

[6] "Sábanas de tierra" and "Inauguración del monumento" were first published in *Sur* in 1938, and "Y así sucesivamente" was first published in Enrique Pezzoni's anthology *Páginas de Silvina Ocampo* (1984).

[7] See Fabienne Bradu and Adolfo Cantón.

[8] "La expiación" was included by the authors as an example of the fantastic. The short story is, however, more appropriately categorized under the mode of the uncanny, a mode that Tzvetan Todorov has distinguished from the fantastic because in such a work the laws of empirical reality remain intact while the phenomenon is explained within the parameters of these laws (41). I further study "La expiación" in the investigation of the sexual subject in chapter two.

Chapter One

The Disappearance of the Subject:

Paradox and Irony in Silvina Ocampo's Early Fiction

The work of Silvina Ocampo occupies a distinguished position in an Argentine tradition of the fantastic that evolved within a literary history in tune with historical and social changes. As explicated in the introduction, Ocampo began writing in a unique and urgent moment in Argentine history that saw the emergence of a literature displaying several features: a rejection of the naturalist and realist psychological tradition; a playful, mischievous attitude toward the literary exercise; the tendency toward parodox and irony; and the thematic exploration of literature and its practice. Noemí Ulla adds to this list an obsessive thematic preoccupation with time and immortality, as well as the profanation of empirical reality and referentiality ("Silvina Ocampo" 390). Beyond Ocampo's use of the fantastic, especially in the collection *Autobiografía de Irene* (1948) and to some degree in *Viaje olvidado* (1937), another early indicator of her participation in the modern cynicism generated by an unpredictable and uncontrollable environment is her disdain for saturated story lines. Ocampo's early collections present a strong rejection of cause-effect contingencies, those paradigmatic plots of the universe. Plot development in Ocampo's stories is often minimal, a legacy in her prose of the vanguard movements. We do not encounter a chain of events that increases narrative tension and culminates in a climactic moment, cascading toward resolution.

A striking feature of Ocampo's prose, which provides the central focus of this chapter, is her use of paradox and irony--within a contemporary fantastic mode--to construct an image of the disappearing self. We can see this quality most clearly in the representative stories "El diario de Porfiria Bernal" (1961), "Autobiografía de Irene" (1948), and "El castigo" (1959). The singular view of the subject presented in

these stories and the interplay of paradox and irony that creates it are consistent with a contemporary notion of the fantastic.[1]

The fantastic as a canonical genre seems no longer applicable to twentieth-century narratives. After all, the traditional definition of the fantastic, as established by Tzvetan Todorov in his landmark and controversial study, subsequently generated a series of approaches that responded critically to his restrictive conditions for the fantastic.[2] These requirements mainly include hesitation by the reader as he or she wavers between the natural and the supernatural explanations of the narrated events; a comparable hesitation experienced by characters and narrators; and the reader's adoption of "a certain attitude with regard to the text [. . .] [rejecting] allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations" (Todorov 33).

In light of the wave of works that have reconsidered Todorov's requisites for the fantastic, Nancy Havera proposes a broader approach to accommodate the mode's diversity. The contemporary fantastic maintains the characteristic tension between the empirical and the supernatural worlds (the crucial discrepancy for the existence of the fantastic), but the elements of terror and epistemological vacillation by the characters or the readers are not essential responses (Havera in Klingenberg, *El infiel espejo* 75). Havera credits Franz Kafka with this "subtle underplaying of the fantastic element" in common everyday experiences (Havera in Klingenberg, *El infiel espejo* 77). In her notable analysis of the grotesque--this mixture of "comedy with tragedy or the horrible with the ludicrous"--in Ocampo's narrative work, Patricia Klingenberg explains that "when fear is subtracted from the fantastic and we view a chaotic world with indifference, resignation, or worse, a diabolical smile, we find ourselves face to face with the grotesque" (*El infiel espejo* 98-99). The examples are numerous: a child laughs as she watches a black velvet dress strangle a woman to

death ("El vestido de terciopelo"); a husband narrates with resignation the loss of his wife who has vanished, absorbed by another person's life ("La casa de azúcar"); a young girl callously perpetrates the metamorphosis of her governess through her necromantic diary ("El diario de Porfiria Bernal").

Since the contemporary fantastic lacks that traditionally important trait of hesitation--whether produced by awe, horror, or fear--Chanady has proposed that the fantastic mode requires three criteria. First, there should be two codes of reality with equal momentum in a text, the natural and the supernatural: "The narration is interpreted according to two codes of perception between which the reader does not hesitate" (11). In other words, if by chance hesitation should be absent, there is no reason to leave the domain of the fantastic "because there is no justification to hesitate between logical and irrational explanations" (11). Secondly, these two codes of perception must exclude one another, in this manner creating "a type of antinomy in the text" (12). Thirdly, the narration must be guided by an "authorial reticence" that deliberately withholds information, in order not to resolve this antinomy (16). A preference for mode over genre is clearly expressed: "the fantastic [. . .] is a literary mode rather than a specific, historically identifiable genre, and can be found in all types of literature" (16-17).

In the contemporary fantastic, then, attention has turned away from the element of hesitation and inward toward the very paradoxes, absurdities, and ironies operating in realities supposedly held together by the predictability of empirical laws. There is no mode of literature that juxtaposes more dramatically the diametrically opposed natural and supernatural codes than the fantastic. In terms of Ocampo's work, although she does not wander from familiar, quotidian settings, paradox and irony are not only thematic consequences of her narrating style, but are also, in many instances, the results of narrative structures, temporal pirouettes, and

the interweaving of narrative voices that embody the paradox and collaborate in the ironic effect. While noting certain fantastic elements in her prose, therefore, I will focus more concisely on how Ocampo employs paradox and irony to create a specific image of the disappearing self.

In my analysis of the three stories, I work with a conception of irony that emphasizes the paradoxical coexistence of alterities within a single context. In his work on the short story, for example, Enrique Anderson Imbert argues that the mechanism of irony lies in a text's ability to entertain incongruencies, discrepancies, ambivalences, divergent implications, and simulations (118). For him, the short story itself is essentially ironic, a feature that is posited as well by the temporal schizophrenia characteristic of the written word.[3] No matter what its proximity to the described event, Anderson Imbert argues, the processes of narration and experience will necessarily exclude each other. Anderson Imbert's words find consonance in Paul de Man's discussion on the division of the subject into a narrating persona and a self in the past who experienced the events. The act of narration for de Man involves the division of the subject to the second degree: "Language [. . .] divides the subject into an empirical self, immersed in the world, and a self that becomes like a sign in its attempt at differentiation and self-definition" (213). Thus, narration permits the coexistence of many selves capable of enduring the temporal and spatial distancing of experience.[4]

The common denominator in these definitions is the presence of an otherness seeping into the structures and discourse of narration, that is, a discontinuity of codes that I will highlight in Ocampo's work. This ironic coexistence of alterities points to the creation of paradox: the bringing together of contradictory phenomena, situations, meanings, and concepts. The otherness always lies close by, threatening any sense of continuity, closed significance, or totalizing, absolute meanings. In this

vein, Patrick Hughes and George Brecht provide a practical definition of paradox: "The three terms of description (or condition) of logical paradox most often used are self-reference, contradiction, and vicious circle" (1). Once again, an otherness arises in the core of paradox; realities not found linked in empirical reality will be joined syntactically in language so that two things having contradictory meanings may coexist, both conserving their autonomous truths.

As I will show, paradox and irony are active at various levels of Ocampo's short stories. From the very structure of the texts to the themes, paradox and irony arise in many instances from irresolution, lack of closure, and ambiguity within conceptual labyrinths that do not unfold in Borgesian erudition. Rather, in the simple, quotidian settings of her stories, ambiguity and irresolution often erupt from the sudden appearance of a fantastic element that is never explained away. The result is quite unsettling. The control over meaning is lost in the ironic effect. As de Man points out, irony is "most amazing in putting together the most incongruous, incompatible things, but there are certain points where the trope cannot master the disruption" (145). In Ocampo's work, such unmastered disruptions ultimately lead to a disappearing sense of self.

The three stories analyzed in this chapter--"El diario de Porfiria Bernal," "Autobiografía de Irene," and "El castigo"--exemplify this process in Ocampo's writing. Typical of the fantastic mode found in much of her work, these particular stories coincide in the displayed interaction between paradox and irony that disrupts an integrated sense of self.[5] They also share various characteristics that bring this about: the presence of two narrators whose discourses cancel each other out, preventing a coalescence into aesthetic wholes; complex narrative structures that reflect uncertain origins and temporal incongruencies due to order and voice; the need for a sort of biographical testimony from the narrators; and the thematic

exploration of narration as the template of memory and experience. The analysis undertaken here pays close attention, moreover, to the features of narrative structure--character conflict, voice, and temporal order--that participate in the functions of paradox and irony. Consequent ambiguities and irresolutions--sites where the text threatens to unhinge itself--are precisely where the subject, the representation of the self through language, momentarily manifests an otherness not explicitly articulated but merely suggested.[6] In these three stories we observe a relinquishing of the narrating self's sense of physical density: a transformation that renders the narrator incapable of speech and produces a radically changed and muted self.

The Mut(e)able Self in "El diario de Porfiria Bernal"

In Ocampo's short story "El diario de Porfiria Bernal," the narrator's need to tell her story leads only to her metamorphosis and consequent silence. The work is marked by the features that, as I've noted, can be found in all three stories: the presence of two narrators providing contradictory information; complex narrative structures; and a preoccupation with the themes of memory and experience within the framework of time. In its structural organization, the story evokes a unique conception of time through its fragmentation of the *récit*, by the alternation between a letter and a diary, and by the temporal relationship of these two texts to the narrated events. The problematic nature of the subject emerges as the narrating subject--who originally appears to be an independent coherent entity--slowly degenerates linguistically and physically. As a consequence of the paradoxical temporal nature of narration, the text's narrative structure, and the postulated intimate relationship between language and reality, the final condition of the principal narrator reveals a muted, silenced self, as well as a radically transformed self.

The first narrative level of the story seems deceptively simple. Miss Fielding, an English governess in Buenos Aires, is writing a letter that is to accompany the diary composed by her only pupil, Porfiria Bernal. Miss Fielding subsequently inserts Porfiria's diary to continue her own story. She constantly alludes to the little time she has left, which is one of the reasons for the insertion of Porfiria's diary, but the reader learns only at the story's end that this initial despair is a response to the necromantic powers of Porfiria's written word. Nonetheless, the text, comprised of Miss Antonia Fielding's letter and Porfiria Bernal's diary, which in turn includes two interventions by Miss Fielding, is constructed such that the first narrative level is a mere fragment of this strange *histoire* that concludes in the transformation of Miss Fielding into a cat. The first narrative level transpires in a few hours, the time it takes Miss Fielding to write this final letter and to edit Porfiria's diary (with two intrusions) while she resignedly awaits her own metamorphosis.

The *histoire*, however, actually begins with Miss Fielding's arrival in Buenos Aires. Her letter initiates the narrative by stating its purpose of relating her experiences in Buenos Aires retrospectively: "Recuerdo como si fuera hoy la calurosa mañana de diciembre, brillaba el llamador de bronce, en forma de mano" (*Informe del cielo y del infierno* 165).[7] The narrator relives this moment with all its sensorial intensity: "Recuerdo el vívido olor a piso recién encerado [. . .] las claraboyas con vidrios de distintos colores, las tonalidades verdes, ropas, violetas predominantes [. . .] un piano vecino, cuya música melancólica me perseguiría" (*ICI* 165-66). After personal inquiries and reminiscences, Miss Fielding finally arrives at the turning point of her life: during a train ride to the beach, teacher and pupil converse about the usage of a diary. Porfiria Bernal asks with apparent innocence: '¿Y hay que decir la verdad?' Miss Fielding responds: 'De otro modo ¿para qué sirve un diario?' (*ICI* 167). Interestingly, this narrator's following remark contains a multi-layered

temporality: "sin pensar en el significado que tendrían para ella mis palabras" (*ICI* 167). These words express resentment and remorse for having initiated Porfiria in the habit of keeping a diary. The voice belongs to the character-narrator, Miss Fielding, who recognizes that she, too, is being narrated from beyond herself, from the diary that was written before the realization of its contents. Since the subject's voice occupies the narrative present of the letter, the paradoxical nature of language emerges with the governess's declaration of ignorance concerning the future effect of her words on Porfiria. This "act of irony," to use de Man's term, seduces the reader.[8] Or, as Gérard Genette would put it, the elusive significance of the enunciation functions on the principle of deferred or postponed significance, thus luring the reader into the literary artifice (57).

During this conversation, Porfiria announces in a sour tone that she has already begun keeping a diary: 'Mi diario es un diario muy especial. Tal vez un día se lo entregue para que lo lea. Pero se lo entregaré a usted solamente. Mamá no lo tiene que ver porque a ella le parecería inmoral' (*ICI* 171). At this moment Miss Fielding feels that a secret has joined them, "un secreto peligroso, indisoluble, inevitable" (*ICI* 171). Though the governess initially tries to resist Porfiria's attempts to give her the diary, she finally acquiesces and begins it sometime during September 1930. At this point, by introducing Porfiria Bernal's narrative after her own, the narrator Miss Fielding allows her student to speak through the diary, while respecting the chronology of the events that it reports. The manuscript is inserted, supposedly intact--except for two interruptions--as a continuation of the events evoked by Miss Fielding. The diary's first date is January 3, 1931: "Tengo ocho años cumplidos. Me llamo Porfiria y Miguel es mi hermano. Miguel tiene un perro grande como una oveja. Durante muchos años esperé tener un hermano mejor y menor, pero he desistido: no quiero a mi familia" (*ICI* 172-73).

The discrepancy between this first entry and the alleged date of the diary's acquisition, September 1930, constitutes a disturbing feature for the reader. Even more significant is the ambiguous meaning of Miss Fielding's willingness to insert Porfiria's diary as a valid continuation of her own testimony, a move that consequently legitimizes Porfiria Bernal's version. Miss Fielding sustains that her testimony stands pitted against Porfiria's diary; and yet, though purporting a redeeming intent, the attempt to clear her own name is weak: "Escribo sobre todo para mí misma, por un deber de conciencia" (*ICI* 163). Nonetheless, she confesses to almost committing a crime: "Si llegué al borde del crimen, no fue por mi culpa: el no haberlo cometido no me vuelve menos desdichada" (*ICI* 163). This crime is described in Porfiria's diary one entry and one day prior to Miss Fielding's alleged metamorphosis: "Subimos a la azotea [. . .] . Tenía las manos heladas y temblaba. Me clavó las uñas. Me sorprendió de nuevo con su cara de gato; se lo dije. [. . .] De pronto perdí pie. ¿Es Miss Fielding que me ha empujado? Trato de asirme a los barrotes de hierro" (*ICI* 185). The diary then proceeds with 32 entries that run through October 5 of that same year, 1931. After an interruption by Miss Fielding, the diary continues with eight entries dated October 26-December 15. The last six entries dated December 20-26 follow the last intrusion by Miss Fielding.

Through Porfiria's diary, we piece together Porfiria's special personality, some questionable details of the family's interaction, and Miss Fielding's life. Though not explicitly stated, malicious innuendoes constantly chip away at the posited image of Miss Fielding's virtue. For example, the entry for March 10 relates a trip to the grandfather's house in Arrecifes. Miss Fielding faints while taking a walk with Miguel: "Camina con Miguel por el parque a la noche. Oigo las voces hasta que me duermo. Dicen que vieron un fantasma y que Miss Fielding cayó desmayada: eran los ojos fosforecentes de un gato, que corría por el techo de la casa, como un gigante

negro" (*ICI* 176). The subsequent events are few and quite banal. More enticing are the allusions to suspicious activities in Porfiria's family. One day Porfiria steals one of Miss Fielding's personal letters, documents that she states her mother would consider "comprometedoras" (*ICI* 180).

Miss Fielding's credibility as a virtuous governess suffers under Porfiria's watchful eyes. According to Porfiria, a sinister bond unites Miguel and Miss Fielding, as the entry of July 23rd demonstrates: "No veía, pero oía todo lo que decían. Miss Fielding hablaba con Miguel: parecía que lloraba. Hablaban mal de mí. Cantaban los pájaros de las jaulas, en el balcón, como si se besaran. En la claridad de la pared veía agitarse las sombras, como las figuras de una linterna mágica" (*ICI* 180). A few weeks later, on August 24th, the insinuation of incest becomes bolder: "Miguel la llamó ayer para que le ayudara a escribir una carta: tardaron más de una hora" (*ICI* 181). The reader senses a strange attachment between Miss Fielding and Porfiria's brother, Miguel: "Trataré de alejarlos. No me importa que me odien. Cuando uno consigue el afecto que reclama, el odio es un alivio. El odio es el único que puede reemplazar al amor" (*ICI* 163). In her account, the child lacks the innocence typical of her age; Porfiria feigns ignorance while betraying the moral deterioration of her upper middle-class family embodied in her mother's adulterous activities: "Roberto Cárdenas y mi madre se despiden como si temieran no verse nunca más. ¿Qué secretos terribles se dicen en la oscuridad de la sala cuando pasa el tranvía?" (*ICI* 182).

Finally, on October 5th Miss Fielding suddenly interrupts the diary to add her own agitated response, simulating a similar event in the past: "Interrumpo este diario, como lo interrumpí entonces, con estupor, el 5 de octubre, a las 12 de la noche, al comprobar que todo lo que Porfiria había escrito en su diario hacía casi un año estaba cumpliéndose" (*ICI* 181-82). Miss Fielding confesses, "Sentí ese día

horror por ella, y a la noche, en la soledad de mi habitación, leí las páginas siguientes del diario" (*ICI* 182). The desire to recreate the past is evident, considering that Miss Fielding writes in a narrative present as she composes her manuscript and edits her pupil's diary. This passage, which is "predictive" in Genette's terms, possesses a multiple time component: though Miss Fielding writes after having discovered the meaning of Porfiria's writings, the insertion of the diary in that particular moment simulates the past.[9]

The narrative intensifies this temporal paradox as well as the sense of a fateful outcome through the disconcerting discrepancy between the date on which Miss Fielding discovers the meaning of the diary (October 5) and Porfiria Bernal's entry of seven days before (September 29): "Miss Fielding me ve tal vez como un demonio [. . .] y es porque empieza a comprender el significado de este diario, donde tendrá que seguir ruborizándose, dócil, obedeciendo al destino que yo le inflingiré" (*ICI* 181). Then, on December 15, Porfiria presents an eerie entry detailing Miss Fielding's final destiny: "Es como si una voz me dictara las palabras de este diario: la oigo en la noche, en la oscuridad [. . .] . Temo el desenlace, como lo temerá Miss Fielding" (*ICI* 184). Indeed, Miss Fielding's fear of this conclusion compels her to voice her final words. She has become aware of the diary's powers, for all of its events have transpired as related. Miss Fileding's final intervention also possesses a double time dimension: not only is it produced by a consciousness that has experienced the reading of the entire diary, but it is designed as well to re-present the moment as it happened in the past. In a gesture that communicates the muted subject's complete and irreversible surrender of herself, Miss Fielding awaits in silence the fulfillment of her destiny: "Hablará por mí el diario de Porfiria Bernal. Me falta vivir sus últimas páginas" (*ICI* 184).

Although these are Miss Fielding's last words, the diary written prior to the development of the detailed events completes the *histoire*. Thus the diary completes the first level of narration, while simultaneously emerging at the hypodiegetic level of the narrator-Porfiria. At the story's conclusion, we observe a disturbing transgression of the diegetic levels when time collapses in one final moment as Miss Fieldings temporal dimension finally catches up with the diary's time. Given that the governess appears to be the principal narrator occupying a superior diegetic level to that of Porfiria, the textual destruction of the character-narrator, Miss Fielding, produces an ironic effect. Whereas traditional realist strategies are characterized primarily by a hierarchy of diegetic levels, under the authority of a narrator, here the story destabilizes the narrator's control over meaning and over her own existence. Ursula Heise describes such a process typical of contemporary texts: "systematic violations of the boundary between frame narrative and embedded story destabilize another kind of conventional narrative causality: the narrator's control of the story" (59).[10]

This destabilization of narrative levels constitutes the temporal paradox encased in the closed universe of the text whose structure resembles the relationship among Chinese boxes. Although Miss Fielding occupies a diegetic level superior to Porfiria's, to complete her narration the governess must yield silently to the events previously detailed by her pupil. Thus the temporal paradox is incorporated into the work's very structure: the future becomes a memory before the realization of the events. In a sense, as if she were remembering, Miss Fielding retreads the path of events because her own story has already become history through its prior verbal rendition in Porfiria's diary.

As in many works within the fantastic mode, here an alteration of linear time serves as the backdrop for the supernatural event. In "El diario de Porfiria Bernal",

time does not flow in a linear manner but instead circulates like cogs on a water mill meeting anew. When the temporal dimension of the diary finally coincides with the one lived by the narrator Miss Fielding, the supernatural event emerges and leads to the physical transformation and ultimate disappearance of the subject. On December 26, Miss Fielding finally fulfills her destiny while preparing a cup of chocolate for Porfiria: "Hierve la leche en un calentador. Ya no podrá traerme la taza. Se ha cubierto de pelos, se ha achicado, se ha escondido; por la ventana abierta da un brinco y se detiene en la balustrada del balcón. Luego da otro brinco y se aleja" (*ICI* 186). Thus what had been only a feline epithet and metaphor now yields to a literal representation.

The final scene described above figures as the culmination of the momentum created by this feline motif that evolves from simple references to cats, to the establishment of a metaphor comparing Miss Fielding to a cat, and ultimately, to the governess's transformation. Porfiria first mentions these animals in an apparently minor incident: "Me enojé con Miss Fielding: no quería que me despidiera de los gatos de Palermo" (*ICI* 174). However, proceeding entries emphasize the governess's mysterious reaction to cats: "No sé si adora o si odia a los gatos. Los acaricia y les da pedacitos de carne cruda [. . .] pero también les da puntapiés" (*ICI* 176); "Dicen [Mario and Miss Fielding] que vieron un fantasma y que Miss Fielding cayó desmayada: eran los ojos fosforecentes de un gato, que corría por el techo de la casa, como un gigante negro" (*ICI* 176). Again, the prophetic feline reference serves to increase the thematic momentum toward the final metamorphosis.

Early in her diary--the sixth of 46 entries--Porfiria firmly sets up a metaphoric link between Miss Fielding and the feline being: "Estoy enferma. Miss Fielding no me deja pensar: Lee con su monótona voz de gato, *Robinson Crusoe*" (*ICI* 175). Further on Miss Fielding suffers a tantrum: "De pronto Miss Fielding se puso a

temblar; su cara se transformó: parecía horrible, un verdadero gato. Se lo dije y me cubrió de arañazos" (*ICI* 180). And one day prior to Miss Fielding's alleged metamorphosis, Porfiria writes: "Me sorprendió de nuevo con su cara de gato; se lo dije" (*ICI* 185). Together these passages establish and intensify a metaphoric link between Miss Fielding and the feline condition; nonetheless, the metaphor will eventually yield to a literal physical reality.

In the final scene describing the governess's transformation, Miss Fielding now succumbs to Porfiria's written word. Reality not only complies with language but also completely depends on it. Critics have observed a similar process in Borges's stories. But if, as Alfonso de Toro observes, Borges's "Pierre Menard" generates the postulate "escribo, luego existo" (459), the dictum in Ocampo's story changes the grammatical "I" to the third-person: "escribe (Porfiria) luego existo (Miss Fielding)." Since words constitute Miss Fielding's selfhood, she must interpret her self (while reading the diary) to become her self, and, ironically, to experience the demise of her self.

This act of reading also produces ironic outcomes, similar to those in Borges's "La muerte y la brújula" (1944). It is a sort of oedipal irony: the subject of the investigation seeking the truth realizes she herself is the victim of its ultimate consequence. Miss Fielding has stepped into Porfiria's snare, and as she deciphers the significance of her pupil's manuscript, she ironically experiences a climactic moment of lucidity. Nonetheless, just as with Aureliano Buendía's blinding clarity through discovery before the apocalyptic conclusion of *Cien años de soledad*, a successful reading here leads to the demise of the subject herself, a consequence that suggests Miss Fielding's own irreality. For Miss Fielding, the act of reading requires the division of the subject, since her identity is being constructed through narration that originates outside of herself, in Porfiria's text. Deciphering leads to death by

metamorphosis. As words fill in her futurity, the governess is fulfilling a history written before its own realization. She has been reduced to a mere character of Porfiria's narration, much as the reader will be destroyed at the end of Julio Cortázar's "Continuidad de los parques." Ultimately, the narrating governess is simply another character in Porfiria's story. Ocampo's narrative strategies manifest the "self-canceling" of character that critics such as Brian McHale associate with postmodernist fiction.[11]

In this vein, the character-narrator Miss Fielding's self-canceling, ironic reading, which reveals more than she intended, also generates a lack of narrator control over meaning and, ultimately, over her own constitution. For example, Miss Fielding anguishes over the diary's inflammatory nature: "¿Quién podrá creer en mi inocencia?"(*ICI* 160). And yet we cannot detect a genuine effort to correct Porfiria or to offer a contestable story that would dissipate the insinuations of an incestuous relationship with the thirteen year-old Miguel. On the other hand, Porfiria herself does not stand up to moral scrutiny. In the first entry of her diary, Porfiria confesses a desire to engage in the following prohibited activities at night: "A esas horas podría escaparme de mi casa, matar a alguien, robar un collar de brillantes" (*ICI* 173). Furthermore, Porfiria's insistence on an abnormal bond between her brother and Miss Fielding suggests a peculiar attachment to her brother Miguel. At one point, Porfiria vows to separate them: "Trataré de alejarlos" (*ICI* 163). Porfiria insists on depicting Miss Fielding as a being of malicious feline savagery. In reality both Miss Fielding's narration and Porfiria's diary are undermined by what is implied but not stated, as one fails to respond adequately to or contest the other.

These irresolutions, as in the juncture of Miss Fielding's and Porfiria's narratives, produce interesting epistemological implications. Miss Fielding willingly identifies herself in Porfiria's narrative. Thus the governess masters the significance

of her pupil's text. The pupil has successfully carried out the duties of narration, as the governess has with those of reading and deciphering. But this dynamic requires that the subject completely relinquish her fragile autonomy to become an object of knowledge: Miss Fielding's mastery over meaning requires her submission to a story as imposed by Porfiria. In another context, Dennis Foster explains that mastery over meaning is perhaps more uncomfortable than one readily believes: "as flattering as it may be to find oneself confirmed in another's text (and therein to feel one's mastery over it), that reflection also suggests one's redundancy" (13). In "El diario de Porfiria Bernal" this redundancy or self-identification of the subject, which Foster contextualizes in the reading process, emerges in the parallel characters, Miss Fielding and Porfiria. The mirroring of the two characters' words weaves a disquieting and irresoluble effect on Ocampo's reader. Contemplating Porfiria's physical appearance, Miss Fielding comments: "Porfiria tenía esa modesta recatada belleza que vemos en algunos cuadros de Botticelli" (*ICI* 168). On the same subject Porfiria writes: "Miss Fielding piensa que no soy hermosa, pero que tengo una expresión fugitivamente hermosa. [. . .] Me parezco a los ángeles de Botticelli" (*ICI* 172-173). As Miss Fielding ruminates over her own appearance, she confesses: "Frente a un espejo, en la infancia, deploré, llorando, mi fealdad" (*ICI* 164). The same considerations induce similar thoughts in Porfiria: "Antes de conocerla no se me hubiera ocurrido contemplar [. . .] mi cara en tantos espejos, porque siempre encontré que yo era horrible y que mirarme en un espejo era un pecado" (*ICI* 173).

Are these characters, then, mirror images of one another? Is one the alter-ego of the other? According to Nelly Martínez, in the Borgesian universe mirrors prove to characters that they are mere reflections of other lives (48). The visual metaphor of the mirror blurs the self, reducing the subject to an object of language, the very structural basis of narration. In Ocampo's story, Porfiria's curious imitation of Miss

Fielding's writing and ink underscores this idea: "¿A qué abismos del alma infantil, a qué infierno cándido de perversión habían de llevarme estas páginas cuya trémula escritura, en tinta verde, trataba de imitar la mía?" (*ICI* 172). It is as if one character were absorbing the other.

The story's discrepancies remain unresolved: a Miss Fielding who feebly attempts to dispel the slanderous implications of Porfiria's diary; the hidden moral corruption of a comfortable bourgeoisie, middle-class family; the excessively possessive affection of Porfiria towards her brother that perhaps transgresses sibling love; the suspicious echoing of Miss Fielding's words in Porfiria's diary that imitates Miss Fielding's writing and ink. The ambiguities and contradictions sustain themselves within the silence of unanswered questions. The ironic effect emerges from the tension between what is said and what is intended, between what is hidden and what is revealed. The text's structure weaves a temporal paradox created by the completion of the *histoire* by a character-narrator (Miss Fielding) occupying a narrative level whose events have been related in the form of a diary, though these events significantly have not transpired. Because of the prophetic nature of Porfiria's diary, the future has already become the past in a most disturbing form. Irony emerges as well in the division of the subject in separate temporal dimensions. In "El diario de Porfiria Bernal" the functions of paradox and irony within the conventions of the contemporary fantastic ultimately produce the radically changed self. The narrating subject, Miss Fielding, disappears in two ways: physically, the self suffers a transformation that undermines her very nature; linguistically, the self's dependency on the narrated text--or on language--leads to her complete inability to articulate her story upon the conclusion of Porfiria's necromantic diary.

The Text as Prison of the Vanishing Self in "Autobiografía de Irene"

As the temporal paradox in "El diario de Porfiria Bernal" entraps the character-narrator, Miss Fielding, "Autobiografía de Irene" (1948) enacts a similar process. The self's integrity suffers in the confines of a circular narrative structure that defers fulfillment (i.e closure, an end) while rendering the character-narrator's position--in relation to the narrated events--problematic. Time plays an integral part in the subject's loss of autonomy since experience and the organization of these lived events--through memory and narration--constitute in fact the same process in this work.

As in "El diario de Porfiria Bernal", the initial pretext for narration also involves a testimony, in this case of an entire life. As the story begins, Irene Andrade appears to be the primary homodiegetic narrator, for she tells her own story. Irene anxiously awaits death with a welcoming disposition, a reaction quite contrary to what one would expect at the threshold of such an event. This attitude entices the reader: "Ni a las iluminaciones del veinticinco de mayo, en Buenos Aires, con bombitas de luz en las fuentes y en los escudos, ni a las liquidaciones de las grandes tiendas con serpentinas verdes, ni al día de mi cumpleaños, ansié llegar con tanto fervor como a este momento de dicha sobrenatural" (*AI* 103). "Me aflige sólo," Irene Andrade confesses, "el temor de no morir" (*AI* 103). This atypical posture at the brink of death sets into motion the Barthesian hermeneutic code and awakens the desire to continue the revelatory process of reading. In Barthes' terms, the hermeneutic code is functioning, impelling the narration towards the end.[12]

Anderson Imbert has noted that the irony produced when a deceptive narrator humbly laments that his words have no future reader intensifies the reader's engagement with the narrative process (119). In this vein, Irene Andrade, Ocampo's narrator in this story, claims ignorance concerning her future reader: "La improbable

persona que lea estas páginas se preguntará para quién narro esta historia" (*AI* 103). An anxious tone laces this narrator's voice, suggesting that the narratee of Irene's enunciation is her own consciousness: "Tal vez el temor de no morir me obligue a hacerlo. Tal vez sea para mí que la escribo: para volver a leerla, si por alguna maldición siguiera viviendo. Necesito un testimonio" (*AI* 103). Only at the end does the story disclose the true position of this allegedly homodiegetic narrator in relation to her own story. The complete *histoire* presents Irene's life since birth and returns us chronologically forward to the moment at which she is narrating. True to the character of Ocampo's prose, plot is minimal and events at the first narrative level scarcely merit attention. Irene is seated on a park bench when a stranger takes a seat beside her and strikes up a conversation. When she divulges her burdensome ability to foresee the future, the stranger expresses an overwhelming desire to transcribe Irene's life: 'Irene Andrade, yo quisiera escribir su vida' (*AI* 120). But Irene wishes not to have her life recorded. She pleads with her interlocutor:

> ¡Ah! Si usted me ayudase a defraudar el destino no escribiendo mi vida, qué favor me haría. Pero la escribirá. Comenzará así: Ni a las iluminaciones del veinticinco de mayo en Buenos Aires, con bombitas de luz en las fuentes y en los escudos, ni a las liquidaciones de las grandes tiendas con serpentinas verdes, ni al día de mi cumpleaños, ansié llegar con tanto fervor como a este de dicha sobrenatural. Desde mi infancia fui pálida como ahora . . . (*AI* 120)

The story closes with a word-for-word transcription of the first paragraph and first sentence of the second paragraph, in this manner endowing the text with a cyclical structure that connotes imprisonment. The italicized portion of the last paragraph corresponds exactly to the beginning of the story. Thus the beginning of the story is, in fact, the beginning of Irene's account of her life.

The obscure origin of the text also renders problematic Irene's position in relationship to her own story. Whose utterances are these? Only at the end does the reader understand that Irene is actually an internal narrator of her own account; we learn that a mere character in Irene's lines is the actual transcriber and editor of the entire text. With the disclosure of her prophetic powers to a stranger, this character-transcriber-editor suggests that Irene's life is worthy of being recorded: "Irene Andrade, yo quisiera escribir su vida" (*AI* 120). Thus, we have been reading Irene's words through the organization of events imposed by the anonymous amanuensis who, only toward the end of the story, reveals Irene's actual position as an internal narrator in the account.

The position occupied by the anonymous transcriber in an indefinite space between the implied author and the narrator Irene is quite unsettling to the reader. By failing to function as a formal narrator, the transcriber poses a challenge to expected narrative conventions. Yet, the story's narration is mediated by this character, for she is the editor of the text before us. Interestingly, the editor's position resembles the implied author entity in Seymour Chatman's semiotic model of communication (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 86). Although for Chatman, the "narrator" and "narratee" are not essential components of this model, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues that they are central: "Even when a narrative text presents passages of pure dialogue, manuscript found in a bottle, or forgotten letters and diaries, there is an addition to the speakers or writers of this discourse a 'higher' narratorial authority responsible for 'quoting' the dialogue or 'transcribing' the written records" (88). Rimmon-Kenan opts for a sparse definition of the narrator as "the agent which at the very least narrates or engages in some activity serving the needs of narration" (88). This model resembles the anonymous transcriber in "Autobiografía de Irene" who is, indeed, an essential vehicle for the needs of narration through the transcription of

Irene's life. Oddly enough, a significant inversion results at the end of the story, as a character occupies a position superior to the internal narrator's diegesis. This play with narrative levels encloses the character-narrator Irene, in the consequence similar to Miss Fielding's circumscription by Porfiria's diary in "El diario de Porfiria Bernal." Irene is boxed in a prison of narrative levels. Just as the ouroborus bites its own tail, so do the anterior and posterior ends seem to coincide in the structure of the text through the circularity implicit in the correspondence of the story's first and last paragraphs. The text itself embodies the prison holding Irene; she is being perpetuated in a narrative with no conclusion. In more traditional texts, a return to the beginning produces a sense of closure (Wilde 39). Nonetheless, in "Autobiografía de Irene," there is no such comfortable closure or finality. Whereas Miss Fielding in "El diario de Porfiria Bernal" fears the conclusion of Porfiria's diary narration, Irene wishes for no other fate. The anonymous transcriber's narration perpetuates a text that confines the internal narrator, Irene, to the condition of a character in an interminable narrative circuit.

The effect achieved in this story resembles the one created by works in the plastic arts that refer to their own production. As in the story's circular narrative circuit, infinity lies at the heart of M.C. Escher's lithograph "Drawing Hands." Here a hand emerges from the sketches made by the hand that it itself is drawing, a commentary on the work's artifice. Escher's visual structures, in which figures move along staircases in a simultaneously upward and downward movement, provide a fitting visual metaphor for the narrative structure of "Autobiografía de Irene."[13] Best exemplified by Escher's "Ascending and Descending" (1960), this infinite movement around a finite world paradoxically leads the eye back to the point of departure only to move forward anew along an already treaded visual path. As in this Möbius universe, there is no difference between the center and the periphery of

Irene's reality in Ocampo's story.[14] Reality, as Irene experiences it, is actually the textual reality of Irene's life as already written down by the anonymous amanuensis. Eternity is Irene's damnation: the elements constituting her life are limited to a finite and fixed order. Irene's narrative nature and irreality are further underscored by the fact that she sometimes cannot distinguish the storyline of a protagonist's life from her own future: "Alguna vez confundí mi destino con el destino de la protagonista de una novela" (*AI* 116). As in "El diario de Porfiria Bernal", this textual identification process constitutes a fragile subjectivity. Foster argues that the identification of the subject in his or her own work produces the erasure of the self: "Such doubling indicates a discomforting lack of a unique soul in the individual and consequently, suggests that he is secondary, replaceable" (13).

Thus in "Autobiografía de Irene" the narrator's autonomy becomes diluted in a time frame that loses its rigidity, as past, present, and future are superimposed: "Asomada a los balcones, veía pasar con caras de hombres a los niños que iban al colegio" (*AI* 112). The story provides an incisive commentary on the nature of experience and memory, components we normally ascribe to a cognizant subject. In fact, Irene's dubious gift to see the future renders her incapable of living. Living conventionally entails experience and its consequent insertion into the recesses of memory. Irene, however, has never lived because she is retracing the course of memory:

> Comprendí, entonces, que perder el don de recordar es una de las mayores desdichas, pues los acontecimientos, que pueden ser infinitos en el recuerdo de los seres normales, son brevísimos y casi inexistentes para quien los prevé y solamente los vive. El que no conoce su destino inventa y enriquece su vida con la esperanza de un porvenir que no sobreviene nunca: ese destino

> imaginado, anterior al verdadero, en cierto modo existe y es tan necesario como el otro. [. . .] Creo que mi pensamiento, ocupado en adivinar el futuro, tan lleno de imágenes, no podía demorarse en el pasado. (*AI* 111)

These lines emphasize the separation between the construction of the past through memory and the real experience of an integrated self. Irene is incapable of conceiving futurity; she has no space for temporal projections beyond the present because every single detail of her life has been foreseen. Time has suffered in its dimensions, becoming malleable, losing its limits, flowing through Irene's consciousness: "Para los que recuerdan, el tiempo no es demasiado largo. Para los que esperan es inexorable" (*AI* 118). Instead of the anticipatory tone at the threshold of the future, we hear the melancholy tone of nostalgia. This treatment of memory transcends its common conceptualization in the Western world.

Time plays an important role as the organizational mechanism in the constitution of the self.[15] In the field of psychology, Stephen Kern observes at the end of the nineteenth century the emergence of a number of psychologists interested in their patients' relation to time. Among the studies cited by Kern, one example strikingly resembles the character-narrator Irene's experience. In *La Conscience morbide* (1914), Charles Blondel analyzes the case of his patient named "Gabrielle," for whom future events were relocated into the past, thus causing feelings of anxiety and suffering to occupy continuously the patient's present moment. Commenting on Blondel's patient, Kern explains that it "was as if her mind constantly surveyed the entire temporal range to collect and condense all morbid thoughts into a present and inescapable experience of anxiety" (20). Irene's temporal perception strangely displays the characteristics of the schizophrenic--that psychological disorder that epitomizes the deterioration of the self--who disconnects from the outside world and becomes a victim of his or her own "internal fantasms". These fantasms, says Paul

Fraisse of the schizophrenic, are "intemporal since they are not subject to the law of change which governs the world and every thought which takes shape within it. It is perfectly accurate to say that a sense of time can only exist when there is submission to reality" (197).

In "Autobiografía de Irene" reference and submission to an external reality are impossible, given that exterior and interior seem indistinguishable in this circular torment of narration. As noted before, the act of reading conveys a delusory movement forward only to return to the point of departure. This singular conception of time in "Autobiografía de Irene" results from the workings of paradox through self-reference, contradictions, and vicious circles at every level. These elements of paradox, moreover, contribute to Irene's porous subjectivity. Instead of rounded characters--as understood by the realist tradition in which characters clearly refer to the particular society depicted in the literary work--Ocampo's characters such as Irene correspond to Christine Brooke-Rose's assessment of contemporary characterization: "a proper examination of characters in both the postmodern novel and the best science fiction [. . .] would show that they exist in any complexity only insofar as they represent ideas rather than individuals with a civic status and subtle social and psychological history" (192).

Instead of functioning as a traditional character, then, Irene's entity serves as the locus of paradox. Contradictions can be found at various levels of the text: "living" as the fufillment, and not the antecedent of memory; the past lived as the future; and the desire to cease desiring. The vicious circle, which is also self-referent in terms of its own production, is created by the narrative structure: it begins at some moment of the narration that terminates neither with a narrative conclusion nor with death but rather with the origin itself. Indeed, the temporal paradox has been woven by a narrative structure hampering or preventing temporal progression, a feature that

Ursula Heise sees as a distinguishing characteristic of postmodernist texts (13).[16] In such works, time is no longer the organizing principle of narration that endows a text with coherence and meaning.

In "Autobiografía de Irene," irony arises from the story's paradoxical structure and temporal relationships. The movement forward of narration and reading is duplicitous; these processes lead directly into the trap of an internalized, endless repetition, a quality essential to the true horror story, according to Chadwick and Harger-Grinling (93). In Ocampo's piece, the story perpetuates a path of events that exhibit the necessary minimum tension for narrative momentum, but it eschews the typical denouement, and, thus, never relieves the tension with resolved situations and dispelled ambiguities. The story's structure shows this quality not only as an unceasing instant, but also as the persistence of unappeased desire. In a literary work this type of gap produces an ironic effect: the openness of "irony is a space [. . .] the gap between desire and its realization" (Wilde 41). Enrique Pezzonni comments briefly on this story:

> El procedimiento es aquí transparente. Un solo sujeto (se) enuncia: declara una y otra vez su obsesión, 'el deseo imposible de escribir sobre el deseo imposible', la ejemplifica como empresa antiproustiana. No se trata de recuperar el tiempo perdido, sino de invertir la proyección hacia el futuro en una retrospección que trasciende la historia del Yo, reinventándola a partir del desenlace. (29)

Pezzonni does not elaborate on the nature of the history that transcends the "I," so we are left to hypothesize on the nature of the subject within the context of the fantastic in the story "Autobiografía de Irene." A subject states a desire, the desire to cease desiring the conclusion of her narration, in other words, her death.

However the act of narrating does not endow the enunciative voice with agency. The words of the character-narrator Irene lack authority and integrity, since these words do not belong to her but to the anonymous transcriber. Thus an act that usually founds the subject--the act of narration--here produces Irene's irreality. The structural circularity of the text also contributes to Irene's unstable selfhood since she is confined to a narrative structure that begins and ends at the same point, the beginning of Irene's narration. Here, self-reference has led to an infinite regressive movement towards an obscure, elusive origin. Though time seems to move forward in Irene's act of enunciation, time paradoxically moves backward, since Irene is condemned to relive her life and tell her story for eternity. Irene Andrade is imprisoned in a moment of incessant recollection and endless desire for mortality: the conclusion of narration is avoided, as is death, while the narrative structure evades closure. Irony emerges in precisely this lack of closure that illustrates the gap between desire and its realization. Rosemary Jackson has stated in her analysis of post-Romantic works that the transgression factor seems clearest in the texts that venture to remain "'open', dissatisfied, endlessly desiring"; it is in these texts that "the fantastic is at its most uncompromising in its interrogation of the 'nature' of the 'real'" (9). The traditional search for closure, unity, and truth should be replaced by an attention to the subject and to the strategies that permit these narratives to endure in their "open" and "endlessly desiring" structures.

Narration and the Demise of the Self in "El castigo"

Of the three texts examined in this chapter and exhibiting similar strategies resulting in paradox and irony within the fantastic setting, "El castigo" is the shortest. It first appears in the collection *La furia* (1959). In this particular story the peculiar processing of language through the act of narration alters a subject's physical nature, mainly as a consequence of Ocampo's unique narrating technique.

Telling one's life story is a common activity; in this story, however, telling it backwards transforms reality while defamiliarizing this activity for the reader. As in "El diario de Porfiria Bernal" and "Autobiografía de Irene," the reader must sift through the enunciations of two homodiegetic narrators, one external and one internal. All three stories involve two narrators who occupy separate narrative levels, each with its own temporal logic. The stories also display a simple first narrative level, though significant narratological complexities relating to themes emerge.

In "El castigo" the plot is sparse and identifying discrete concrete events is impossible until the end of the story. Nothing particularly interesting occurs. The external narrator, Sergio, explains in the first line of the text that he and a female companion, who remains unidentified throughout the story, had been sitting in front of a mirror that reflected them against a background of flowered wallpaper: "Estábamos frente a un espejo que reflejaba nuestros rostros y las flores del cuarto" (*F* 185). He then explains that his companion's pallid skin had caused him to inquire what was wrong and what was she concealing. Her answer is puzzling:

> No te oculto nada. Ese espejo me recuerda mi desventura: somos dos y no una persona -dijo tapándose la cara-. Al verte tan severo, me siento culpable. Todo me parece una infidelidad. Tengo veinte años. ¿Para qué me sirven? Por miedo no quieres que mire, ni que pruebe nada, no quieres que viva. Quieres que sea tuya definitivamente, como un objeto inanimado. *Si te hiciera el gusto, terminaría por volver al punto inicial de mi vida o por morir,* o tal vez por volverme loca. (*F* 185, my emphasis)

These last words are prophetic. The young woman places her head on his lap and then begins to narrate her life story, although Sergio demonstrates little desire to hear it: "¡Como si no conociera tu vida!" (*F* 185). She commences at that moment when

she lays her head on Sergio's lap: "El único pecado que existía para mí era la infidelidad. Mas ¿cómo ser fiel sin morir para el resto del mundo y para uno mismo? En un cuarto, con flores pintadas en la pared, Sergio me tuvo, desnuda, entre sus brazos. Sospechó que lo había engañado, pues en mis infidelidades, si las había, lo buscaba a él" (*F* 185-86). Since the female narrator initiates the story of her life exactly at that physical moment from which she narrates, her lover's narration has been subsumed and Sergio becomes a character in her narration.

A life, in fact, is told, but the reader is struck by the oddity of the temporal momentum advancing backwards to the moment of birth. The narrative procedure is reminiscent of Alejo Carpentier's "Viaje a la semilla" (1944), in which the life of Don Marcial, the Marqués de Capellanías, is recounted in inverse chronological order. Whereas in Carpentier's story an omniscient voice tells the life of a Caribbean gentleman representative of the idle upper class of the nineteenth century, Ocampo's character is a young modern woman who seems dissatisfied and compelled to speak because of her lover's disposition towards her. Moreover, when the woman states that, "Si te hiciera el gusto, terminaría por volver al punto inicial de mi vida o por morir," we understand that she intends no metaphorical interpretation of her words. The story's fantastic element lies not in its inverse procedure for narrating a life, but rather in the woman's literal experience of her own words, a process that ultimately leads to her diminution and demise.[17] The reader learns this only in the story's last lines. When the female internal narrator concludes the second level of narration that constitutes the story of her life, Sergio reclaims his position as a narrator by surprising the reader with the woman's inability to speak:

> No me respondió y apretó los labios: jamás volvió a abrirlos para decirme que me amaba. [. . .] La abracé por última vez y fue como una violación. Durante el relato, el tiempo, para mí, había transcurrido a la inversa: para

> ella, veinte años menos, significaron para mí veinte años más. Eché una mirada al espejo, esperando que reflejara seres menos afligidos, menos dementes que nosotros. Vi que mi pelo se había vuelto blanco. (*F* 191)

His lover's body, as well as his own, have undergone a physical regression as the related events regress towards birth. Because of Sergio's incestual assessment of his final embrace, ("fue como una violación"), we understand that the female character has metamorphosed into a child.

As Todorov insists, the literal dimension of language is the manner of interpretation in the fantastic text and it is precisely this literal dimension of narration in "El castigo" that generates the demise of the self.[18] Chanady argues as well that the fantastic mode requires the presence of two mutually exclusive codes, the natural and the supernatural. Here, Chanady echoes Todorov's insistence on the rejection of a poetic interpretation of the fantastic event. The "first object of [. . .] utterance" provides an exact meaning that requires no jump to a second level of significance (Todorov 83). Thus, when the internally narrating young woman accuses Sergio of wanting her to "volver al punto inicial de mi vida o por morir, o tal vez por volverme loca," we are to interpret her words quite literally, as the final scene proves: "Vi que mi pelo se había vuelto blanco" (*F* 191). The fantastic event revealed in these last lines also infuses prior moments with new meaning. For example, before the young woman begins her life story, Sergio recalls that he had situated himself in a chair so that she could lay her head on his knees while rocking her "como a un recién nacido" (*F* 185).

As we read these lines literally, the process of narration can now be seen under a different light. The reader realizes that the account of a life in reverse has actually affected the characters' physical constitution, and this has contributed to their unstable subjectivity. Similarly, and as we have seen, Porfiria Bernal's

insistence on Miss Fielding's feline characteristics acquired new meaning with the latter's transformation at the end of "El diario de Porfiria Bernal." The presentation of seemingly normal events or familiar settings of reality is revoked as narration concludes. This sudden transformation of normalcy into the unfamiliar calls to mind Sigmund Freud's concept of the "uncanny," particularly as Witold Ostrowski has applied it to the fantastic. For Ostrowski normalcy depends on a "matter-space-time-conscious pattern" (55).[19] But the fantastic, Ostrowski argues, involves the reorganization of the elements of the "matter-space-time-conscious pattern" by the action of one character in a material and spatial setting (57). "The trick," explains Ostrowski, "consists [. . .] in changing typical relations between consciousness and other elements of the human world" (58). In "El castigo" the procedure for narrating transforms these relations between the objects that inhabit the world and their perception by and processing through human consciousness until the very essence of the matter-space-time continuum is no longer sustainable. Consequently, the stability of the internally narrating subject suffers as time treads backwards: she travels through the diminution of herself to her final dissolution. As Sylvia Molloy has commented on the relationship "narración-sujeto" in this story: "La verbalización llega a anular literalmente, en este caso, al personaje" ("Silvina Ocampo" 21).

In a more psychoanalytic approach, the ability to articulate one's story manifests a healthy and stable self. By contrast, instead of forging her constitution through language and narration, the unstable female subject intensifies her own disintegration through the telling of her life. Ocampo's female narrator tells the story of her life backwards, and as she moves toward the point of origin at birth, she actually journeys back to nonexistence, a form of death. Thus, in Ocampo's fictional world, the streams of life and death flow from and towards the same source. The peculiar style of narration produces this temporal paradox achieved through the

linguistic-linkage, in reverse, of events that would normally follow one another. Instead of conjuring up the pleasant contentment of nostalgia this temporal technique produces an eerie defamiliarization: "En los columpios de Palermo, me mecía sin temor y subía al tobogán más alto, sin vacilar. Luego, poco a poco, no me dejaban subir sino al tobogán más bajo, porque el otro era peligroso. Peligro, peligro, ¿dónde estaba el peligro? Trataron de enseñármelo: en los cuchillos, en los alfileres" (*F* 190). This passage demonstrates a direct relationship between a posterior and an anterior event through the narrating consciousness of retrospection. More than a simple chain of events told in inverse chronological order, a conscious narration links accumulating past events through phenomenological judgment. Thus, the phrase "Luego poco a poco" constitutes the evaluation by a conscious being who considers the fact that she was not allowed to play on the steeper slide at a younger age, even though prior to the phrase's enunciation she is clearly old enough to handle the height.

This strategy generates a powerful imagery that obliges the reader to visualize the stated events in order to transcend the apparent nonsensicalness of the language. Although, as in all acts of reading, the reader must engage with the text to make sense of it, an apparently nonsensical text requires a more diligent reader to create meaning. Linda Hutcheon's observations regarding Carpentier's "Viaje a la semillla" can also be applied to "El castigo": "Narrative has the power to reverse time: its words progress in a linear fashion in space and time but the referents of those words can be temporally reversed" (80). Language develops in a linear manner, but time paradoxically flows backwards. The visual effect achieved unsettles the reader and recalls the cinematographic inversion of a sequence of images through the reversal of film footage. In "El castigo" the events related in reverse are the transient episodes in the woman's life, the ordinary experiences typical of a female human being:

childhood travails and education, adolescent escapades, first trials in love. But the ordinary becomes extraordinary through the method of presentation. As if literally traveling through time, the narrator's enunciations follow the course of an inverted temporal evaluation: "Al cabo de tres años de dicha y también de tormento, paulatinamente [. . .] aprendimos a no querernos" (*F* 186). Referring then to the first letter written to her by Sergio, the narrator states: "Me escribió una carta proponiéndome cosas obscenas. Tiré la carta al fuego. '¿Qué contenido tendrá esa carta?', pensé al mirar el sobre, llena de esperanza. Lo tuve un rato en mis manos antes de abrirlo" (*F* 186). Thus, the chain of events has been laid out chronologically reversed. In the first moment she has the envelope in her hands, then, the narrator first wonders about its contents and then proceeds to throw it into the flames once she has read its obscenities. A few lines later she alludes to the moment Sergio and she met, only to conclude this chapter of her life with these words: "Rápidamente Sergio entró en mi olvido" (*F* 140). Like film footage shown in reverse, the female narrator returns to the beginning of her life, and, in keeping with the fantastic mode, she physically experiences the temporal dimension of her own story. Thus, the act of telling generates the erasure of the narrating self, the self constructed in the temporal span of the twenty years already transpired.

Beyond the regressive demise of the female narrator, the narrative process in "El castigo" also produces an image of a fragmented self. The ironic self, produced in the division of the narrating self and the experiencing self, is taken a step further by the fact that both character-narrators, Sergio and the young woman, are seated before a mirror, a paradigmatic symbol of the unstable, divided self. Furthermore, the female narrator prefaces the story of her life with a comment that generates an epistemological problem caused by a reflective crisis: "Ese espejo me recuerda mi desventura: somos dos y no una sola persona" (*F* 185). In her illuminating work on

Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Judith Butler critiques and defines Sartre's concept of the "look" as the process by which a being becomes conscious of itself as a distinct entity through the recognition by the other. This recognition is illustrated by the visual metaphor of the "look," meaning "the constituting act by which one consciousness apprehends another as an object" (Butler 140). Through the exteriorization of the self, the self is seen in the eyes of Others in the world, though this perceived form only constitutes the "phenomenal self"; the "pre-reflective self" remains hidden, latent, unmanifested, and yet, infinite in its formlessness (141-43). This process, however, is partial because the other can only recognize and interact with the self that it grasps, the self that *appears*, the phenomenal self. There still remains the pre-reflective self that persists in its inapprehensible state. Moreover, the self apprehended is a fabrication of the other's gaze.

Borrowing Butler's observations, a Sartrean reading of the moment in which the female narrator in the story comments, "somos dos y no una sola persona. . . . Todo me parece una infidelidad," suggests that the illusion of self-identification in the other has dissolved. The mirror, moreover, further deflects the "look," thus deferring even more the gaze required for the recognition of the self by an other. In contrast to a traditional amorous discourse of union and totality, we observe an alternate, disillusioned perspective in Ocampo's story: "Por miedo de perderme no quieres que mire, ni que pruebe nada [. . .]. Quieres que sea tuya definitivamente, como un objeto inanimado" (*F* 185). With the failed recognition of the self by the other, suspicion, doubt, and estrangement overcome Sergio who insists: "Me ocultas algo" (*F* 185). One can argue that the female narrator's constitution suffers as a result of an unfulfilled recognition by the other, Sergio. Because of the mirror's visually deceptive nature of its ability to reflect and deflect images, as a metaphor it

is charged with representative meaning that communicates the inability to perceive and identify the true and integrated self.

Conclusion

Despite the forward momentum of narration in the three stories analyzed in this chapter, "El diario de Porfiria Bernal," "Autobiografía de Irene," and "El castigo," self-generation paradoxically elicits the disappearance of the subject. Even in the process of its affirmation, the elusive and transient nature of the subject seems inexorable. Though narration must unfold in a linear manner, the process of narration encounters repetition, coincidence, and cyclical movement. The narrative strategies in these stories work against linearity, while the act of reading obliges the reader to participate directly in the perpetuation of an order produced by the stories' structures that ensnare and lead to the metamorphosis of the narrators. As the reader pieces together information from various diegetic levels of these fantastic stories, the texts constantly undermine any absolute, definitive interpretations.

The structure of these stories also poses challenges to rigid categorization. Miss Fielding is the external narrator of her own story, but Porfiria's diary is presented by an internal narrator who also tells her own tale while invading the related events and validity of the first narrative level controlled by Miss Fielding. The supposedly superior narrator falls prey to the narrative spell of her own character, Porfiria. Moreover, the multiple temporal dimension of Porfiria's text--written prior to the events--points to a temporal paradox. In "Autobiografía de Irene," the allegedly external narrator, Irene, is actually the internal narrator within the anonymous transcriber's narration. The closed, circular structure of this story embodies the persistence of death's desire and of the ironic gap caused by the inability to satiate desire and to put an end to narration. In the clearest temporal paradox, narration in "El castigo" is temporally spliced in the divided subject (ironic,

in de Man's words) of the female internal narrator. She narrates from a present moment, but as her narrative activity impels the story forward, she is, in fact, regressing physically and temporally to the moment of birth. Along with the indicated narratological aspects that defy categorical conceptualizations of time and space, in the three stories we also observe the relinquishing of the narrating self's sense of physical and psychological density, a transformation that involves a radically changed self as well as a muted, silenced self.

Contextualized within the discussion of civilization and barbarism in Argentine history and literature, the next chapter focuses on the confrontation between the bourgeois, stable subject and the unstable, mutable subject constructed by these stories. As her characters provide the stage for the moral and epistemological problematization of the social subject, the elements of the binary civilization/barbarism prove to be only provisional oppositions. In disharmony with what Francine Masiello describes as "the writers from Sarmiento to Borges who have rehearsed this dualism in Argentine culture" (9), Ocampo undermines such polarities as subject / object, human being / animal, male / female, middle class / lower class, child / adult, victim / victimizer to the point that the antinomies appear blurred and are caricatured. While undoing traditional dualisms, the physically and psychologically unstable self in Ocampo's stories challenges the social order, the public and private spaces of bourgeois life, and the relations of power specific to these spaces.

Notes

[1] Curiously, along with the notable exercise and proliferation of fantastic prose during the thirties and forties in Argentina, writers themselves questioned the very idea of a rigid paradigm for the fantastic. Borges, Ocampo, and Adolfo Bioy Casares, editors of *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (1941), state in their prologue: "Pedimos leyes para el cuento fantástico. Habrá que indagar las leyes generales para cada tipo de cuento y las leyes especiales para cada cuento" (8). Moreover, critics such as Carlos Rincón have observed tangential challenges and bold transgressions of the traditional limits of the genre during these years. Considering Borges' "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," Rincón addresses the refutable nature of the fantastic: "What dominates [. . .] and signals the end of the fantastic as a possibility of narration [. . .] [is] a now happy schizophrenia that plays with systems, including writing, and reorganizes logocentric structures by means of a narrator-authority that constantly shifts from authorial discourse to narrative action" (167).

[2] Many have criticized Todorov for a theory that has been shaped primarily by nineteenth-century European fantastic literature as well as by the works of Edgar Allan Poe. This is one of the reasons for the onslaught of subsequent studies reevaluating Todorov's concepts and opening up the horizon of the fantastic with numerous approaches : *The Fantastic in Literature* (1976) by Eric S. Rabkin; *Fantasy: A Literature of Subversion* (1981) by Rosemary Jackson; *A Rhetoric of the Unreal* (1981) by Christine Brooke-Rose; *Fantasy and Mimesis* (1984) by Kathryn Hume; and *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy* (1985) by Amaryll B. Chanady.

[3] According to Anderson Imbert, phrases such as "perhaps no one will ever read this story" and double-voiced enunciations often undermine a narrator's credibility (118). Hyperbole and litotes always betray a narrator's intentions,

therefore resulting in a very different purpose from what was originally intended. As Anderson Imbert argues, it seems that the classical notion of irony as the practice of "dissembling in speech" has survived well into modern times. Joseph Dane's discussion of the etymological origins of irony proves useful here. It comes from the Greek *eirōneia* (irony), *eirōn* ("commonly defined as a dissembler"), and *eirō*(to speak) (1). Dane also elaborates on Aristotle's contempt for ironists for their duplicitous verbal activities: "Aristotle classifies ironists with other wretches (*panourgoi*) who are more dangerous than those who speak passionately and freely" (45). Irony thus evolves to connote a form of "dangerous deception" (45).

[4] Italo Calvino also succintly summarizes this multiplicity of selves. The "person 'I,' whether explicit or implicit, splits into a number of different figures: into an 'I' who is writing, into an empirical 'I' who looks over the shoulder of the 'I' who is writing and into a mythical 'I' who serves as a model for the 'I' who is written. The 'I' of the author is dissolved in the writing. The so-called personality of the writer exists within the very act of writing: it is the production and the instrument of the writing process" (*The Uses of Literature* 15).

[5] The present chapter focuses on three stories belonging to a body of work consisting of more than two hundred stories, of which, according to Klingenberg, only 40 per cent qualify as fantastic (*El infiel espejo* 76). Two tendencies are prominent among the critics of Silvina Ocampo's fiction. On the one hand, various studies have shown a desire to encompass as many stories as possible in the limited space of introductions and prologues of anthologies, and in studies such as those of Noemí Ulla, Lucia Fox Lockert, Sylvia Molloy, and Patricia Klingenberg. On the other hand, some have opted for bringing attention to a particular story, such as Barbara B. Aponte, Cynthia Duncan, Cristina Ferreira-Pinto, Emilia Perassi, and Alejandra

Rosarossa have done. The texts emphasized in this chapter have been overlooked due to the prevalence of these two tendencies.

[6] This concept is developed further by Dennis A. Foster's definition of the subject: "By 'subject' I do not mean an autonomous, centered being that founds the individual, but the representation of the self [. . .] as it is objectified through language" (*Confession and Complicity in Narrative* 3).

[7] Although "El diario de Porfiria Bernal" was originally published in *Las invitadas* (1961), I will be citing this story as it appears in Edgardo Cozarinsky's anthology of Ocampo's short stories, *Informe del cielo y del infierno* (1970), henceforth referred to as *ICI*.

[8] "The act of irony [. . .] reveals the existence of a temporality that is definitely not organic, in that it relates to its source only in terms of distance and difference and allows for no end, for no totality" (de Man 222).

[9] Genette acknowledges borrowing the term predictive from Tzvetan Todorov (*Grammaire du Décaméron*, The Hague: Mouton, 1969, 48) to refer to any kind of narrative in which the narrating instance precedes the story. Genette employs the term "predictive narrative," "in its various forms (prophetic, apocalyptic, oracular, astrological, chiromantic, cartomantic, oneiromantic, etc.), whose origin is lost in the darkness of time" in order to classify the type of narration that precedes the transpiration of the events (216).

[10] Commenting on postmodernist texts shaped by recursion and metalepsis, Heise cites *Thru* (1975) by Christine Brooke-Rose, "Menelaiad" and stories in *Chimera* (1972) by John Barth, *La Maison de rendez-vous* (1965) and *Topologie d'une cité fantôme* (1976) by Alain Robbe-Grillet as exemplary texts exhibiting the transgression of diegetic levels.

[11] For example, Brooke-Rose cites John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968) as "representing the disappearance of character" (184); Heise investigates how the "demise" of character in postmodern narrative is linked to the displacement of "human experience as the central organizing parameter of narrative" (7); and McHale discusses variations on the "canceled-character strategy" in works by Muriel Spark (*The Comforters*, 1957), Steve Katz (*The Exaggerations of Peter Prince*, 1968), and Borges ("La busca de Averroes" from *El Aleph*, 1949) (103-4).

[12] "This code [. . .] raises an enigma only to keep increasing its narratological value by delaying or obscuring revelations" (Cohan and Shires 124). The dilatory pace of revelation imbues the narration with a particular temporal rhythm: "the hermeneutic code imposes over the temporal sequencing of events the narrative structure of placement/displacement/replacement, which it directs towards [. . .] the story's transformation of question into answer" (Cohan and Shires 124).

[13] Escher's countless drawings, etchings, and lithographs demonstrate a preoccupation with perception and the simultaneity of temporal and spatial planes. Escher's works depicting ants, salamanders, horsemen, or even cities on Möbius strips demonstrate a particular concern for the unsettling effects of figures that neither descend nor ascend, surfaces that are neither interior nor exterior, and objects that neither sit nor hang, as can be observed in the lithographs "Relativity" (1953) and "Convex and Concave" (1955).

[14] I draw the term Möbius universe from *Dreams, Illusions, and Other realities* (1984) by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty. In this book, O'Flaherty undertakes engagingly enlightening examinations of classical Indian texts, particularly the *Yogavāsistha*, a Sanskrit text composed in Kashmir sometime between the ninth and twelfth centuries A.D. The tales of the *Yogavāsistha* bear a common feature of Indian texts:

tightly wound narratives with numerous narrators occupying different diegetic levels that often render impossible the identification of a beginning, a center. These various diegetic frames are effected by narrators who acknowledge their position as narratees of other narrators and by the vehicle of the imagination that allows narrators who become characters in the minds of others through yogic trances and dreams penetrating the different levels of reality possible in the Indian conception of time and space. O'Flaherty perceives the Möbius strip, then, as "the shape of time and space in India" since narrators and characters realize "that you never know which is which [the center and the periphery] - that in fact there is no difference between the center and the periphery" (243). This observation is taken to its ultimate consequence: "We are tempted to step back in rhythm with all the other characters who leap from frame to frame: we move from Rudra, who is dreamt by the swan (who is dreamt by the goose, [. . .] who is dreamt by Jivata), to the monk, who is imagined by Vasistha, who is a character in a book (the *Yogavāsistha*) that is said to be a lost part of another book (the *Rāmāyana*) that is attributed to the poet Vālmīki, whose work has been translated into English by me and is now being read by you. [. . .] When we reach Vasistha, we think we have reached the outermost level, but this turns out not only to be the first of several apparently 'outermost' levels but also to be inside several inner levels" (243).

[15] Interestingly, psychologists, physicists, and writers have problematized any finite, universally true conceptualization of time, particularly since the end of the last century. Living in the last two decades of the late nineteenth century meant witnessing a series of innovations and experiments demanding a reexamination of the existing ideas concerning time and space. Among the more important developments, the institutionalization of World Standard Time eradicated the notion of localized, individualized time. As the world slowly adapted to a

standard time, a sort of bureaucracy of time converted time into something dividable and identifiable as zero meridian, or the beginning, was accepted universally as Greenwich. The scheduling of railroads in the United States was the prime motivator, at least in the beginning, for the standardization of time; nonetheless, business and commerce quickly embraced and thrived under this temporal structure that facilitated transactions nationally and internationally. The man credited with the idea of uniform time is Sanford Fleming, whose efforts and plans were the seeds for the establishment of uniform time. Kern has outlined Fleming's motivation: "A single event may take place in two different months or even two different years. It was important to be able to know precisely when laws go into effect and insurance policies begin. The present system, he concluded, would lead to countless political, economic, scientific, and legal problems that only the adoption of a coordinated world network could prevent" (12). Uniform time began to infiltrate everyday life as laborers clocked-in at work and transportation systems organized route schedules; the world seemed to synchronize its watches. Nonetheless, looming figures from various disciplines such as Albert Einstein, Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, and William James, contentiously examined the precepts of the past that fixed time and space as absolutes, separate from the reference point of human perception.

[16] Heise observes that "if novelists such as Proust, Mann, Joyce, Woolf, Stein, and many others reinvent narrative's structure so as to explore the flow of memory, duration and expectation in human consciousness, writers such as Beckett, Calvino, Robbe-Grillet and Brooke-Rose design narrative forms that deliberately make temporal progression difficult or impossible to conceive" (13).

[17] In light of the subversive nature of the fantastic in its relentless questioning of the Real, the last ten years have seen a growing trend towards the "genderfication" of the fantastic in order to betray the contradictions weakening patriarchal norms.

One particular characteristic of the fantastic as practiced by women writers is the dismantling of binary oppositions determining gender relations and gender identity. See, for example, studies by Maria Birgitta Clark, Amy Joy Ransom, Cynthia Duncan, and Deborah Harter. Though certain aspects the story "El castigo" perhaps would lend themselves to a feminist approach, this will not be the concern here.

[18] Control over meaning, Todorov argues, is easily lost in a metaphorical reading since it "reveals an intention to speak of something else besides the first object of its utterance" (62). Only one aberrant phenomenon is sufficient--and necessary--to disturb the organization of a familiar and empirically coherent world, a world quite similar to the reader's. In the fantastic the metaphorical level of language is not the dominant manner of deciphering meaning when the fantastic event transpires: the "first object of its utterance" marks the delimitations of the intended meaning.

[19] This concept defines the mechanism by which human beings perceive and mentally record recurrent stimuli from their environment, and in this manner function according to a pattern of particular constants believed to constitute everyday empirical reality.

Chapter Two

The Crisis of the Bourgeois Subject in Silvina Ocampo's Fiction

Since the beginning of the consolidation of the Argentine nation, the binary civilization / barbarism has been a key, though problematic, concept informing efforts towards modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As sweeping as such efforts were, by the time Silvina Ocampo began to write in the 1930s, a sense of failure permeated the modernizing cultural projects of the past. Francine Masiello considers that the impetus for modernization, as seen in "the period when a secularized post colonial world began to take definition" through the 1930s, was ultimately unsuccessful (4). Echoing this judgment, Blas Matamoro recognizes, "se admite el fracaso del intento 'civilizador,' pero ello es visto como una carencia histórica, como la impotencia argentina por constituirse en país 'civilizado' en serio" (44). In all moments of cultural definition and awareness, the social being must conform (consciously or unconsciously) to models of behavior--what Edward Said describes as a "system of exclusions" (11)--specific to a particular historical moment. It follows from this view, then, that repression and sublimation of instincts are the tools that carve out the ideal citizen. During President Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's violent extermination of the gaucho, for example, he instructed General Mitre before the battle of Pavón: 'No trate de economizar sangre de gauchos. Es abono que es preciso hacer útil al país' (Murena 75). In the following decades, the nation's attempts to eradicate the "uncivilized other" captured the imagination of writers whose novels proposed a hygienic, healthy episteme that excluded the unhealthy other, usually represented by immigrants, Jews, Italians, communists, prostitutes and other figures of the *lumpen*.[1] Gabriela Nouzeilles, in fact, recognizes that in the latter part of the nineteenth century in Argentina, the modern utopia--as envisioned by the elite liberal class--was founded on a strict surveillance system that

monitored the entities comprising the body of society (233). Among these methods of control, she underscores the role of the more overtly coercive forms of surveillance, such as the police, but also of the less conspicuous institutions regulating health care and education.

Observing a suspicious insistence on the civilization-and-barbarism antinomy in Argentine literature, politics, and society of the last 150 years, Masiello has addressed the politically expedient notion that the Argentine nation had indeed eliminated those barbaric elements that estranged it from the European World. Masiello demonstrates that beyond the civilization / barbarism binary there is a third position "located neither in the dwellings of the civilized nor in the fields of the barbaric" (9). From the domain of domesticity, women like Juana Manuela Gorriti, Juana Manso de Noronha, and Alfonsina Storni, among others, denounced the complacent hypocrisy and failures of Argentine government and society. In stark contrast to the civilized and modern image the nation vehemently touted, these women writers and intellectuals revealed the social and political injustices suffered by women, the working class, and other underrepresented groups. In this way, the binary thinking at the base of civilization/barbarism dissolved under the pen of women writers whose works have succeeded in "unraveling false oppositions" (Masiello 10).

It was amidst this political and social turmoil of the thirties that Silvina Ocampo's unsettling work first appeared. Instead of stable, exemplary subjects embodying the virtues of a civilized society, we encounter physically and psychologically unstable characters in settings readily identified as reflective of Ocampo's social extraction. Many critics observe in her work the portrayal of the bourgeoisie and its interaction with the lower classes. Influenced by Mikhail Bahktin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Enrique Pezzonni, for example, views

Ocampo's characters as exhibiting behaviors and idiosyncrasies that follow "la pauta pequeño burguesa [. . .] estrictamente localizado en la vida del envoltorio concreto e impenetrable de su clase o su estrato social" (34). Lauding her characterization of the middle class in a city identified as Buenos Aires, Mario Lancellotti also comments on her accurate portrayal of a particular social type of Argentinean, the middle class deformed by *codicia* and by *cursilería*: "La autora nos ofrece el registro entero de sus voces: en cierto modo, el relato es su habla. Conoce a fondo sus inflexiones [. . .] . Silvina Ocampo revela con despiadada lucidez para la sociología" (75).

It would be inaccurate, however, to read Ocampo's characterizations simply as realist transcriptions of social types. As Cristina Ferreira-Pinto correctly points out, "El mundo pequeño burgués aparece [en sus cuentos] [. . .] bajo un punto de vista crítico" (309). A clear definition of the bourgeois subject provides a way to understand the process by which Ocampo uncovers the hypocrisy and moral failings lurking beneath the surface of gentility and manners. By bourgeois subject I mean a subject whose identity is based on objective characteristics and behaviors that allegedly form part of an experiential reality that can be perceived, understood, recorded, and consequently, predicted. In this definition of subjectivity, the self is assumed to be a discrete, stable, unitary being, and purports to participate in the civilized, orderly rituals of society. The values upheld by the middle class include the family and the institution of marriage as the moral and structural basis of society; the pursuit of the accumulation of wealth, as seen in the inordinate appraisal of the object; and the elevation of the home as the paradigmatic space of the bourgeoisie. The architectural disposition of the domestic space, as Peter Brooks explains in his discussion of the rise of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, also reflects the corresponding differentiation of the private

from the public in the "well-demarcated private apartments, boudoirs, 'closets' and alcoves of [. . .] upper and middle-class housing" (28). The nineteenth-century's positivist faith in external, objective truths buttresses this world view. Finally, as naturalism sought to show, the bourgeois perspective claims that identity and the external elements that create it--such as clothes, mannerisms, and behavior--are fixed concepts firmly moored to basic, immutable paradigms.[2]

In all of these stories, Ocampo disrupts typical notions of character and plot, those traditional concepts that underpin realism and its predictable subjects. In the instability and fragile nature of her characters that exhibit the propensity to divide, disappear, or destroy themselves, the dissolution of the self becomes evident. Traditional underpinnings of the self are further compounded by the fact that these characters often remain nameless or bear a caricaturing appelation, such as Irma Peinate, Mangorsino, Eladio Rada, Estanislao Romagán. Furthermore, in their lack of plot, many of Ocampo's stories barely include discrete events that writers and readers normally rely on for the formulation of character identity. In spite of Ocampo's terse style, the settings in these stories are clearly representative of the Argentinian middle and upper classes.

In this chapter I examine four manifestations of the social subject: the unstable self, the bored subject, the sexual subject, and the child subject. While these categories are neither all encompassing nor mutually exclusive, they demonstrate that in Ocampo's work, characteristics associated with the civilized self, such as rationality, health, and moral solidity, slip out of focus and cross into the arena of the degenerate, irrational, infirm, and unstable self. Although in the prior chapter I analyzed the narratological features of structure, voice, and time, and the effects of the observed techniques on the narrating subjects of three stories, in the second chapter I will discuss primarily strategies of characterization in a number of stories.

Furthermore, while I have organized the analysis of the stories in this section to follow the progressive desintegration of selfhood, this development is not observed chronologically in Ocampo's works. The types of subjects I have delineated in this section appear in all moments of Ocampo's literary career.

The Unstable Self: The Enigma of Selfhood and the Disappearing Subject

Many critics have highlighted Ocampo's portrayal of the Argentine society. Observations by Pezzonni, Lancellotti, and Ferreira-Pinto demonstrate that Ocampo captures the linguistic and behavioral idiosyncrasies of the Argentine middle- and upper-classes who inhabit a geography particular to the Buenos Aires and its surroundings.[3] Her characters live, walk, or drive on readily identifiable streets and neighborhoods of Buenos Aires such as Flores, Montes de Oca, Florida, Sáenz Peña, Sarandí, and San Isidro, and they stroll along the tree-lined paths of Palermo and the Jardín Zoológico. Ocampo's protagonists also inhabit spaces in which they must interact with cultural items such as "carpetas de macramé," "medallas de la virgen de Luján," and "tortas pascualinas." These characters sing Carlos Gardel's tangos and read the popular magazine *Caras y Caretas*. Ocampo's stories are populated by middle- and upper-class wives and children, teachers, governesses and students, doctors and patients, married and courting bourgeois couples, musicians and painters, shopkeepers and bureaucratic functionaries. Yet, behind the facade of a readily identifiable social reality and underneath the guise of a civilized and orderly life, Ocampo's characters exist precariously in settings that are traditionally identified as bourgeois spaces characterized by solidity and predictability. These are characters whose sense of self is unremittingly threatened by external or internal forces. The subjects encountered in these stories are thus everything but autonomous beings with a secure subjectivity. In fact, the very devices Ocampo employs in the development of character often challenge the notion of character to the point of

rendering this concept untenable. In this section, my analysis of the self progresses from a denial of stable subjectivity caused by the foreigner within and the division of the self, to the complete dissolution of the self through biological metamorphosis and linguistic deconstruction. As Ocampo's stories posit alternatives to the stable, bourgeois subject, the gender categories, biological taxonomies, and linguistic conventions in her work emerge as transient orders whose delimitations blur or disappear completely in the most familiar settings.

Many of Ocampo's stories reveal the chaos beneath the trappings of the stable subjectivity through her recurring device of a character that harbors a foreigner within. For example, in "La cara en la palma"--a story reminiscent of the anatomical displacement in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birth-mark"--a face strangely occupies the hollow of the narrator's palm.[4] Addressing her male suitor, Aurelio, the female narrator reveals the reason for the glove on her left hand: "Tengo en la palma de la mano izquierda una cara que me habla, que me acompaña, que me combate; una cara pequeña como un bajo relieve, que ocupa el lugar en que deben estar las líneas de la mano" (*INV* 90). After posing a disturbing question, "Amarías a una mujer manca?" (*INV 91*), she informs him that this voice has stated that her suitor walks like a soldier and that the artificial flowers she makes are unsightly. The narrator warns: "Si me ves un día con la manga del vestido vacía, [. . .] sabrás que estoy dispuesta a casarme contigo; pero si me ves alejarme como siempre, [. . .] con ese guante tejido, en la mano izquierda, entiende que yo, tu enamorada, vivo oyendo en mí la voz de alguien que te odia" (*INV* 92). Here the mutilated self--suggested by the provocative question, "Amarías a una mujer manca?"--looms as a threat generated by the narrator's awareness that within her abides a stranger with a will alien to her own.

As in "La cara en la palma," a fragile selfhood besets the narrator's friend in "La vida clandestina." The narrator relates the story of a friend who is distressed

over his basement, which exhibits a peculiar acoustic feature: "Cuando grito, no es con mis palabras, ni con mi voz, que el eco responde" (*INV* 99). Moreover, unable to recognize his own image on reflective surfaces, the narrator's troubled friend has also developed a fear of mirrors. Hoping to rid himself of the voice and his distorted reflection, the character takes refuge in the desert only to encounter "aquel ser [que] lo esperaba": "Rendido, se acostó a dormir. Luego vio su impronta en la arena, que no guardaba relación alguna con su cuerpo; le dibujó ojos y boca, y le modeló una oreja, donde susurró el final de esta historia, que nadie sabrá" (*INV* 100). The estrangement from oneself, as seen in the character's inability to identify himself in mirrors, along with the final recognition of the foreign entity as something apart from yet familiar to himself, posits a solipsistic mechanism that prevents the identification of a creator or of an origin. Here, a being discovers his unstable nature and vinculum with an entity other than his own; this dependency confers on him the ability to exist albeit through the function of an other's consciousness.

Significantly, in "La vida clandestina" the source of this awareness inhabits the deepest, darkest zone of a house, a feature that brings to mind the subterranean spaces harboring the unknown. The dark recesses of a house functions as a trope harboring the unknown in such stories as Borges's "El Aleph," H. P. Lovecraft's "La casa maldita," and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart." Furthermore, the house, according to Gaston Bachelard, serves as an architectural metaphor for the differentiation between the conscious and the unconscious (18).[5] In Ocampo's "La vida clandestina," the basement--the underground, hidden part of the home--is the space in which the anguished man encounters the other being, a being that might be regarded as some part of himself because of the final recognition and acceptance of this other.

Thus far, such estrangement from self can be read as ambiguous. Disturbing as it may be, the stranger within, nonetheless, provides these characters coping strategies that allow for somewhat tenable existences under familiar yet strange circumstances. But estrangement from oneself can assume more radical and destructive forms, as in "Malva López," whose central character displays not only a psychological but also a physically destructive foreigner within as Malva's impatient personality drives her to consume herself. The first incident transpires at her daughter's school when poor service provokes a ghastly response: "Durante ese lapso su impaciencia creció [. . .] . Cuando quedó sola [. . .] se comió el dedo meñique de la mano izquierda [. . .] . Felizmente los guantes no estaban del todo rotos y pudo esconder aquel día adentro del guante la mano ignominiosa" (*RS* 213). This self-destruction continues through interminable traffic jams and the consistently poor service and ineptitude of public servants and personnel at the police station, the grocery store, and the cheese store. After every mutilating incident, the narrator praises Malva's ability to hide her disfigurement with gloves, scarves, and clothing, an ability that earns her the reputation of being a well-dressed woman. Ultimately, Malva's stylish culottes hide her disfigurement in her last incident:

> Se arqueó como una víbora, y echando la cabeza hacia atrás, se mordió el talón, hasta arrancárselo. Felizmente llevaba puesta una culotte negra, de otro modo el espectáculo hubiera sido indecoroso. Había gente: el ministro de educación y una pianista italiana, a la elegante luz de las velas. Algunas personas estúpidas aplaudieron. (*RS* 215)

Her death is announced the next day, and at the funeral, the narrator discovers that there is no corpse under the funerary shroud in the coffin. An event of these horrific dimensions, however, causes no surprise and no pity, only the giddy amazement typical of a circus atmosphere. The narrator's last line suggests a distancing from the

representatives of her society: "Esta ciudad no era para ella [Malva]. Que terminara tan pronto de comer su propio cuerpo era humanamente imposible" (*RS* 216). The story suggests, therefore, that the self-destruction stems from the alienation the character experiences in a social class too self-absorbed to rise above its pretentiousness and express shock. Moreover, the ironic tone characterizing the narrator's description of the gloves that hide the "mano ignominiosa" and the culottes that save Malva from committing "el espectáculo [. . .] indecoroso" exaggerate to the point of caricature a particular social class's attention to fashion over tragedy.

While these characters' response to an inscrutable force that dwells within ranges from perturbing anxiety to complete self-destruction, the decomposition of the subject in the stories "La casa de azúcar" and "El impostor" appears as the dissolution of the central characters' autonomies, one by the supposed appropriation of another life, the other by the division of the psyche into a self and an other. Although these characters enjoy the benefits and predictability of the middle-class life in Buenos Aires, they undergo a radical change of their being in response to the limited horizons of experience of bourgeois life. The narrator of "La casa de azúcar" relates the story of his wife who, shortly after their marriage, exhibits changes in personality that he attributes to a supernatural phenomenon: Cristina has lost her own being to the prior resident of their "casa de azúcar." Ironically, according to the narrator, Cristina's abnormal superstitious fears compelled the narrator to lie about the newness of their home. The first line of the story establishes this aspect of her personality: "Las supersticiones no dejaban vivir a Cristina. Una moneda con la efigie borrada, una mancha de tinta, la luna vista a través de dos vidrios, las iniciales de su nombre grabadas por azar sobre el tronco de un cedro la enloquecían de temor" (*F* 28). However, a series of unknown visitors who insist that his wife is Violeta, the prior resident of their house, confirms to the narrator that Cristina is

losing her life to the prior resident. Consequently, the husband grows suspicious, monitoring her every move. As he makes inquiries around the neighborhood, the narrator's questions lead him to Violeta's former voice teacher who reports that Violeta has recently died, taking to her grave an all- consuming anger: "Murió de envidia. Repetía sin cesar: 'Alguien me ha robado la vida, pero lo pagará muy caro'" (*F* 36). The discouraged narrator ends his story: "Cristina se transformó, para mí, al menos, en Violeta. [. . .] Me alejé tanto de ella que la vi como a una extraña. Una noche de invierno huyó. La busqué hasta el alba. Ya no sé quién fué víctima de quién, en esa casa de azúcar, que ahora está deshabitada" (*F* 36). For the narrator, then, it is a supernatural phenomenon that has caused his wife's estrangement. However, another interpretation of this story underscores Cristina's disenchantment with the domestic space and the constraints of the marital situation. In this interpretation, the story posits the fragmentation of selfhood as subversive strategies employed by Cristina to transcend her circumstances.

In the aptly titled "El impostor," conventional orders of characterization, narrative, and identity are further problematized. In this story, the splitting of the self permits Armando Heredia to create an alter ego that utlimately provokes his death by his own hand in a schizophrenic act.[6] The text, which structurally embodies the theme of the double, is divided into two parts. The extensive first part is Armando Heredia's notebook written under the alias of Luis Maidana; the brief second part, written by Rómulo Sagasta, is introduced by the title *Consideraciones finales de Rómulo Sagasta*. Though we read about the events mainly through the narrator, Luis Maidana, the true nature of Armando's text and of Luis Maidana's identity is revealed at the end by Rómulo Sagasta. Sagasta, the friend of Armando's father, explains that he had arrived on 28 January 1930, only to come upon the scene of Armando Heredia's suicide. The young man had been staying at the family farm

located near the town of Cacharí. When Armando's parents arrive to bury their son and to collect his belongings, Armando's father, unable to bear the pain entrusts Sagasta with a notebook they have found on a table.

The notebook bearing the title *Mis sueños* holds many secrets. First of all, the title does not reflect the contents. Also, the author identifies himself as Luis Maidana, not Armando. The reader then realizes that the first part of the story is Armando's notebook that Sagasta reads. Luis Maidana, Armando's alter ego, had written in the notebook that Armando's father had entrusted him with the investigation of his son's alleged insanity. The first part of the text presents in Luis Maidana's words his train trip to the farm, the numerous discussions he and Armando sustain, a series of coincidences, déjà vus, prophetic dreams and nightmares, that all finally culminate in the death of Armando, alias Luis Maidana. Sagasta, astonished by the psychological intricacies, joins Armando's father in the search for the identity of the author of the notebook:

> Estudiamos la escritura del cuaderno; confrontamos cuadernos del colegio y cartas que fueron escritas por él, presumíamos, en esa época: la letra era la misma. Averiguamos entre los amigos de Armando si existía o había existido un Luis Maidana. Nadie lo conocía ni había oído hablar de él. Los caseros de 'Los Cisnes' afirmaron que nadie visitó a Armando en la estancia. Finalmente tuve que aceptar lo increíble: los relatos contenidos en el cuaderno bajo el título *Mis sueños* habían sido escritos por Armando Heredia y no por Luis Maidana. (*RS* 354)

Sagasta concludes that Armando was incapable of distinguishing the dream state from the conscious one. This could be the only explanation, Sagasta believes, for the young man's uncanny ability to link objects and events: "Armando sufría desdoblamientos. Se veía de afuera como lo vería Luis Maidana, que era a la vez su

amigo y su enemigo. 'En la vigilia, vivimos en un mundo común, pero en el sueño cada uno de nosotros penetra en un mundo propio'" (*RS* 354). Sagasta recalls Armando's childhood and how even then he had shown signs of mental imbalance. As an adolescent, Armando would outline with red ink a being on the ground. After punishing the outlined being with his whip, Armando usually broke down crying because he had *killed* him. Drawing upon this recollection, Sagasta ponders a series of questions: "¿creyó matar a Luis Maidana, como creyó matar en su infancia a un personaje imaginario? ¿En vez de tinta roja empleó su propia sangre para jugar con su enemigo? ¿Quiso, odió, asesinó a un ser imaginario?" (*RS* 354).

In the division of the subject observed in "El impostor," Armando encounters some form of himself that seeks to alleviate his psychological anguish. Because Armando projects the image of an intelligent young man, recipient of all the benefits of his comfortable upper-middle class status, his fleeing to Cacharí, a rural, isolated settlement deeply disturbs his father. The alter ego, Luis Maidana, writes in his notebook that Armando's father had begged him to help Armando. In the geographical space away from the urban, civilized center of Buenos Aires, Armando and his alter ego encounter experiences that veer away from the paradigms of empirical reality. It is in this territory of the unknown that Armando finally materializes his other self only to destroy him in a climactic scene that recollects Poe's "William Wilson." Armando poses as the evil self, Luis as the benevolent second self, the complementary opposite. Carl Keppler argues that in the deployment of the trope of the divided self, the first self is traditionally composed of positive qualities while the other is the "evil second self" (28). Ocampo's story reverses this order. Whereas Armando is arrogant, misanthropic, violent, and psychologically unstable, Luis Maidana, the second self, exhibits the opposite qualities. Thus, even in the already unsettled territory of the doubled or dual self,

Ocampo interrupts our expectations by positing the positive self as derivative of the evil self.

The crisis of selfhood in Ocampo's stories can lead to serious consequences for the characters' integrity: the process leads to the disappearance of the subject in "La casa de azúcar" and to the demise of the self in "El impostor." But in other instances, the complete splicing of the self has positive implications, as observed in "El miedo" and "La lección de dibujo" in which the rejection of a solid sense of selfhood compensates for the dissatisfactions of existence. In "El miedo," a text that takes the form of a letter addressed to Alejandra, the narrator asserts that duality can combat fear: "Nace la idea de la salvación, para no estar sola, porque la salvación está en conseguir que el miedo resida tal vez en gran parte en la soledad. Quise ardientemente ser dos personas" (*CF* 168). According to the narrator, achieving this duality requires an arduous journey that begins with the mental concentration on one's shadow. The purpose of this exercise is to isolate the shadow until it achieves an independent existence. Then one must renounce all pleasures. "Después de varios años de sacrificio se agrega a nuestro ser otro ser como un mellizo que nadie ve pero que está latente con su voz propia, con los apetitos, con su dominio [. . .] . De este modo logré el orgullo más absoluto, el de ser dual, no el orgullo de no tener miedo" (*CF* 169). Here the multiplicity of selves can help quell the anxiety of solitude.

This separate being or second self--at once similar yet different from the first self--is also capable of reflection and evaluation. In "La lección de dibujo" the narrator describes how one night she came upon the presence of an enigmatic little girl. Contemplating the narrator's work in progress, a copy of one of Michelangelo's paintings, the young critic expresses disapproval of the narrator's artistic style: 'Yo te enseñé a dibujar de otro modo [. . .] . ¿No te acordás del retrato de Miss

Edwards, la institutriz, que se volvió loca? Tenía una vincha de terciopelo y un vestido de lustrina' (*YASI* 63). The nature of the intruder and the reasons for her knowledge of and presence in the narrator's childhood are never clarified. The apparition seems to stem from the narrator's unconscious, a repressed past, a way of being and feeling that was forgotten in the process of aging. The narrator confides in this being: "Tardé en darme cuenta de que la realidad no tiene nada que ver con la pintura" (*YASI* 67). There is the disturbing fact that the child speaks about the narrator's past as if it were her own; furthermore, when the child removes her shoes to tiptoe out, the narrator notices that their feet are identical: "Que pronunciara el nombre de Miss Edwards y luego todo lo demás que dijo, revelaba su identidad, pero que nuestros pies se parecieran, me golpeó contra la vida real con violencia" (*YASI* 69). The child disappears "como un dibujo," but she returns the next night. When the narrator asks her age, she responds: "Nunca quise ser grande. La edad me parece la peor invención del mundo. Sentí que para siempre me extrañaría no tener la edad que tengo" (*YASI* 70). The second self displayed in "La lección de dibujo" corresponds to what Keppler holds as the essential paradox of the relationship between a character and his second self: "the two participants in it are simultaneously separate from each other in Space and continuous with each other in personality" (161). Similarly, Ocampo's child poses here as some manifestation of the self onto which the narrator projects a critical artistic consciousness. The splitting of the subject permits it to view itself from the position of an other to enhance perception and awareness.

Beyond Ocampo's subjects who confront the foreigner within and the division of themselves, an even more dramatic assault on the integrity of the characters occurs in stories that bypass the conventions of biological and grammatical categories. For example, gender and species delimitations blur and disappear in

stories such as "Hombres animales enredaderas," where the narrator begins his narration as a male but ends up female. In the beginning the male narrator states: "No comprendo en qué forma sucedió el accidente: que yo esté solo en esta selva con los víveres y que no quede ningún rastro a la vista de la máquina donde viajé, me desconcierta" (*RS* 197). At the end, however, the adjectives describing the narrator indicate a female referent: "No me creerán. Tampoco creerán que no puedo estar ociosa. Ultimamente trato de tejer trenzas como la enredadera alrededor de las ramas [. . .] . Estoy tan ocupada" (*RS* 204). A similar obfuscation arises in "Okno, el esclavo" wherein the narrator appears to be human since he states that he is working in his study. A few paragraphs later, however, he asks a strange question: "Me ha crecido una pata. Respiro como el perro. Preferiría ser planta. Tengo puesta una falda. ¿Seré una mujer? En mi pelo tengo las hojas de la planta" (*CF* 219). The reader's perplexity and probing for sense are tangentially addressed when the narrator judges the human desire for logic: "El hombre adquirió una costumbre del todo inútil. Todo tiene que explicarlo; si es cierto lo que explica, no importa" (*CF* 219). If we believe the narrator, another disturbing metamorphosis then takes place, but this time the narrator inexplicably switches to the past tense: "Me puse de pie, encendí la luz eléctrica. La pata que me había salido estaba a mis pies, reemplazando uno de mis pies. Sin duda era una pata de perro, preciosa, con las uñas curvas, el pelo blanco y gris salía de las garras. No me asombró" (*CF* 221). The story ends with the canine metamorphosis of the narrator: "Yo no era la misma persona. Me cubrí de pelos y de patas, con uñas afiladas" (*CF* 222). Arguably such transgressions of the traditional categories of gender and species not only problematize the unitary, stable self, as do the other stories considered thus far in this chapter. Unlike other stories, however, these gender / species conflations challenge the very concept of character in narrative. By eschewing the underpinnings

of gender and species, Ocampo renders the concept of character inoperable and thus further subverts the linguistic stabilization of identity.

Ocampo's avoidance of character and identity consolidation do not stop here. Having transgressed the conventions of gender and species, she makes the jump to a completely amorphous character in the story "Anamnesis." Here the narrator, a doctor, describes a peculiar patient whose heterogeneous nature permits her to be everything at once, like a human *Aleph*. This patient, who can change her voice at will, has eyes and ears in her hair. Even the link of cause and effect resists logic: "Un hombre que la mira mata a mi paciente. / Un perro que la sigue la esclaviza. / Un niño que la busca la obnubila. / Un durazno maduro la hipnotiza. / Una tumbergia en flor la vuelve loca" (*DN* 98). Everything is backwards in this being's organism:

> Mi paciente ama con el páncreas
> con el plexo solar y con la médula.
> Espera con la garganta y con las rodillas.
> Teme con las recónditas venas.
> [. . . . .]
> Aborrece con las arterias y con el riñón derecho. (*DN* 99)

The patient's explanation to the doctor for this strange condition of heterogeneity and totality is deceptively simple: 'En cada ser está el universo' (*DN* 100). She poses as the inheritor of objects and beings from any moment in time. From the magnolias she has inherited her skin; her beauty from an effigy of the Greek goddess Diana at the bottom of a platter; from the greyhound her body's elasticity, her teeth, and her tongue. The doctor's appraisal of his patient's condition reveals the Platonic nature of this patient: "Mi paciente tiene / [. . .] un organismo con memoria, una sensibilidad, / una presencia infatigables" (*DN* 96).

Mircea Eliade describes the Platonic concept of *anamnesis* as a "kind of 'impersonal memory' buried deep in each individual, made up of memories of the time when the soul was directly contemplating the Ideas" (52). According to this view, individuals differ from one another because of the imperfect memories that they conserve of this original state. If we follow Eliade's conception of *anamnesis* here, the being described by the narrator in Ocampo's story is more a concept than a character in that she possesses a "remembrance of impersonal realities," rather than a stable, fixed, singular identity (52). In the way that her undermining of traditional character challenges conventional notions of identity formation, the intrusion of poetic form in a supposedly narrative text further illustrates the permeability of the subject. In effect, then, Ocampo's subversion of categories of narrative devices expose the illusory exactness and false permanence of the processes by which human beings have organized the world.

These stories brim with a playful irreverence that taunts the reader's desire for rational orderly worlds. In truth, startling changes in narrators and grammatical inconsistencies with no specific purpose have never worried Ocampo, an inclination she candidly acknowledges to Noemí Ulla in a series of interviews published in 1982.[7] For example, in "Atropos" narration begins in the third person but changes to the first person. Moreover, an enigmatic sentence of the story adds to the confusion: "Mi hija se parece a mí, pero es en realidad mi madre, aunque yo la llame mi hija" (*CF* 172). And though the Greek word *atropos*--"atropous" in its English form--functions as an adjective and means "not to be inverted," if taken at its most immediate level of meaning, nothing makes sense in this "story." Similarly, "En el bosque de los helechos" opens with a first-person narrator but changes to the third person in the second page: "Esta niña se llamaba Agnus; nunca se sabrá por qué" (*YASI* 172). In "Jardín de infierno," the narration begins in the first person: "No

comprendo por qué me casé" (CF 83). Then, in the second paragraph, narration changes to the third person: "Quedó [. . .] preguntándose por qué su mujer se había casado tantas veces" (*CF* 84). In effect, then, in the second paragraph the first voice becomes a character in the story.

Behind the apparently stable, predictable reality of a civilized, urban life, Ocampo's characters and narrators exist precariously in contexts that are traditionally identified as bourgeois spaces. Exhibiting weak autonomies, these fragile beings suspect that a strange force abides within them. They either undergo the division of their psyches, or they suffer the complete loss of selfhood through physical transformation and linguistic breakdown. By rejecting the stable, bourgeois subject which relies, in part, on the positivist faith in the categories of gender, biological taxonomy, and language, Ocampo proposes the need for alternate modes of existence as these historically fixed orders are revealed to be transient and insufficient in the most familiar of social settings.

Alleviating Order: Gentility's Rituals, Objects and the Bored Self

In the stories previously discussed in this chapter, the Ocampean subject must navigate the fixed ontological realities of bourgeois existence. As we have seen, Ocampo's portrayal of the bourgeois subject stands as a critique of a definition of subjectivity wherein the self is assumed to be a discrete, stable, unitary being. In this section, we will see how Ocampo's gaze ranges beyond the subject to the excessively ritualized activities of bourgeois life itself, revealing therein a deficit of intentionality and authenticity. In a highly repetitive, predictable existence, tedium oppresses these synchronized, middle- and upper-class households filled with mundane parties, extravagant meals, malicious gossip, and endless teas. Although the methodical daily rituals of refined society appear to control time and its contingencies, in Ocampo's stories the sudden intrusion of death in the most prosaic

of activities destroys this illusion of mastery over time. Similarly, the fixation on the domestic space--the reliable household topography that is created by the presence of familiar objects--appears to secure order and a predictable, safe reality. Ocampo's characters, however, are betrayed by the things that had once brought them satisfaction and comfort, and in this way Ocampo sabotages the relationship of the bourgeoisie to the object in general and to clothes specifically. Moreover, the social order, assured by encoded behaviors and fixed, dried-out dialogues, offers few possibilities for an engaged and conscientious existence for the self. To elude this condition, however, we find in Ocampo's fiction strategies that lie outside of the civilization paradigm, such as illness and the supernatural event. By disrupting the conventional groundwork of the bourgeois life, these events constitute a deviation from bourgeois reality as well as an interrogation of the stable, rational self.

Amidst the ennui of a wearisome eternity sustained through the daily rituals of the well-to-do, death can strike to diffuse this moral inertia. In the synchronized households of the bourgeoisie, time stagnates, and death seems a far-off, remote event. Yet, as in "El retrato mal hecho," death emerges shockingly out of the mundane and the familiar. The narrator summarizes in one sentence the monotonous, orderly life led by the main character, Eponina: "La vida era un larguísimo cansancio de descansar demasiado; la vida era muchas señoras que conversan sin oírse en las salas de las casas donde tarde en tarde se espera una fiesta como un alivio" (*VO* 63). Believing that her numerous, undisciplined children have robbed her of her youth, Eponina feels only contempt for them. One evening, as she reads in *La Moda Elegante* tips on embroidering and wonders why the maid has not yet set the table, she decides to look for Ana, the maid, in the only place left: "Subió al altillo y empujó la puerta [. . .] . Ana estaba con la cintura suelta de naúfraga, sentada sobre el baúl; su delantal, siempre limpio, ahora estaba manchado

de sangre" (*VO* 64-65). In contrast to her relatives' affected, exaggerated wailing of hypocritical commiseration, Eponina tenderly embraces Ana while reciting an eerie echo of the descriptions of embroidery patterns: "Niño de cuatro años vestido de raso de algodón color encarnado. Esclavina cubierta de un plegado que figura como olas ribeteadas con un encaje blanco. Las venas y los tallos son de color marrón dorado, verde mirto o carmín" (*VO* 66).

Confronting this infanticide through a consumer language typical of merchandise catalogues, instead of reacting with shock and horror, readers are distanced from the murder to the point of misunderstanding the true nature of the scene. Ocampo thus defamiliarizes the death scene and, through the denial of empathy, obliges the reader to contemplate first the intellectual component of the scene. In Victor Shklovsky's words, "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (12). Shklovsky argues that Tolstoy's "method of seeing things out of their normal context" effects a criticism and undermining of the purported authority and sacredness of "dogmas and rituals" of secular or religious traditions (17). Similarly, Ocampo's story subtly blames a social group that lives vainly free from toil and strain and whose lifestyle depends on the exploitation of another. Though the child's death recedes into the background, the ensuing distancing brings to the forefront Eponina's compassion for Ana and the hypocrisy of the household members. Eponina, as a reluctant member of her class, and Ana, as the laborer supporting the idle class, are allies against the strictures delimiting their lives.[8]

The ceremonies of the middle and upper classes erect an order that duplicitously conceals the passage of time. Social gatherings, dinner parties, and teas deceive the genteel participants; time and reality appear under their control.

Tragedy, however, quiescently lurks beneath the most prosaic, familiar activities, as observed in the stories "Las fotografías," "El árbol grabado," and "Voz en el teléfono." Death is often a cruel reminder that life's apparent predictability and continuity are but illusions. As the story "Las fotografías" suggests, the civilized rituals of society can be exhausting, even deadly. Though having recently returned home from the hospital after an almost fatal accident, Adriana must endure her parents' insistence on celebrating her birthday with a lavish party. The activities, the heat, and the atmosphere of the party are unbearable enough, but the lethal blow comes with the long photography session in which every family member and friend has to pose with the invalid girl: "Adriana se quejaba. Creo que pedía un vaso de agua, pero estaba tan agitada que no podía pronunciar ninguna palabra; además, el estruendo que hacía la gente al moverse y al hablar hubiera sofocado sus palabras, si ella las hubiera pronunciado" (*RS* 29). In the midst of drinking, dancing, gossiping, and eating, somebody finally notices that the guest of honor is dead: "La cabeza colgaba de su cuello como un melón. No era extraño que siendo aquélla su primera salida del hospital, el cansancio y la emoción la hubieran vencido" (*RS* 30). Some people laugh, others try to wake her up, still others, fearing that the party may end early, fill their pockets with food.

While society's rituals can prove deadly, in other stories death itself disturbs the order of gentility's rituals. As the cook instructs in "El árbol grabado": "Un banquete es siempre un banquete [. . .] . Las fuentes tienen que estar bien dispuestas, los vasos frente a los platos y cubiertos correspondientes" (*INV* 148). Amidst this banquet scene in a serene bucolic space, "debajo de la sombra del sauce," a crime erupts from a most unexpected source, a child. In an act of vengeance against his abusive grandfather, Clorindo stabs the old man during a party held in the patriarch's honor. Similarly, in "Voz en el teléfono," a child

introduces disorder to a festive atmosphere when he provokes the burning death of his mother. During a childhood birthday party, he intentionally locks his unsuspecting mother and her friends in a room. With the help of his friends, he lights a small bonfire in front of the entrance of the room. As a preface to his story, the narrator characterizes his family's status by the abundance of useless things and spaces: two desks, (no one utilized them for writing), eight hallways, three bathrooms (one with two washstands), two kitchens, two rooms for ironing and washing, five rooms for the servants, carpets, chandeliers, show cases, and more. His last memory of his mother is "su cara inclinada hacia abajo, apoyada sobre un balaustre del balcón" (*F* 138). Expressing no remorse, he explains: "El mueble chino se salvó del incendio, felizmente. Algunas figuritas se estropearon: una de una señora que llevaba un niño en los brazos y que se asemejaba un poco a mi madre y a mí" (*F* 138).

Indeed, the repetitious, fatuous daily practices of the middle and upper classes deceive their members into believing that they predict and plan events and measure the passage of time. This perception of a stable, reliable order deludes the members of the bourgeois household. As the daily rituals and practices of gentility imbue solidity to the household space, the construction of a secure domestic topography is also achieved through these classes' interaction with objects. Critics have highlighted Ocampo's portrayal of the Argentine society and its relationship to the object. Mario Lancellotti's 1962 review of *Las invitadas*, for example, recognizes the middle class in which the common Argentine appears deformed by his own moral greed and envy. She reveals, according to Lancellotti, "un mundo inquieto, exaltado por el vuelco económico y social al plano sádico del predominio, resuelto en posesión de personas, en preciado anhelo de objetos" (75). Blas Matamoro argues that the majority of Ocampo's protagonists portray an old bourgeoisie, the

oligarchy of Buenos Aires, as metonymically represented by "sus mansiones de la ciudad, sus quintas de extramuros, sus estancias. Dicho objetalmente: sus muebles, sus objetos de arte, sus animales domésticos" (*Oligarquía y literatura* 196). As Matamoro correctly suggests, the space of the home cannot be evaluated separately from the things found in it; a discussion of objects is thus pertinent here.

Speaking in general terms, the space of the home connotes the security assured by the predictability of the location of objects and a daily routine that has evolved in relation to the structural features of the home. The distribution of the internal space and the orderly activities associated with these spaces compensate for the fearful uncertainties of the exterior world.[9] Nineteenth-century realism reveals the extent to which the faith in the representative powers of language lead to longwinded detailed descriptions of the spaces inhabited by the bourgeoisie and of the things occupying those spaces. The middle and upper classes viewed the world from their libraries, drawing rooms, and bedrooms, while aspiring to collect and protect pieces of reality--objects--in velvet pouches, wooden boxes, cedar drawers, closets, and chests. Nonetheless, the sanctuary of the home could suddenly become a source of bewilderment when objects exhibit an unsuspected nature.[10] As Melquiades of *Cien años de soledad* explains: "Las cosas tienen vida propia [. . .] todo es cuestión de despertarles el alma" (García Márquez 9). Things also take on a life of their own and estrange characters and narrators from their once familiar surroundings in Ocampo's stories. For instance, the narrator of "Los libros voladores" witnesses the books in her home library secretly copulate, multiply, and finally take flight through the library window. This narrator concludes that we should hire detectives to keep vigil of the infinitesimal changes that occur at every moment: "para vigilar el tiempo y a sus víctimas, para vigilar la vida clandestina de los libros. Yo no sirvo para vigilar el movimiento de cosas tan preciosas" (*CF* 79).

Furthermore, Ocampo's attention to the acquisitiveness and the sanctity of property as displayed by the the middle and upper classes, underscores the value system held by the bourgeoisie.[11] Once evidence of a comforting, orderly existence, things in Ocampo's work can double-cross their owners and cause unexpected suffering, as in the stories, "Los objetos," "La enemistad de las cosas," and "Informe del cielo y del infierno." Although Camila Ersky of "Los objetos" treasured only her loved ones, her canaries and dogs, the loss of her family's house and furnishings, once by fire and another time through financial losses, has devastated other family members:

> La idea de ir perdiendo las cosas [. . .] no la apenaban como al resto de su familia o a sus amigas, que eran todas tan vanidosas. Sin lágrimas había visto su casa natal despojarse [. . .] de sus más preciados adornos (cuadros, mesas, consolas, biombos, jarrones, estatuas de bronce, [. . .] vitrinas enteras con miniaturas [. . .]), horribles a veces pero valiosos. (*F* 75)

These objects lost in the past, however, begin to reappear. The first object, a bracelet given to her by an old boyfriend, causes a joyous surprise in Camila. Subsequently, though, all the lost articles begin to materialize at a diabolical pace, until the final day in which all are literally recovered: "Entonces vió los objetos alineados contra la pared de su cuarto, como había soñado que los vería. [. . .] Vió que los objetos tenían caras, esas horribles caras que se les forman cuando los hemos mirado durante mucho tiempo. A través de una suma de felicidades Camila Ersky había entrado, por fin, en el infierno" (*F* 77).

As the accumulation of things comes under scrutiny in Ocampo's work, one object in particular, the garment, bears special significance because of its role in the making of bourgeois identity. Jean Paul Sartre, for example, emphasizes the importance of clothes in the processes of representation by which the bourgeoisie

identifies itself as a class (770-775). In two stories in particular, "El vestido de terciopelo" and "Las vestiduras peligrosas," the female, upper-class characters, bored with the excessive leisure time they have on their hands, seek diversion through self-gratification and the satisfaction of their vanity in clothes. Through the indulgence of this appetite for clothing, both characters unwittingly provoke their own deaths. Described as *ociosas* of the upper class who exist exclusively for the adornment of their bodies, these two characters are punished for the idleness of their class and the pastimes undertaken to mark their delimitation from other classes.

In "El vestido de terciopelo," the supernatural powers of a velvet dress castigate a petulant woman of the idle class. The narrator, a child, details the hardships endured to deliver the sumptuous dress: "Sudando, secándonos la frente [. . .] llegamos a esa casa con jardín, de la calle Ayacucho. [. . .] Casilda es modista. Vivimos en Burcazo y nuestros viajes a la capital la enferman, sobre todo cuando tenemos que ir al barrio norte" (*F* 106). When the maid leads them upstairs to a garishly decorated red bedroom in the ostentatious mansion, the lady of the house greets the patient girls only after gargling for a long time in the adjacent room. In light of the hardships endured by the young girls, the woman's frivolity is, at the very least, grossly offensive. She blurts out that the girls are fortunate to live in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Although they have to contend with "perros rabiosos y quema de basuras," they do not worry about the soot marring the pulchritude of their existence: "Miren la colcha de mi cama. ¿Ustedes creen que es gris? No. Es blanca. Un ampo de nieve" (*F* 106). Moreover, while trying on the dress that Casilda has made according to her demands, the lady whines, "¡Probarse! ¡Es mi tortura! ¡Si alguien se probara los vestidos por mí, qué feliz sería! Me cansa tanto" (*F* 107). Although Casilda labors as she dresses and undresses her client, the lady seems "extenuada" and "a punto de desvanecerse" (*F* 107). After a series of pinnings for

the final alterations, the lady complains that she cannot breathe and finally drops dead strangled by the black dress adorned with a sequin dragon: "La señora cayó al suelo y el dragón se retorcía" (*F* 109). But the phenomenon causes no surprise in the two girls; in fact, Casilda worries more about her economic losses and the narrator concludes the story with the facetious exclamation, "¡Qué risa!" (*F* 109).

Similar to the petulant, egocentric woman of the story "El vestido de terciopelo," in "Las vestiduras peligrosas" Artemia's personal seamstress, Piluca, tells the story of a "niña que vivía para estar bien vestida y arreglada. La vida se resumía para ella en vestirse y perfumarse" (*RS* 442). Although the seamstress acknowledges Artemia's generosity, Piluca often toils through the night to finish any one of Artemia's new creations, which she designs herself. The narrator disapproves of her tendency to idleness: "La señorita Artemia era perezosa. No es malo que lo sea el que puede, pero dicen que la ociosidad es madre de todos los vicios" (*RS* 443). To Artemia's dismay, a series of perturbing crimes in which the victims were wearing Artemia's clothes convinces her that women around the world are copying her dresses. On two consecutive mornings, after two nights on the town, Piluca and Artemia read in the newspapers that the women raped and killed by a group of young hoodlums wore the dresses that the seamstress had recently made: a black velvet jumper with a plunging neckline and a transparent gauze dress with images of feet and hands that seemed to caress Artemia's body with every movement. Piluca had warned Artemia about the raciness of this particular garment: "La Artemia se complacía frente al espejo, viendo el movimiento de las manos pintadas sobre su cuerpo, que se transparentaba a través de la gasa" (*RS* 445). Artemia's haughtiness and narcissism continue undiminished by the heinous crimes; instead of worrying about the disturbing events, she cries over the discovery that she is not original. Predictably, Artemia's next creation, a tulle frock with images of naked bodies that

come together in orgiastic forms, are also photographed on a murder victim. The next time Artemia steps out for the night, she heeds Piluca's advice and wears a sober, masculine suit. The next morning the seamstress discovers the grim news: "Una patota de jóvenes amorales violaron a la Artemia a las tres de la mañana en una calle oscura y después la acuchillaron por tramposa" (*RS* 447).

The frivolous and pretentious Artemia, a slave to the adornment and alteration of her appearance, signs her own death warrant when her attire is judged duplicitous by a pack of young hoodlums. Regarding the alteration of identity through garments, Roberta Davidson reminds us that cross-dressing in early literature posed a subversive response to the established order concerning social and gender appearances (59).[12] In "Las vestiduras peligrosas" Artemia is murdered not because of the sexually provocative nature of her garment, but because she is judged as "tramposa." Whereas Artemia is female, she dares to don a garment typically worn by a male. This transgressive act of gender identity elicits her death at the hands of a pack of violent young men.

Typical of Ocampo's upper class characters, Artemia and the suffocated woman of "El vestido de terciopelo" display an acute sense of boredom caused by their idleness. As if excessive leisure time were like carrying a burden, these characters indulge in the "luxury of aloofness."[13] In response the vacuous, tedious existence of the upper classes, some of Ocampo's characters seek alternate modes of existence that deviate from the rational, unitary, civilized self. It is these characters who find liberation from everyday life by embracing infirmity and by escaping through the supernatural event.

Indeed, a momentary alleviation of the tedious weight of everyday existence can be found through the negation of a healthy, stable self. Under the destabilizing effects of illness, a character can disconnect from concrete social reality. In the

stories "El mal" and "Visiones," the weakened, infirm condition provides voluptuously sensorial experiences for the hospital patients. Efrén of the story "El mal," for example, happily surrenders to an illness that has transported him to an unfamiliar plane of enhanced awareness:

> [. . .] con sábanas y frazadas para cubrirse, estaba en el paraíso. [. . .] De vez en cuando le daban de beber; tenía conciencia del alba, de la mañana, del día, de la tarde y de la noche, aunque las persianas estuvieran cerradas y que ningún reloj le anunciara la hora. Cuando estaba sano solía comer con tanta rapidez que todos los alimentos tenían el mismo sabor. Ahora, reconocía la diferencia que hay hasta en los gustos de una naranja y de una mandarina. (*F* 19)

Efrén discovers the pleasure of identifying the individual sounds that constitute the noise around him. The injections, described as if the nurse were sewing a precious fabric, transcend their importance as mere medical procedures. Evaluating the heightened awareness of his body, this character reflects on his condition : "Qué precio tiene un cuerpo. Vivimos como si no valiera nada, imponiéndole sacrificios hasta que revienta. La enfermedad es una lección de anatomía" (*F* 19). Desensitized by the dulling exigencies of everyday life, Efrén views his wife and children as little more than components of a burdensome economic transaction: "Para él, ellos estaban dentro de la libreta del pan o de la carne. Tenían precio. Costaban cada día más" (*F* 21). The "lección de anatomía," however, awakens him to his formerly dormant body. This intensified awareness points to a more intentional human experience. Moreover, time, now detached from exterior standard time, moves within an interior, personal zone, comparable to what Matei Calinescu identifies in modernist texts as "the personal, subjective, imaginative durée, the private time created by the unfolding of the 'self'" (5).

In the same vein, the patient in "Visiones" values her debilitated physical condition. Falling in and out of a feverish delirium, the narrator relishes the minutiae of existence. Though the discomforts are many, the narrator deems these moments as necessary to extend life: "Qué corta sería la vida si no tuviera momentos desagradables que la vuelven interminable" (*ICI* 97). In this state of heightened awareness, caused by acute physical sensitivity, time decelerates significantly: "A fuerza de interrupciones, el tiempo se alarga. El reloj, con su cara redonda y lívida, me mira. Es eterno como el sol: sus horas no se extinguen, como los rayos. Ocho diarias visitas de médicos hacen de un día un año. ¿Habrá que agradecer que lo desagradable nos permita medir el tiempo?" (*ICI* 98). Instead of a clock, other more archaic forms of measuring time appear in her thoughts as she watches the incessant drip of the intravenous bottle: "El suero cae gota a gota. Un reloj de arena, para cocinar huevos pasados por agua, una clepsidra, en un jardín perdido, en Italia, son menos obsesivos. Hay algo de fiebre en la arena que cae, en el agua que cae. La aguja clavada en la vena se transforma en nuestra vena" (*ICI* 98-99). The narrator's nurse, preferring the sick over the healthy, takes unusual interest in conversations detailing the experiences of her seriously ill and suffering patients: "¿Qué es una persona sana? Un cachivache sin interés. La vida de Linda Fontenla es un sinfín de enemas, de termómetros, de transfusiones, de cataplasmas hábilmente aplicadas y distribuidas" (*ICI* 102). Here, the uncertainties of illness, with the possibility of death lurking behind every medical procedure, satisfy a morbid curiosity that paradoxically enlivens an otherwise dull existence. The narrator predicts the characteristics of her nurse's future husband: "se casará con un enfermo, que es una persona atrayente para ella, un paquete de hemorroides, un hígado demasiado grande, un intestino perforado, una vejiga infectada o un corazón lleno de extrasístoles" (*ICI* 102). The pain and uncertainties of the diseased condition will

help the couple elude the monotony of marriage, as well as the tedium of everyday life.

As with sickness, an event of the supernatural order also provides the opportunity to break away from the burden of tedium. Eduardo González argues that the fantastic event in Julio Cortázar's work often operates as a refuge from the "boredom of rationality" (101).[14] By opening a fissure in reality, the supernatural phenomenon paves an escape route from the routine of everyday, rational existence. In a similar manner, the female characters of Ocampo's stories "Keif" and "Isis," no longer willing to tolerate their comfortable, monotonous lives, find liberation from themselves and their social circumstances through a fantastic event. In the first story, "Keif," the narrator's friend, Fedora Brown, flees from her extravagantly wealthy but boring life through the intercession of a supernatural phenomenon, the transmigration of souls. She has decided to end her oppressive tedium by committing suicide and being reborn. The process, as Fedora informs the narrator, is simple: "mi alma vagando blandamente buscará un cuerpo para vivir de nuevo. Lo encontrará en un niño o en un animal recién nacido, o aprovechará el desvanecimiento de un ser para entrar por el intersticio que deja en el cuerpo la pérdida de conocimiento" (*DN* 195). According to Fedora's will, the narrator is to inherit Fedora's home along the beach, her possessions, and her beloved tiger, Keif. Fulfilling her wish to be an Amazon woman of the circus, Fedora reappears four years later in the body of a four-year-old girl brought by her circus family to buy Keif, which is now in the narrator's possession. There is no doubt that the narrator and the tiger recognize Fedora in the little girl: "La niña se había abrazado al pescuezo de Keif y me miraba con ojos de súplica" (*DN* 200).

The desire to escape her socially and physically repressive condition activates a character's metamorphosis in the story "Isis." Passers-by regard Elisa as

mentally retarded. Barely speaking, she spends hours fixedly gazing through the window at, unbeknownst to all, the jaguar cage in the zoo. Her mother and the other members of the large household, who intend to keep her busy with beautiful mother-of-pearl opera glasses, a kaleidoscope, and a rattle, are unable to distract Elisa: "era constante en su propósito y persistente en el renunciamiento de aquello que no le agradaba" (*INV* 64). On a rare outing, when the narrator and the girl pass in front of the entrance of the zoo, Elisa, who does not seem to have a will, signals with her chin: "hacía tanto tiempo que no manifestaba su voluntad con ademán alguno, que ese gesto fue una orden" (*INV* 64). Noticing that one animal in particular has caught her eye, the narrator then realizes that Elisa's window can be seen from where they stand: "Comprendí que ése era el animal que ella había contemplado y que la había contemplado" (*INV* 64). While the narrator clasps Elisa's hand, she notices that it is changing into a paw: "No quise verla mientras se transformaba. Cuando me volví para mirarla vi un montón de ropa que estaba ya en el suelo" (*INV* 64).

The female characters in these stories, Elisa and Fedora, resemble other examples of metamorphoses in literature, such as those studied by Peggy Sharpe in her analysis of incomplete transformations in the stories of the Brazilian author, Lygia Fagundes Telles. In assessing this blurring of the line "between the Real and the Imaginary," Sharpe explains that "to record the decadence of the bourgeoisie, [Fagundes Telles] sets out to intermingle the real and the imaginative [. . .] [by using] reality as a point of departure to speak for those who cannot express themselves" (79). To Telles, fiction embraces the imaginary as an extension of objects and situations that are real in order to explore the characters' inability to escape their "solitude, decadence, and lack of identity" (79). In a similar manner, Ocampo's characters inhabit settings that correspond to particular social realities and escape from their circumstances through a supernatural phenomenon. Thus in Ocampo's

work, there is a continuity from the real to the supernatural realms. Moreover, in order to transcend their circumstances, Fedora and Isis relinquish their bourgeois, socially acceptable selfhood to become an other in spaces peripheral to the center of society. Fedora, significantly, reincarnates into a member of the circus, a marginalized region at the fringe of society where disorder and self-abandonment reigns. As well, Isis undergoes her transformation in the zoo, an area not only exterior to the home but, more pointedly, a space dominated by species other than human.

All of these stories portray an Ocampean subject that responds to the fixed ontological realities of bourgeois life by seeking emancipation from its highly repetitive, predictable existence. Gentility may delude itself in its apparent control of the processes of time through ritualized activities and daily practices; however, the sudden intrusion of death in the most prosaic of activities undermines this notion of domination over reality. Furthermore, the reliable household topography, as secured by daily rituals and familiar objects, rapidly deteriorates under Ocampo's pen. In contrast to the civilized conceptualization of the self as a healthy, unitary being, Ocampo's characters pursue paths outside of the rational paradigm, such as disease and the fantastic event, to transcend the boredom and vacuity produced by the codified reality proper of their social class.

The Sexual Subject: Marriage, Love, and Desire

Ocampo's work also explores the social practices of the relatedness between men and women in the domain of love, desire, and the institution of marriage. Specific codes of behavior and myths dictate the nature and development of the self in relation to the desired other. To borrow Foucauldian language, the disciplining of sexual desires through the rituals of engagement between men and women is consistent with the rigidity of the bourgeois world. These paradigms determine the

ways in which love is experienced and dictate the forms of expression of this most intimate aspect of human existence. As Stephen Kern discusses in his study of love in Victorian and Modernist novels, the formal, repetitive nature of social rituals renders the experience of love inauthentic because ritual "determines courses of action, even ways of feeling, without requiring the personal reflection about meaning essential for authentic loving" (*The Culture of Love* 371). Feelings and instinctual drives, however, will always exceed social mores of civilized life that is by definition unable to contain the totality of possibilities of human experience. In a similar vein, Ocampo's characters in the throes of love are never quite comfortable with the strictures delimiting love and desire, especially with the idea of marriage as the legitimate channel for desire. Consequently, they seek alternative ways to compensate for conventions that contain the exploration and expansion of the self in relation to the other. Ocampo works through the myth of union of the souls in the Romantic notion of amorous engagement to expose the rhetorical formulas, myths, and rituals that control sexual practices by determining the course of desire and love. Her couples sometimes require the intervention of a third party to rise above the sterility of their monogamous condition. In other instances, if lovers remain within the accepted boundaries, their interaction becomes comically grotesque. Moreover, the impulse to break away from the boundaries of traditional forms of love is abetted by supernatural phenomena. In her study of the processes of love, Ocampo also examines the deceptive and illusive nature of the object of desire while exposing its fetishistic dimension. What does it mean *to fall in love*? What do we fall in love *with* when we experience amorous feelings? Rejecting facile explanations, Ocampo focuses not on answering these questions but on laying bare the intricacies of this most fragile condition.

Society's codes of behavior prove unreliable and constricting for characters that find themselves unable to create a new life of their own. Authenticity and truth elude Ocampo's characters as convention ensnares them through the myth of the union of souls in matrimony as the only lawful channel for sexual desire. The narrator of "La boda," for example, explains how her prudish aunt forces her to marry a man whom she barely knows. After observing a scene that she evaluates as a romantic encounter--a male friend is innocently undoing one of her curls that had become entangled in the wicker furniture--the aunt demands that the narrator and the friend marry. The duration of the wedding, which lasts only a few seconds, and its perfunctory procedure highlight the purely bureaucratic nature of this ritual. Although the narrator finds her new husband repulsive, upon hearing the news that he has seduced and impregnated a young girl, the narrator responds with a series of clichés that seem taken from the sensationalist press: "Pensé primero matar o hacer abortar a golpes a mi rival, después de acuchillar o quemar a Armando echándole una lata de nafta encendida" (*INV* 40). As if reading her lines from a script of a common melodrama, the narrator repeats a series of platitudes: "Una mujer enamorada no puede sobrevivir a un engaño. [. . .] Por ahora me quedaré con él, porque uno se enamora, después de todo, una sola vez en la vida, pero, si vuelve a ver a esa desvergonzada, lo mataré o me suicidaré" (*INV* 40). Unable to imagine a reality beyond the social roles available, the character becomes a caricature, an exaggeration of societal expectations.

If we understand that a yearning for continuity impels the individual to pursue the physical encounter with another being, with the loved one, we must also recognize the doomed nature of such efforts. As George Bataille writes, this desire is condemned to exceed the potentiality of fulfillment: "Hay un exceso horrible del movimiento que nos anima. [. . .] [La] ruptura de esa discontinuidad individual a la

que la angustia nos clava, se nos propone como una verdad más eminente que la vida" (33). Similarly, Ocampo illuminates the failed attempts to transcend alienation in the story "Amada en el amado," which focuses on the rhetorical formulas and the myth of union in amorous engagement. Although the title remits to Saint John of the Cross's poem "The Dark Night of the Soul," contrary to the fusion of the lovers in the mystic's poem, the couple in Ocampo's story displays an unsettling disjunction. Unable to bear separation, the lovers plan their daily lives so that they are always within each other's reach: "A veces dos enamorados parecen uno solo; los perfiles forman una múltiple cara de frente, los cuerpos juntos con brazos y piernas suplementarios, una divinidad semejante a Siva: así eran ellos dos" (*RS* 119). Though their lives are weighed down with hardships--a cramped living space in deteriorated conditions and an unbearable cockroach infestation--they happily welcome the inconveniences of daily life because "Compartir cualquier cosa vuelve cualquier cosa mejor para los enamorados, cuando son felices" (*RS* 120).

The lovers' happiness is tainted only by the fact that the woman is unable to dream. In consolation of his lover's lack, the man describes his dreams to her every morning. Envious of his ability to dream, she declares: "Quisiera ser vos" (*RS* 120). They resolve to sleep with their heads touching one another. Her ability to materialize objects--a ladybug, a strand of nylon hair, and some violets--from his dreams of the subsequent nights, seems to confirm her ability to see into his dreams. This process, however, takes a dangerous turn one summer afternoon. The man dreams he is walking with his beloved in an unknown city when the couple encounters the ancient Greek, Artemidorus Daldianus, author of *Interpretation of Dreams*, who hands him a love-potion while instructing, "Cuando quieras llevar a tu amada como a tu corazón dentro de ti . . . no tienes más que beber este filtro" (*RS* 123). Still within the dream, he awakens. When he begins to relate his dream, she

interrupts him and shows him the flask with the love-potion. He proceeds to drink it. After suddenly disappearing, she gleefully exclaims from within him, "Soy vos, soy vos, soy vos. Al fin soy vos" (*RS* 123). Although she approves of her new condition, he is less than pleased: "Es horrible. [. . .] Es un conyugicidio" (*RS* 124). Astonished, they both wake up. In an anti-climactic manner, the narrator ends the story by simply adding that life continued at a predictable pace, he dreaming every night and she materializing the objects.[15]

A scathing caricature of the myths that inform society's conceptualization of love emerges in the ironic tone of the narrator. The ironic voice reveals the couple's feeble-minded bliss in the filthy and crumbling environment of their "love nest" to be untenable. In the first paragraph of the story, the narrator compares their union to the image of Shiva with its multiple arms, legs, and eyes. This Hindu god of destruction, as Joseph Campbell explains, is also known as "the Destroyer of Illusion" (185). The monstrous multiplicity of limbs and eyes, as well as the destructive nature of this god, can be linked to the notion of the loss of identity on the part of the lovers. The conventional view of love as the "union of souls," when taken to its ultimate consequence, culminates in the complete dissolution of the subject, as observed in the female character's disappearance in the interior of her lover. The male character's integrity also suffers in the process as the beloved penetrates his being. The narrator's last line emphasizes the hazards of love: "¿Pero acaso la vida no es esencialmente peligrosa para los que se aman?" (*RS* 124). In traditional amorous literature of courtly love, as Denis de Rougement notes, the love-potion served to overcome the Church's proscription of passion and delights of the flesh; in partaking of the potion, lovers were free to pursue the satisfaction of their desires since they were liberated from "every kind of visible connexion with human responsibility" (48). In Ocampo's story the love-potion not only brings together the

two lovers, but introduces one into the very being of the other. Both lovers lose their autonomy in this quite uncomfortable union that leads to the "conyugicidio."[16] The woman's childish and gleeful "Soy vos" emerging from within her male lover produces an ironic effect. As Molloy points out, Ocampo systematically betrays the bankruptcy of traditional amorous language and configurations, and by doing so, "denuncia las convenciones que rigen la visión del mundo que los origina" ("Silvina Ocampo: La exageración como lenguaje" 22).

In these stories, love and desire, whether within the boundaries of matrimony or not, involve two beings who never join in blissful oneness and who never manifest the Romantic notion of the recognition of one's self in the other's eyes. Though lost in the whirlwind of love, Ocampo's lovers remain distanced from a fulfilling encounter, as in the impossible union afflicting the lovers of the story "Los amantes." The demands of family, friends, and jobs prevent them from meeting regularly; however, "esos encuentros esporádicos eran rituales y ocurrían siempre en invierno" (*RS* 113). The adjective "sporadic" seems irreconciliable with the fact that these encounters are mechanical and predictable: they always transpire during the winter months and in the same manner: "después de desechar otras posibilidades, elegían siempre, para lugar de citas, la confitería "Las Dalias", y un domingo. [. . .] Frente al escaparate de la confitería se saludaban sin mirarse, ceremoniosamente confusos" (*RS* 113). After buying eight slices of cakes "como lo hacían siempre," they stroll down the Recoleta to the usual place where they eat their cakes in silence or between idle chatter. After eating the cakes and peanuts, the woman spreads her cape on which the couple then proceeds to more intimate activities: "ella sabía (y él también lo sabía), que bajo el amparo de esa manta el amor repetiría sus actos" (*RS* 115).

In these encounters, despite the fact that the lovers are in each other's presence, alienation and artificiality tarnish the occasion. In that awkward moment

in which they greet each other in front of the pastry shop, they both fantasize about how different they could be if the circumstances were different: "'Tal vez en un cuarto bien oscuro o en un automóvil a gran velocidad,' pensaba él, 'perdería mi timidez.' 'Tal vez en un cinematógrafo, después del entreacto o siguiendo una procesión, sabría qué decirle', pensaba ella" (*RS* 113). As if compensating for the void in the relationship, the narrator dedicates almost half of the story to the ritual of eating the cakes. This meticulous but messy process is interrupted only by banal comments and nervous glances that feign interest in a passing car or a dove, ironically referred to as a "símbolo del amor." The space in which the lovers meet is also significant because of its desolate and deteriorated condition: "se dirigieron . . . al reparo del paredón del asilo de ancianos, donde se refugian los niños que rompen los faroles y los mendigos que lavan su ropa en la fuente. Junto a un árbol degenerado [. . .] se sentaron sobre el pasto" (*RS* 113-14). Instead of the trickling fountain, shady trees, and inviting beds of grass that have traditionally charmed the environment of lovers in literature, here these elements appear in their most corrupted form, an adulterated *locus amoenus*. Moreover, the language utilized by the narrator produces an ironic effect. The echoes of amorous traditions of the past can be heard in the insistence on the sameness and oneness of the lovers. Yet, because of the vulgarity and decay of the space of the encounter and of the lovers, a grotesque image crystallizes:

> Simultáneamente, como si cada uno proyectara en el otro sus movimientos (¡misterioso y sutil espejo!), tomaron una mano primeramente, luego con las dos, la tajada de torta con penachos de crema [. . .] y se la llevaron a la boca. Mascaban al unísono y terminaban de deglutir cada bocado al mismo tiempo. Con idéntica sorprendente armonía se limpiaban los dedos en los

> papeles que otras personas habían dejado tirados sobre el pasto. La repetición de estos movimientos los comunicaba con la eternidad. (*RS* 114)

Though the lovers participate in the mechanics of the rituals of amorous interaction, their rendezvous is mundane and devoid of fulfillment.

When Ocampo's characters adhere to the codes of love expecting to reach the plenitude of amorous engagement, they experience dissatisfaction or, at the most, a parody of happiness that is closer to resignation than bliss. Another imminent but unsuccessful encounter is observed in the story "El para otra." Here the female narrator considers how she and a lover--it is not clear if he is a real or an idealized being--live separate lives that almost, but never, cross. A stranger's voice on the telephone or a pair of eyes holds the exhilarating possibility of confronting the lover. After all, the narrator states with naive certainty, "Teníamos que encontrarnos" (*CF* 134). One afternoon she anxiously awaits for the beloved in an unidentified room. Here the narration changes from first to third person to describe the rendezvous : "Se echó al suelo sobre la rosa de una alfombra y esperó, esperó a que dejara de sonar el timbre de la puerta de la calle, esperó, esperó y esperó. Esperó que se fuera la última luz del día, entonces abrió la puerta y entró el que no esperaba" (*CF* 134). The division of the narrative voice--into a first and third persons--reflects the disjunction, this lack of oneness in the amorous encounter. Prudishly presented as a carpet ride, which evokes "La alfombra voladora" of the same short story collection, the encounter permits them to fly, metaphorically, above their streets, the city, and finally, the horizon. But the union lacks meaning and fulfillment: "Amaneció lentamente [. . .] no advirtieron el día ni la falta de noche, ni la falta de amor, ni la falta de todo por lo que habían vivido esperando ese momento. Se perdieron en la imaginación de un olvido-él para otra, para otro ella- y se reconciliaron" (*CF* 135). This ending suggests that neither of the participants actually engages with the person

they believe the other to be. Neither lover is the idealized other; still, both participants settle for the reality the partner can offer.[17]

Significantly, the narrator of "El para otra" also fails to achieve the recognition of herself in the romantic interlude. She instead experiences difficulties identifying her own image. Before the arrival of the lover, she searches for the image of herself in a mirror: "No vi dentro del espejo sino el armario del cuarto y la estatua de una Diana Cazadora que jamás había visto en ese lugar. Era un espejo que fingía ser espejo, como yo inútilmente fingía ser yo misma" (*CF* 134). The search for an authentic self-reflection only leads to a further estrangement. In Bataille's language, the physical encounter has failed to satisfy the yearning for continuity in an other. Furthermore, the experience has accentuated the alienation between the lovers as well as from themselves.

In contrast to Ocampo's characters that remain in unsatisfactory unions, in other instances the supernatural event--imagined or real--paves an escape route for women stranded in the confines of their homes and amorous relationships. The abandoned, solitary husbands and lovers of the stories "El automóvil" and "La casa de azúcar" narrate their stories of romantic disillusionment and the loss of their beloved to an unnatural phenomenon. Despite the unusual or even bizarre circumstances that precipitate the loss of the beloved, this loss never reaches melodramatic proportions, but provokes only tepid bewilderment and resignation. Moreover, these stories evade closure in two ways: at the thematic level, marriage is not the ultimate reward for withstanding love's difficult course nor does this institution embody the ultimate consequence of desire; at the narrative level, the stories' unresolved and ambiguous endings fail to achieve closure because of the persistence of unanswered questions concerning the alleged metamorphoses of the female characters.[18]

The narrator of the story "El automóvil," acting against his will, accepts his wife's monopoly of their car, a wedding gift for the happy newlyweds. In light of her seductive and adulterous tendencies, however, the narrator, also an adulterer, justifies the liquidation of their property to embark on another life with his wife: "Zarpamos de Buenos Aires [. . .] en un barco que nos llevaba con nuestro automóvil, nuestro amor y nuestra alegría. Rompíamos las amarras: todo lo que era tedio o sufrimiento quedaba en el puerto" (*YASI* 49). When they finally reach their destination, Mirta, scantily clad, embraces the car as if it were a lover. Instead of her heartbeat, the narrator one night hears the rumbling of a car engine: "No podía dormirme; tenía que mirarla para asegurarme de que no era un automóvil" (*YASI* 53). At night he lies awake listening to "su corazón de automóvil" (*YASI* 55). After a day of sightseeing in Paris without his wife and unable to find her, he believes that Mirta has finally been transformed:

> En vano la busqué por todas partes. Al volver a la madrugada, me pareció que oía su respiración. Era un automóvil, con el motor en marcha, estacionado frente a la puerta del hotel. Me acerqué: en el interior no había nadie. Lo toqué, sentí vibrar sus vidrios. Tan enloquecido estaba que me pregunté si sería Mirta. [. . .] De pronto pasó algo inexplicable. Suavemente el automóvil empezó a alejarse. (*YASI* 55-56)

The narrator now spends his days looking for that car. In a final letter addressed to Mirta, the destructive power of love surfaces: "Amar en exceso destruye lo que amamos: a vos te destruyó el automóvil. Vos me destruiste" (*YASI* 56). The reader is not quite sure whether or not to accept the alleged metamorphosis. Save for the supposed rumbling of her heart at night and her subsequent disappearance, there are no physical signs of the wife's transformation from woman to car.

In a similar vein, a questionable transformation of the narrator's wife, Cristina, occurs in the story, "La casa de azúcar."[19] Given that our only source of information is an unreliable narrator who continually betrays his own motivations and fears, and considering Cristina's experience in the marriage, we can posit that it is the husband's obsessive control of the home which provokes changes in the female character. According to the narrator, his wife's identity has been absorbed by another being, Violeta. As readers we encounter only slight alterations in Cristina's personality: normally of a happy disposition, she becomes sullen and distanced, her superstitions disappear, and she takes solitary walks. The narrator's credibility comes under suspicion since it is his initial lie that initiates burdensome measures necessary to control the environment within the home. Nonetheless, another level of interpretation comments on the myth of the home and the institution of marriage. First of all, the home they finally have agreed to reside in is located not near an urban center, but on its periphery, far away from the temptations and unpredictability of the city: "Recorrimos todos los barrios de la ciudad; llegamos a los suburbios más alejados, en busca de un departamento" (*F* 28). Obviously, the more insulated and isolated a space, the less probable for exterior forces to infiltrate the controlled environment within the home. The future home, located by the narrator, is a small house on Montes de Oca: "parecía de azúcar. Su blancura brillaba con extraordinaria luminosidad. Tenía teléfono y, en el frente, un diminuto jardín" (*F* 29). Although the myth of the newlywed's nest seems very real, the necessity of the husband's lies underscores its illusory dimension:

> Tuve que hacer creer a Cristina que nadie había vivido en la casa y que era el lugar ideal: la casa de nuestros sueños. Cuando Cristina la vió, exclamó: '¡Qué diferente de los departamentos que hemos visto! Aquí se respira olor a

> limpio. Nadie podrá influir en nuestras vidas y ensuciarlas con pensamientos que envician el aire.' (*F* 29)

However, this "casa de azúcar," a metaphor for their ill-fated union, is the space in which Cristina's transformation is facilitated by her husband's behavior and not by a stranger's "pensamientos que envician." No matter how intent the narrator is on protecting his wife, his home, and his marriage, it all comes to no avail in light of the constant erosion of the reality within the home.[20]

The culminating moment occurs at the Constitución bridge when the narrator encounters Cristina staring longingly at the departing trains. She voices her interest in the various means of transportation and dreams about trips without ever really leaving: "Me gustan los medios de transportación. Soñar con viajes. Irme sin irme. Ir y quedar y con quedar partirse" (*F* 33). These enigmatic words, which pose as Cristina's last direct intervention, can be interpreted in the context of the intrusion of the other life in her own, the breach splicing her own being, or the erosion of the reality within the home and of the couple's relationship. The verbal exchange also significantly transpires on a structure that functions as a link between two spaces or, in and of itself, it poses as an ambiguous, liminal space. It is only fitting that in this space of transit, not of permanence, Cristina should allude to her fragile autonomy by saying, 'Irme sin irme. Ir y quedar y con quedar partirse.'

Many of Ocampo's situations that explore the dynamics of love and desire involve not couples but triangles whose participants shun traditional monogamy and the bourgeois union. As Maria Ossowska has written concerning the stifling constraints of bourgeois society on the couple as depicted in Polish literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "For both husband and wife marriage is a sort of burial, the final collapse under the burden of the conventions and trivialities of the milieu" (50). Echoing this repressive tone, Ocampo's characters either tolerate,

though not without discomfort, societal restraints on the expression of desire or they deviate completely from the norms to deploy alternate strategies of behavior absent from social paradigms. In these particular story lines, the woman occupies the juncture in which the desire of two men coincides: in "La expiación," she stands between two friends; in "El mar," between her husband and her brother; and in "Nosotros," between two brothers. Although these alliances prove sometimes uncomfortable, Ocampo's stories suggest that a third partner is necessary, perhaps essential, to breathe new life into the stagnant traditional couple.

While the narrator of "La expiación" subsists in a placid yet uneventful marital union, she awakens to her relationship with her husband as the male friendship bond suffers under the covetous eyes of a friend. When the female narrator finally becomes aware that she is the object of disrespectful glances from her husband's best friend, she confesses the disturbing effect these provoke: "sus miradas me recorrían desde la punta del pelo hasta la punta de los pies, [. . .] . En consecuencia perdí la naturalidad" (*ICI* 77-78). When Ruperto suddenly falls ill, her husband Antonio saves his life. After the incident, the blinded Ruperto describes a nightmare in which canaries pecked at his neck, arms, and chest. He relates how his limbs were like sand bags preventing him from fighting off the birds. Although the narrator's husband insists that Ruperto's blindness is psychological, he soon reveals the truth. At the fateful gathering, Antonio begins his deadly ritual by saying that he wants to make a silent confession, after which canaries then begin to drop tiny thorns with curare on his neck and chest. Shielding him from the canaries, the narrator frantically covers Antonio's body with her own. At that moment, she understands the significance of the confession:

> Fue una confesión que me unió a él con frenesí, con el frenesí de la desdicha. Comprendí el dolor que él habría soportado para sacrificar y estar dispuesto

a sacrificar tan ingeniosamente, con esa dosis tan infinitesimal de curare y con esos monstruos alados que obedecían sus caprichosas órdenes como enfermeros, los ojos de Ruperto, su amigo, y los de él, para que no pudieran mirarme, pobrecitos, nunca más. (*ICI* 87)

Ocampo's portrayal of the amorous experience here suggests that love is inextricably bound to anguish and suffering and that the couple requires a third member to intensify the relationship. For example, the narrator of "La expiación" confesses her dismay when, in spite of Ruperto's visual advances, the camaraderie between the men intensifies to the point of the exclusion of the narrator: "¿Tuve que admitir que la amistad es más importante que el amor? Nada había desunido a Antonio y a Ruperto; en cambio Antonio [. . .] se había alejado de mí" (*ICI* 85). Further on, however, she narcissistically admits enjoying those turbulent days when Antonio had first noticed Ruperto's insinuating gaze: "Sufrí en mi orgullo de mujer. Ruperto siguió mirándome. Todo aquel drama ¿sólo había sido una farsa? ¿Añoraba el drama conyugal, ese martirio al que me habían abocado los celos de un marido enloquecido durante tantos días?" (*ICI* 85). In other words, according to Ocampo's exploration of marriage in this story, without conflict, conjugal life is oppressively tedious.

In "El mar," a story that calls to mind Borges's "La intrusa" without the tragic consequences, the sight of a woman in a bathing suit ignites the unspoken discord between a man and his brother-in-law. These two men live together under the same roof and enjoy a strong camaraderie forged by their work together as fisherman by day and thieves by night. While surveying a house one night, they peer through the window and witness the lady of the affluent house trying on her new bathing suit. After she and the rest of the household have retired for the evening, the partners-in-crime steal nothing of value, only the box with the bathing suit that has taken

inexplicable hold of them: "Los dos sentían el perfume que emanaba del traje de baño" (*VO* 158). Once at home, the men ignore the indignation of their wife / sister who is incensed at the absence of valuables among the stolen goods. Obsessed with the bathing suit, they ask her to try it on. Reluctantly, she indulges them, those men who "nunca la llevaban con ellos, que nunca se ocupaban de ella sino para pedirle comida o alguna otra cosa, ¿qué era lo que les pasaba?" (*VO* 160). Subsequently, the woman overcomes her fear of the ocean, and in the process discovers "una irresistible alegría" while the men silently watch her. The days pass and both men rarely leave the house. Darkness comes over the household: "Vivieron en una madeja intrincada de ademanes, palabras, silencios desconocidos" (*VO* 161). One night, after a violent discussion, the woman suddenly leaves with her child. The next day the two men leave the house as usual: "Caminaron uno detrás del otro, uno detrás del otro, sin hablarse" (*VO* 162).

Assuming the uninformed perspective and disconcertedness of the woman, of an external observer, and of ourselves as readers, the narrator never provides explanations for the disharmony or for the deterioration of the atmosphere within the household. The unanswered questions, which invite the search for explanations, point to the ineffable mystery of the desire elicited by the formerly invisible woman. The fact that she lacks a name reinforces the female character's hollow selfhood. After all, she is only known through the desire that she awakens.[21] The incest taboo inspires neither condemnation nor moral judgement in this story as the husband and the woman's brother covet the same woman. Desire, here, transcends the orders of kinship, and the more primitive, instinctual forces that are not acknowledged by society come to light. Unlike the husband's legitimate erotic imagination, the brother's sexualized gaze veers dangerously toward incest, a taboo in Western civilization. As Peter Brooks points out, "the erotic body both animates and

disrupts social order" (6). Similarly, this story posits that a locus of desire is simultaneously legitimate and illicit for it is only when the woman becomes the object of a transgressive gaze by her brother that her own husband rediscovers his wife as an erotic being. Ironically, it is precisely this animation of desire that forces the woman from the house, thus leaving the reader to ponder the significance of her trajectory from invisibility to desired object to exile.

In contrast to the expulsion of the woman in "El mar," the twin brothers in "Nosotros" simply move to another neighborhood to avoid social opprobrium for cohabitating with the woman they both desire. Belonging to the upper-middle class of Buenos Aires, both the narrator and his brother Eduardo live a comfortable, unhurried life. One day, Eduardo seduces Leticia, a girl who has refused the narrator's amorous advances. At first, the narrator substitutes Eduardo during intimate telephone conversations with Leticia. Further on, after Eduardo's marriage to Leticia, the sharing of Leticia becomes more serious. The first time the narrator takes his brother's place in the conjugal bed proves difficult; still, both men grow accustomed to this habit. Leticia's reaction is inexplicably calm when she discovers Eduardo coming in through the door as her supposed husband lies beside her: "Tanta tranquilidad no era humana. [. . .] Pensé que iba a matar a uno de los dos o a delatarnos. Seguramente la vergüenza le impidió hacerlo. [. . .] Hicimos nuestro baúl y con Eduardo nos fuimos de esa casa donde la vida ya nos parecía tediosa, por no decir insoportable" (*F* 81). In contrast to "El mar," here the triangle persists and the two brothers simply move to be able to continue their liaison. Furthermore, the disruption of the incest taboo embraced by both men causes no rift between the brothers.

As the rhetorical formalities and conventional roles that direct the course of desire fall short of the promises of fulfillment, lovers must pursue alternate patterns

of amorous engagement. By failing to provide a more conscious and authentic intimate experience, as Ocampo suggests, the bourgeois paradigm stifles the couple. Although an essential drive of human existence is to seek intimacy, the dynamics of relatedness between lovers inspire the most intense and conflicting emotions. The narrator of "Fidelidad" defines love for his girlfriend: "Amar es sufrir, pero también es la felicidad (o se le parece)" (*DN* 113), while the narrator of "El automóvil" admits, "Vivir es difícil para cualquiera que ama demasiado" (*YASI* 55). Without these experiences, however, order and meaning slip out of life, as the narrator of "El rival" warns: "Nuestra vida es un pandemonium si no atrae al ser amado" (*YASI* 92). Nevertheless, in its lack of concrete reality, love appears extremely fragile. It is precisely because of its intangibility, as Diane Ackerman observes, that love requires "such extravagant gestures" (281). Love does not emerge *ex nihilo*; it must be sustained through a series of daily rituals that signify its presence. Expressing this visible embodiment required by love, one of Ocampo's characters sighs, "¡El amor es tan complicado con todos sus ritos!" (*INV* 20). As if compensating for the elusive presence of love, the narrator of "Y así sucesivamente" suggests that in order to perpetuate the state of love, "se aprende a amar todo aquello que lo rodea" (*YASI* 145). The objects that one learns to appreciate and identify with the lover range from personal articles, like the lover's scarf, shirt, handkerchief, and pillows, to the physical space occupied by the person. Therefore, the object of desire can never be known wholly. Ocampo's most extreme example of the inability to fix the locus of desire can be found in "El fantasma," a story in which the narrator discovers that he is in love not with a person but with the scent of a dead woman, a being he never encountered and who no longer possesses a corporal presence.

The question, therefore, persists: how do we define the object of the verb "to love"? This inquiry is especially disturbing In Ocampo's stories as the artifices of a

woman's beauty--whether eyes, hair, or perfume--are powerful enough to substitute for the beloved. The female subjects appear unstable as their male lovers channel their amorous attentions on one or more attributes of their physical presence. Unable to engage with the totality of the presence of the female other, the male threatens the autonomy of the beloved. In "La peluca," "Mi amada," "Los celosos," and "Epitafio romano," the displacement of the loved one by her fetishized parts and artifices sheds light on the power of the visual, or what Kern describes as "the externality of embodied love" (*The Culture of Love* 68). Furthermore, in the course of desire this displacement always involves violence, even death. In his study of fetishism and sexuality, Jean Baudrillard describes the psychological dynamics of the male bent on pursuing his sexual satisfaction by the fragmentation of the woman:

> This woman is no longer a woman, but a sexual organ, breasts, belly, thighs, voice or face [. . .] . From that point onwards she becomes an 'object', constituting a series whose different terms are ranked by desire, whose real signified is no longer at all the person loved, but the subject himself in his narcissistic subjectivity, collecting-eroticising himself and turning amorous relations into a discourse with himself. (31)

Considered in this light, the male characters in Ocampo's stories cannot apprehend the selfhood of the beloved because they see myopically and engage with only fetishized fragments of the female.

In the stories "La peluca" and "Mi amada," the desired woman's locks surface as an overpowering object of attraction. A cannibalistic woman's wig seduces the narrator's boyfriend in "La peluca," a story in which a German character, Herminia Langster, establishes contact with the female narrator and her boyfriend through an ad in the classified section of the newspaper. The narrator directs her letter to her boyfriend who is by now her husband: "te enamoraste de ella por la peluca.

Admiraste su cabellera postiza, creyendo que era natural pero el día que se le ladeó, . . . o que la puso en la punta del respaldo de la silla, para alisar su verdadero pelo, porque creía estar sola, sin que la espiáramos, y que volvió a colocársela con elegancia, la amaste aún más" (*INV* 101). As their relationship evolves, Herminia's animal instincts become more pronounced: she climbs trees to catch birds and eats them whole; she tends to bite and scratch, especially the narrator's boyfriend. Both the Spanish equivalent "armiño" and the anglicized pronunciation "ermine" of this character's name allude to her bestial nature as well as the fur of the same animal. A few days after Herminia and her lover travel to the province of Tucumán, the narrator soon follows. When the narrator arrives and asks her lover what has happened to Herminia, he answers, 'Me la comí. Si ella era un animal, es natural que yo la comiera' (*INV* 102). Explaining that she is now happily married to her lover, the narrator confides that his insistence on her gaining weight troubles her: "Esta carta es para que sepas que no soy tonta y que no me engañas. Los hombres se comen los unos a los otros [. . .] que lo hagas de un modo físico y real, no te volverá más culpable ante mis ojos, pero sí ante el mundo, que registrará el hecho en los diarios como un nuevo caso de canibalismo" (*INV* 102). The verbs pertaining to the semantic field of erotic language--such as to consume, to masticate, to devour--taken to their ultimate consequence or to the literal level of interpretation, approach cannibalism and thus contain death. As Bataille observes, "el movimiento del amor, llevado al extremo, es un movimiento de muerte" (73). Thus, desire poses a threat to the integrity of the participants as the impulse to possess--an inherently impossible task--overwhelms Ocampo's male lovers.

The loved one's locks, this time natural ones, also substitute the beloved for the narrator of "Mi amada." Her hair, the first physical feature he notices, quickly takes on a life of its own in their relationship. His obsession nearly culminates in a

crime when he gives her a scented amber comb and she refuses to hand him the comb to undo the knots in her hair: "Tomé en mis manos su cabellera que dividí rápidamente en dos, le crucé las dos partes debajo de su mentón y las anudé alrededor de su cuello con fuerza" (*DN* 124). But the narrator doesn't strangle Verónica, "gracias a la suavidad de su pelo, cuyo nudo se deshacía para defenderla" (*DN* 124). The question persists, then, who is the subject of the title "Mi amada"? In one moment he admits, "¿Cómo podría comprender que yo amé (aparentemente) una parte de ella más que a ella misma?" (*DN* 123). As in "La peluca," the fetishistic displacement leads to the possible destruction of the desired other.

In the stories "Los celosos" and "Epitafio romano" the deceptive dimension of desire imbues husbands with intense, overwhelming jealousy that is intimately linked to the desire to know. In his study of eroticism, Brooks explains that sexual jealousy "shows itself to be the very principle of epistemology" as the "desire for possession of another's body [. .] becomes a restless unfulfillable quest for knowledge" (118). A similar yearning to know the unknowable, motivates the husbands of Ocampo's stories. Irma Peinate of "Los celosos," for example, never removes any of the articles, whether contact lenses, fake nails, rouge, or mascara, that contribute to her attractive physical image. Her husband, however, does not suspect that his wife is myopic; her nails are short; her eyelashes are not long and silky but stubby and blonde; her lips are extremely thin; and blue is not the color of her eyes. Unwilling to inform her husband about her chipped tooth, she inadvertently awakens his suspicions as she secretly disappears from time to time for dental work. One day, after following his wife and overhearing the romantic though unwelcomed advances of her dentist, the husband waits in the elevator to smack her with the umbrella. Her newly replaced tooth falls to the ground, as well as her contact lenses, fake eyelashes, hair pieces, and platform shoes. Because he doesn't recognize her, Irma's transformation

convinces the husband that he has followed and attacked the wrong woman. The narrator finishes the story with an ironic observation: "Apresurado se alejó, sintiéndose culpable por haber dudado de la integridad de su mujer" (*CF* 128). Without the artifices composing her physical appearance, the bewildered husband cannot even recognize his dear wife, much less love her. Ocampo, therefore, underscores the difficulties of locating the identity of the loved one since desire depends on a deception; the desired other is never known wholly, but tangentially by fragments that signify her presence.

In "Epitafio romano" we read about Claudio Emilio's punishment of his wife, Flavia, whom he believes has been deceiving him as a courtesan to his political rivals in the temple of Venus. Claudio Emilio obsessively catches glimpses of his wife everywhere: under a hidden face revealing only the blue of a pair of eyes; in a woman's back when he can only see her figure underneath a tunic and brilliant red locks; and in the faces of his numerous lovers that are willing to suffer the dire consequences of simulating Flavia's features. These incomplete presences of Flavia, these fragments of the beloved torment him and flame his suspicions as jealousy corrodes his heart. When he interrogates his wife to find out the truth, Flavia answers:

> ¡Oh, Claudio Emilio! Tus amigos plagian tus versos, pero yo los reconozco. Díme, ¿te agradaría que los confundiera? Porque soy hermosa, y también para que las ames, mis amigas plagian mis túnicas, el color de mi cabello, tan difícil de lograr, las ocho trenzas de mi peinado. ¿No trataron de imitar el color de mis ojos con ungüentos? Para recibir tus besos ¿no perdió casi la vista Cornelia con aquella pomada azul que nunca llegó a ser del color de mis ojos? Durante tres meses, para lograr el brillo alarmante de mi cabellera, ¿no quedaron calvas las sienes de Helena? ¿Adela no murió de fiebre, con esa flor

> que daba a sus labios el color de mis labios? [. . .] Reconoces sobre mi pecho, desde lejos, la rosa artificial y la rosa verdadera; sin equivocarte puedes distinguir el buen poema del malo, ¡pero puedes confundirme en pleno día con mis amigas! (*AI* 8-9)

However, Flavia is eventually discovered in the arms of a lover. To punish his wife's infidelity, the husband arranges for the farce of her accidental death by fire in the couple's villa. Everyone believes she is dead, but she actually survives as a pampered and privileged prisoner in Claudio Emilio's country house along the Tiber River. For this character, then, desire has collapsed all women into this one ideal woman embodied by Flavia. Fixating on the female fragments--eyes, hair, lips--the lover is incapable of grasping the totality of the desired other, except discontinuously.

Unable to control and restrain the female other's physical and ontological wanderings, the male's desire leads to violence against the constitution of the female characters in these stories. While the male devours the desired woman in "La peluca," the male narrator of "Mi amada" tries to strangle his beloved because she denies him her hair, his real *amada*. Although the husbands of "Los celosos" and "Epitafio romano" do not explicitly murder their wives, their behaviors constitute displaced acts of violence against the female other. Rather than fulfillment, the lovers experience the futility of the desire to possess the beloved's body part or parts. Moreover, Ocampo's stories are in tune with the myth of union that Kern describes "as an illusion, a failure, a projection of oneself" (298). Here she suggests that desire will always pose an unbridled and immeasurable excess of instinct that the paradigms of civilized society cannot contain or control in its totality through disciplining. Thus, along with exposing the bankruptcy of the myth of fusion with the beloved and the formulaic expressions of love, Ocampo underscores the need to

look beyond accepted social practices in order to create more authentic and fulfilling experiences of love.

The Child Subject: the Supernatural and the Corruption of Child's Play as Subversive Acts

If the couple can be said to occupy the moral and biological foundation of the bourgeois household, the child's position and role in the family are distinctly separate from that of the adults though this is a relatively new socio-historic development. Glossing Philippe Ariès's *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (1960), a study of the idea of childhood in relation to the rise of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century, Peter Brooks cautions that childhood "is not a separate social, moral, and psychological concept much before the seventeenth century" ("Toward Supreme Fictions" 6). Only when childhood became a "special category distinct from adulthood" did this period of human development achieve recognition as a unique moment of learning and development ("Toward Supreme Fictions" 6-7). Childhood for the bourgeoisie thus became a time for play and for edification. The child was expected to learn values, good manners, and respect for elders to undertake the transition from dependency to responsibility. Silvina Ocampo's portrayals of the bourgeois world also present the child as distinct and other, but in ways that depart from the aforementioned literature on childhood. First, in her stories the child appears as an ambiguous, amorphous being that challenges categorization. By virtue of being an indeterminate self, the child can circumvent the natural order and function as a vessel of unnatural forces. Second, the hierarchy of authority in Argentine bourgeois households situates the adults at the apex and children at the base, with household servants and governesses interspersed in between.[22] In this way, the child may be viewed as the subordinate other. However, because of the child's uncertain subjectivity, this being is capable of

subverting the relations of power even if only momentarily. In Ocampo's hierarchy of adult-child power relations, the child protagonists often usurp authority by means of their necromantic powers and through the deterioration of the ritual of play. In her depictions of the child, Ocampo uses the child's unstable sense of self to deconstruct the binaries child/adult, object/human, primitive/civilized. In doing so, the hardened bourgeois perspective yields to a more fluid conceptualization of the world.[23]

In many of Ocampo's stories, children usurp the adults' authority through their mysterious powers. Significantly, as Sarah Johnston notes, the belief in a child's privileged connection to the supernatural order has a long tradition: "in many cultures around the world, both modern and ancient, children have been credited with a special ability to see spirits, either spontaneously or when induced by a spell" (97). In the stories "La muñeca" and "La Sibila," the child characters' divinatory powers allow them to turn the tables on the adults. For example, after losing her mother at an early age and a living with a series of caretakers, the narrator of "La muñeca" finally ends up in a large, wealthy home with four children and numerous servants. However, one of the maids, señorita Domicia, torments her by washing the little girl's hands in hot water, pulling her hair while combing it, and scrubbing her face until she cries. This mistreatment continues until Domicia finds out about her power to predict the future: "Juró que no volvería a tocarme, promesa que cumplió estrictamente" (*RS* 454).

In another story, a child with necromantic powers--and in this case the title refers directly to the ancient Greek sorceress, sibyl--foils the criminal plans of the narrator. The narrator of "La Sibila," who relates his story from a police precinct, is a small-time burglar who bungles a job because of a mysterious little girl: "era blanca y suave como un ángel de porcelana que una vez vi en el escaparate de una santería"

(*F* 54). While filling the bags with the stolen valuables, the narrator explains, the little girl of the house appears. Displaying no surprise, Aurora informs him that she has been expecting him; a fortuneteller, Clotilde Ifrán, had predicted that a bearded man, "para el cual no había puertas," would take her to heaven. Aurora brings him a basket and they both proceeded to place in it the most valuable objects. But before departing, she reads him his future in the cards as Clotilde Ifrán has revealed hers. He begins to feel as if he were under a spell: "Quería irme, pero un sopor como el que siento después de haber comido, me detuvo. [. . .] Como un borracho me acerqué a la puerta y la entreabrí. Alguien hizo fuego; caí al suelo como un muerto y no supe nada más" (*F* 59). The young enchantress has single-handedly thwarted a thief's criminal intentions.

The male child also possesses mysterious powers, as observed in "Los amigos" and "Magush." In both stories the narrators relate their experiences with their intriguing childhood friends who exercised a privileged control over the adults. In "Los amigos," after a devastating plague and a flood, the narrator's friend Cornelio begins to exhibit the ability to provoke events. This power assures him complete dominion over the townspeople. Everyone believes that he is a saint, but the narrator thinks otherwise: "Oscuramente yo advertía el error en que incurrían todas estas personas mayores" (*F* 166). Moreover, even after two months of wavering between life and death--a life-threatening situation brought about by Cornelio's wish for the narrator's death--the narrator's sudden cure is attributed by the gullible (and fearful) adults to Cornelio's diligent prayers. But the narrator is never able to know for certain: "¿Cornelio era brujo o santo?" (*F* 170). Similarly, Magush, a fourteen-year-old boy, has the ability to foresee the future. But his methods are modern with an urban bent: "Magush lee el destino en el edificio deshabitado que está frente a la carbonería en donde vive. Los seis enormes ventanales y las doce ventanitas del

edificio vecino son como barajas para él" (*RS* 393). There are appropriate times of the day for reading the future: "El momento propicio para realizar el trabajo es la caída del sol, cuando se filtran por las celosías de las ventanas interiores del edificio ciertos rayos oblicuos, que reverberan sobre los vidrios de las ventanas del frente" (*RS* 393). Significantly, Magush's divinatory expertise gains him respect and a stable source of income.

While the supernatural order provides the opportunity for Ocampo's child characters to subvert the privileged position of power occupied by adults, more violent means permit this inversion of the hierarchy of power. Because this hierarchy rests on a genealogy of cultural inheritance, children are the inheritors of their parents' cultural paradigms and belief systems.[24] The social responsibility of the parents burdens them with the duty of passing on to their children the rituals and practices of everyday life. As Sabine Büssing argues, adulthood is "synonymous with 'civilization' (or at least the thin veneer of decency which mercifully covers man's savage nature), whereas childhood means rich, untamed life based on instinct and unspoiled by the ballast of education" (59). To accomplish the edification necessary to become a civilized, refined adult, society must make its imprint through coercive forces such as education, which George Boas characterizes as "the repressive force" (70). It should come as no surprise, then, that scholars of children's literature maintain that among "the oppressed and colonized we can number children" (McGillis 217).

Concerning Ocampo's treatment of the social and cultural legacy of parents to the next generation, Matamoro observes, "Los padres soportan la vida social como una suerte de castigo específico que habrían de descargar, a su momento, sobre el escalón de los indefensos, los hijos malqueridos, los subordinados" (196). A battle wages between the order of adults and the disorder induced by children in

Ocampo's stories. Governesses, teachers, and other supervisors of the education of the young, as many of her other adult characters, fail to reach exemplary moral stature. The governess of "El diario de Porfiria Bernal," for example, carries on an incestuous affair with her pupil's adolescent brother. Frequently interrupted by the adolescent boy who would ride by her pupils' windows in the afternoons, the governess of "El caballo muerto" is perversely satisfied when she learns of the death of the boy's horse. Ocampo's most violent example of the tug-of-war between educators and children can be found in the story "Cielo de claraboyas" in which she utilizes a striking technique of synecdochic reference to characterize the protagonists whose names, gender, and position in the household are never stated. The governess is described as wearing "una pollera disfrazada de tía, como diablo negro con los pies embotinados de institutriz perversa" and having a "voz de cejas fruncidas y de pelo de alambre" (*VO* 11). The little girl is identified only by "los pies desnudos de Celestina en camisón, saltando con un caramelo guardado en la boca" (*VO* 11). The events are told exclusively through the limited perspective of a skylight that gives the narrator a partial view of the life of the people upstairs. Requiring the reader to piece together the fragments of the images described by the narrator intensifies the shocking gruesomeness of the child's death. The first-person narrator relates the accidental killing of a child who laughs at the humiliating spectacle of her governess's fall. Although the exact mechanics of the death are never explicitly described, the reader concludes that the governess has played an active role in this tragedy. In stories such as these, Ocampo consistently suggests that an unfathomable distance separates children from their adult educators.

Between adults and children in Ocampo's work, violence is multidirectional and children are perpetrators as often as they are victims. These acts of violence directed towards the adults often evolve from a child's seemingly innocent games.[25]

Games are serious ceremonies in Ocampo's fiction. As one narrator recalls a precocious childhood friend and their games, she confesses: "No recuerdo muy bien en qué consistían esos juegos, porque eran tan complicados que sólo un niño podría entenderlos" (*DN* 94). An apparently innocuous game of target practice by an eight-year-old boy turns into the murder of his grandfather in "El árbol grabado," while a child's play with matches in "Voz en el teléfono" culminates in the deaths of his mother and her friends. In "El vendedor de estatuas," the mischievous, cheerful games of a child climax in the death-by-suffocation of a sculptor. In Ocampo's depictions of middle- to upper-class childhood, the space that is created through play poses tragic consequences for the adults.

In "El árbol grabado," a birthday party sours when, at the narrator's suggestion, the guest of honor's grandson hides a nest of ants inside one of the desserts. When the unlucky guest takes a bite, Don Locadio decides that he must punish his grandson in public view. Don Locadio places Clorindo on the main table, removes his pants, and whips him. As soon as Clorindo promises never to repeat the deed, he runs to the table, grabs a knife, and plunges it in Don Locadio's heart. The last paragraph reveals a premeditation that substitutes the innocence and mirth associated with children's games with intentional malice and perverse satisfaction: "Clorindo se divertía [. . .] con juegos de su invención; el predilecto había sido aquel juego del corazón grabado por él mismo, en los troncos de los árboles, al que le clavaba un cuchillo, probando su puntería, que era bastante buena. Los árboles del pueblo, desde hace tiempo, llevaban todos la marca de estos juegos" (*INV* 149). Ironically, the grandfather, who disciplines his grandson with violence, suffers an even greater violence than the fate he has inflicted. The humiliation and physical punishment applied by the grandfather as a disciplinary measure, according to Matamoro, functions as a form of repression: "Gran cantidad de ítems de conducta

en los niños terribles pueden registrarse en las narraciones de Silvina Ocampo, como respuesta a este frente cerradamente represivo de padres y educadores" (197).

An act of retribution against the adults also interrupts a festive atmosphere in "Voz en el teléfono." The story takes the form of a telephone conversation, and though the text contains only the narrator's comments, the reader can infer the interlocutor's questions and comments by the narrator's responses. After the narrator refuses his girlfriend's invitation to her nephew's birthday party, he confesses the tragedy that he precipitated during a childhood birthday party. Significantly, the narrator prefaces his story by passing inventory of the extravagant wealth in his family's mansion. Then he proceeds with his gruesome story. Having hidden in a room in which the ladies of the party have secretly convened, the mischievous boy overhears conversations concerning trips, parties, fashion, and spiteful gossip about who didn't attend the party. Since the space occupied by the adult women excludes the child, especially a male child, the boy treads on forbidden ground as his mother and her friends perversely measure their bust, waist, and hips to compare measurements. When his mother answers a phone call, the ladies' suspicious behavior sparks the boy's interest:

> Olvidé que estaba escondido y me puse de pie para ver mejor el entusiasmo [causado por la llamada] . . . Mi madre al verme cambió de voz y de rostro: como frente al espejo se alisó el pelo y se acomodó las medias; apagó con ahinco el cigarrillo en el cenicero, retorciéndolo dos o tres veces. Me tomó de la mano y yo, aprovechando su turbación, robé los fósforos largos y lujosos que estaban sobre la mesa, junto a los vasos de whisky. Salimos del cuarto [. . .] (*F* 136)

As in the story "El diario de Porfiria Bernal," in which the reader can perceive Porfiria's suspicion of her mother's and governess's illicit behavior, we can conclude that the narrator's mother feels morally exposed by the child witness.

Offended by the male child--who for reasons of age and gender has violated a prohibited space--the female adults try to reinstate the hierarchy of authority by expelling the trespasser. However, the ease by which the child takes recourse to extreme measures demonstrate to the adults the precarious nature of their stature. According to the narrator of "Voz en el teléfono," he rounds up some of his friends to prepare the scene: "Yo fuí el que cerré la puerta con llave, yo fuí el que saqué la llave y la guardé en el bolsillo" (*F* 138). Assuring that the women are locked in, the children gather paper and chimney logs to prepare the scene of the fire. As the narrator winds down his story, he expresses no remorse for his victims, only the satisfaction of the survival of some articles of value: "El mueble chino se salvó del incendio, felizmente. Algunas figuritas se estropearon: una de una señora que llevaba un niño en los brazos y que se asemejaba un poco a mi madre y a mí" (*F* 138). The displacement of the filial relationship to the figure resembling him in his mother's arms conveys the lack of empathetic connection between the narrator and his mother. A violent or cruel child, therefore, disturbs the power strictures as a lower-status individual momentarily usurps power not reserved for him.

At times, a child's violence is incited by an adult's ambiguous sexual nature. In the story "El vendedor de estatuas," Octaviano Crivellini earns his livelihood by copying sculptures, as his business sign indicates, "de jardines europeos, de cementerios y de salones" (*VO* 125). The seven-year-old boy, Tirso, secretly kicks and torments the sculptor who has been reduced to "un hombre devorado de angustias [. . .] desganado y triste" (*VO* 126). Octaviano has the habit of kissing his sculptures goodnight, a habit that one night Tirso discovers with a thunderous

humiliating laugh. Writing in general about the disconcerting effect of a child's laughter, Reinhard Kuhn interprets it as a harbinger of peril: "like the siren's song, this laughter, too, is dangerous" (225). With great distress, Octaviano watches as the snickering Tirso defaces his statues, strokes, and even mounts them. The desperate man finds refuge from the child's taunting only by hiding in a cabinet in his workshop. But suddenly, one night, "[i]ba a salirse del armario cuando oyó dar a la llave dos vueltas que lo encerraban" (*VO* 130). Considering the limited air left in the cabinet, the sculptor accepts his fate. Only death liberates Octaviano from Tirso's harassment.

There is a troubling aspect concerning Octaviano's ambiguous identity that merits attention. The opening lines of the story suggest a character with obscure motivations: "Para el vendedor de estatuas aún el beso de un chico era una travesura peligrosa; les tenía el mismo miedo que se les tiene a los payasos y a las mascaritas" (*VO* 125). When this characterization is read in the context of Octaviano's weak character, his tenderness towards his sculptures, and his submission to his young torturer, the suggestion of a pederastic personality emerges. Moreover, it is important to consider Octaviano's sensitive personality and fear of clowns and masks. Clowns, the embodiment of chaos, masters of the unpredictable, represent disorder while masks hide and deceive as they partially reveal a reality. Both of these items, which connote ambiguity and unpredictability, cause unspeakable anxiety for the Octaviano. Also, the reader cannot escape the insistence on his effeminate nature: "Sin duda lo había visto repartir besos con un movimiento habitual de limpieza sobre las cabezas de yeso que se movían en la noche" (*VO* 127); and upon being discovered by Tirso, he avoids caressing his statues for fear of the humiliating gaze of the boy. The overactive boy, therefore, is a source of

simultaneous fear and attraction for the man who finally succumbs to his young victimizer.

If adulthood, as Büssing argues, is "synonymous with 'civilization,'" and childhood with the primitive, "savage nature," then the binaries adult / child, civilized / primitive, and victimizer / victim do not hold under Ocampo's magnifying lens. Traditionally, children have been the forced recipients of that which society refers to as education. In the model of the adult, the child learns, willingly or not, mannerisms, social conventions, proper language, and ideological frameworks that foster his development into a supposedly more refined, complex being that will ascend the ranks to participate in civilized society. In Ocampo's universe, however, while the child subject appears as the other in terms of the power struggle with adults, the child also emerges as an ambiguous being with the capability of circumventing empirical reality through supernatural powers. In addition, the adult in Ocampo's work often appears violent and abusive; therefore, if the adults' or the teachers' behavior is reprehensible and lacking in moral integrity, then the children cannot be blamed for behaviors they simply imitate.

Conclusion

The general agreement among critics is that Silvina Ocampo tends to depict characters typical of the Argentinean middle and upper classes. Nevertheless, realist portrayals of the bourgeoisie are not encountered here. The bourgeois subject aligned with civilization presupposes a stable, discrete identity, while the barbaric other connotes a destabilized, irrational self. In Ocampo's stories, however, these semantic fields of the two poles of civilization and barbarism intersect. In this study of the subject in Ocampo's work, I have proposed the general categories of the unstable self, the bored subject, the sexual subject, and the child subject. Instead of denoting the firmly grounded-self, the veneer of gentility and pretentiousness in these

stories masks a precarious subject on the verge of dissolution, division, metamorphosis, or insanity. Within the space of the home, which usually connotes a comfortable order of life assured by daily rituals and the invaluable presence of objects--those supposedly concrete, stable fragments of reality--the self is able to transcend, consciously or unconsciously, the inertia and boundaries of the bourgeois environment through infirmity, metamorphosis, and death. Moreover, in deviating from a portrayal of the subject as a rational, unitary being, Ocampo presents as deficient the social paradigms, myths, and formulaic language that determine the course of physical and spiritual engagement between men and women who must transcend the conventions that contain the exploration and expansion of the self. Furthermore, the child subject, in its apparent victimhood under allegedly civilized adults, can circumvent the relations of power through the supernatural and the corruption of the ritual of play. The problematized self, as rendered by Ocampo, thus points to the need for alternative forms of subjectivity.

The nature of the subject continues as the focal point in the next chapter in which I move from an exploration of character as subject undertaken in this chapter to an investigation of the author. From the perspective of postmodern theories, I examine the strategies of representation involved in the self-figuration authorial self in Ocampo's literary production. Rather than accepting the author as a given, self-evident being that is firmly grounded, we need to investigate the authorial self as a product of language that is perpetually coming into being. With this objective in mind, I examine Ocampo's audacious infusion of her work with autobiographical details and the startling correspondences among her interviews, literary work, and personal letters. Not only do narrator and character enunciations seem to mimic the author's voice, but her short stories also function as a laboratory for obsessively investigated themes that point to fictive metaphors that stand as the sign of the

author in Ocampo's narrative work. Through the development of the observed metaphors, this Argentine writer weaves an introspective work investigating, while predicating in this process, the invention of the authorial self, the "I".

Notes

[1] Naturalism in Argentina produced such ideologically laced novels as *Irresponsable* (1889) by Manuel T. Podestá, *En la sangre* (1887) by Eugenio Cambaceres, *Libro extraño* (1894) by Francisco Sicardi, and *¿Inocentes o culpables?* (1884) by Antonio Algerich. A doctor by profession, like so many other writers at the end of the century, Algerich went so far as to argue that, as a genre, the novel represents a nationalist project, the "fruto de verdadero patriotismo" (quoted in Nouzeilles 244). Gabriela Nouzeilles sees these novels as participating in a surveillance system that shaped the bodies of the state: "[estas novelas] no sólo reflejaron las obsesiones de la medicina social, sino que participaron directamente, a través de un conjunto de técnicas representacionales, de la labor policial ejercida por las instancias institucionales del poder estatal. El cruce discursivo venía respaldado por una doble legitimación, la del prestigio del naturalismo francés, por un lado, y por el otro, la de la ciencia misma, puesto que muchos de los escritores naturalistas argentinos no sólo estudiaron y/o ejercieron la profesión médica sino que también ocuparon, como Podestá y Sicardi, puestos directivos en dependencias de salud pública, en hospitales y asilos mentales" (242).

[2] Their faith firmly anchored in the virtues of phrenology, the psychiatrists Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau, his student, believed that facial and cranial features held the key to deciphering a person's moral constitution. With the aid of meticulous charts that linked specific physical traits with their psychological aberration, science could predict, and therefore, identify and contain the irrational, criminal elements of society. Nordau claimed, "Degeneracy betrays itself among men in physical characteristics" (16-17). These physical traits included the unequal development of the two halves of the face; the size, position, and shape of the eyes

and external ear; and the shape and length of the fingers. Overwhelmingly laden with significance, no physical feature passed unnoticed.

[3] See also María Birgitta Clark, Sylvia Molloy, and Blas Matamoro.

[4] "The Birth-mark" concerns a scientist's obsession with his new bride's tiny physical defect that, according to the husband, is the only imperfection on his bride's body. His breathtakingly beautiful wife, Georgiana, has a mole-like birthmark in the shape of a hand in the center of her left cheek. Obsessed with the removal of the birthmark, the husband is convinced that this imperfection must be indicative of a moral flaw in the otherwise angelic woman that he married; their conjugal life becomes unbearable. Confident in his numerous scientific successes, he invents a concoction that should remedy their anxieties. Indeed, the birthmark does begin to disappear, but the wife dies upon its complete erasure. Blinded by his scientific successes and faith in knowledge, the scientist fails to contemplate the possibility that his wife's soul was linked to the birthmark.

[5] In *Poetics of Space* (1964), Gaston Bachelard explores Jung's spatial metaphor for the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, which Bachelard illustrates with the duality attic / cellar: "it [the cellar] is first and foremost the dark *entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces" (18). To Jung, the image of the cellar communicates the fears concealed in the unconscious, in the subterranean hidden spaces where light / reason cannot penetrate, where the dark forces of the psyche swirl.

[6] The film adaptation of Ocampo's story premiered in 1997 and figured among the twenty finalists of Quincena de los Realizadores del Festival de Cannes of 1997. Debilitated by her disease, María Luisa Bemberg, the original director, offered the project to Alejandro Maci. See Ricardo García Oliveri's article, "La película de cajas chinas."

[7] Ocampo responds to Ulla's comments on her lack of attention to grammar and subject pronouns: "Julio Cortázar cambia de sujeto sin que uno lo sepa, entonces obliga al lector a ser más atento, cosa que no le gusta a veces al lector, porque al lector le gusta a veces leer distraídamente. Hay muchas personas a las que les gusta muchísimo lo que yo he escrito, pero si indago un poquito me doy cuenta de que mis cuentos los han entendido a medias, porque los han leído distraídos, y yo actualmente, tengo una manera de escribir que no hace muy claras las cosas ¿no? Por incorreciones gramaticales no, sino porque no me gusta la explicación. Me parece que hay que dejarse llevar por las frases lindas y tratar de conseguirlas, pero no estar explicando todo el tiempo, porque un cuento se transforma en otra cosa. No hay que insistir con las explicaciones" (*Encuentros* 123-24).

[8] In a 1983 interview conducted by María Esther Gilio, Ocampo expressed admiration for the working class: 'Yo tenía mucho más respeto por las personas que en la casa hacían esos trabajos [los quehaceres] que por las otras. Los observaba mucho [. . .] y los envidiaba cuando era chica' (7).

[9] There is an almost natural continuity between a house and its inhabitants. Bachelard calls "organic habits" the ways in which our bodies have incorporated features of our childhood homes by remembering how to climb a stairway or how to push a particular creaky door, unconsciously using the specific force required for its weight: "The feel of the tiniest latch has remained in our hands" (15). This tactile memory persists as a component of ourselves.

[10] For example, Guy de Maupassant's story, "Who Knows?" subtly caricatures the nineteenth-century realist faith in the author's power to describe and interpret reality. As the story begins, De Maupassant's narrator praises the virtues of his home: "My house [. . .] had become a world in which I pursued a solitary yet

active existence, surrounded by physical things-furniture, familiar knickknacks-which in my eyes had all the warmth and benevolence of human faces" (310). But this comfortable, middle-class world crumbles when his furniture literally walks away and returns a few days later. Of course, the event shatters the narrator's nervous constitution as things appear to have a will of their own, an unsuspected spirit.

[11] Jeremy Tambling offers a succinct yet enlightening discussion of the development of the bourgeois family in relation to the emerging value of the "sanctity of their property" in fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (148).

[12] Along the same lines, Deborah Laylock demonstrates that identity and personality, and their implications for gender and social categories; came under scrutiny during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England when the fashion industry, intimately tied to credit, first emerged as an important component of the economy. But the ability to change one's image and to deceive by one's attire was condemned since it threatened the bases of a stable identity or personality (127). This fear, Laylock argues, launched between 1337 and 1604 a body of legislation that ruled "which apparel was deemed most suitable for the preservation of a rigid social hierarchy, for the effective distinguishing between the sexes, and for the mercantalist protection of native textile industries" (129).

[13] In her literary history of boredom in literature, philosophy, and religion, Patricia M. Spacks states that an acute sense of boredom has endowed characters with a veneer of aristocracy. Perceived as the privilege of the upper classes in nineteenth-century European and American literatures, only the difficult-to-please were deserving of "the luxury of aloofness" (194).

[14] One need only to call to mind "Isla al mediodía," "Carta a una señorita en París," and "Axolotl."

[15] The conclusion of "Amada en el amado" has evoked different interpretations. Never mentioning the fact that both characters wake up at the end of this final dream, critics conclude that the woman is absorbed at the end by the husband's dream. (See Klingenberg, *Fantasies of the Feminine* 51-52.) The author of the story herself states: "Pero a ella le va mal, se volatiliza. A él le va mal, por perderla" (*Encuentros* 144). In her assessment Ocampo does not consider the ending of the story in which the husband and wife wake up from their dream: "Bruscamente despertaron. El volvió a soñar a lo largo de la vida y ella a sacar objetos de sus sueños. Pero la mayor parte de las veces no le sirvieron de nada pues son todos objetos de poca importancia; a veces ni siquiera los mira. Los atesora en su mesa de luz. Rara vez, por suerte, le sirven para sufrir transformaciones, como sucedió con el filtro: el término sufrir está bien elegido pues en toda transformación hay sufrimiento. A veces tienen miedo de no volver a su estado anterior -al hogar, a la vida habitual- y volatizarse. ¿Pero acaso la vida no es esencialmente peligrosa para los que se aman?" (*RS* 124).

[16] Addressing the Marquis de Sade's body of work, Georges Bataille evaluates the momentum of desire toward death: "Sade-lo que quiso decir-suele horrorizar a esos mismos que afectan admirarlo y que no han reconocido por ellos mismos este hecho angustioso: que el movimiento del amor, llevado al extremo, es un movimiento de muerte" (73).

[17] The twenty-eight-line narrative poem "La alfombra voladora" presents in a succinct style the fragile nature of the amorous state as two lovers who "[e]namorados caminaban sobre una alfombra de pétalos" (*CF* 101). Ocampo exemplifies the illusory dimension of love when the two lovers, who have deviated slightly from harmonious bliss as they disagree on color preferences, ask:

"¿Estaremos soñando?" (*CF* 101). Upon articulation of this question, the amorous spell is broken, "No volvieron a verse" (*CF* 101).

[18] See Kern for a discussion of the relationship between the open-endings that refuse to resolve the situations played out in Modernist novels and their denial of marriage as the supreme and final objective of love (*The Culture of Love* 354 - 372).

[19] Interestingly, the subtle complexities of the narrator of "La casa de azúcar" have produced irreconcilable readings. Marjorie Agosín believes that the supernatural event did transpire: "Poco a poco al final de la narración descubrimos que la dulce Cristina se transforma en otra mujer, [. . .] en una antigua cantante de ópera llamada Violeta que vivía en esa aparentemente dulce y apacible casita de azúcar" (630). Similarly, Lucia Fox Lockert affirms that "little by little she [Cristina] is replaced by a 'stranger'" (224). But Cynthia Duncan provides a more effective reading in her article "Double or Nothing?: The Fantastic Element in Silvina Ocampo's 'La casa de azúcar.'" Duncan astutely analyzes the unreliable narrator's contradictions, secret motivations, and unfulfilled desires.

[20] Ocampo expressed in her conversations with Ulla her distrust of the home: "La casa puede ser muy destructiva" (*Encuentros* 62).

[21] Klingenberg provides a fruitful reading of the story "El mar" in the context of Jacque Lacan's mirror stage (*Fantasies of the Femenine* 221-23).

[22] In fact, Alejandra Pizarnik considers these servants and governesses as the intermediaries between adults and children, a status that, in many instances, gives way to destructive "triángulos equívocos" in Ocampo's work (93).

[23] For Ocampo, even the physical nature of the child displays an unstable subjectivity. For example, the notion of a chronological development from a child to adult deviates from normal physiology in Ocampo's child characters. The natural movement of life adds height and weight to a child's frame, but this physical

development proceeds in strange ways in the stories "Icera," "Del color de los vidrios," and "Ulises." In the first story, to carry out her intention never to grow up, Icera successfully stunts her growth for forty years by wearing doll clothing and sleeping in a doll box. As with Icera's bizarre physical development, the narrator of "Del color de los vidrios" worries endlessly about the problems caused by his precocious senility. Though still a child, his body atrophies at a faster rate than the normal aging process, a condition that causes people to treat him like an adult and leads to serious misunderstandings and social condemnation. Similarly, the six-year-old boy of "Ulises" suffers the physiology of old age, "la cara cubierta de arrugas [. . .] dos o tres canas, los ojos hinchados, dos muelas postizas y anteojos para leer" (*RS* 205). In her conversations with Ulla, Ocampo confessed a fascination with the physical development of infants: "Como dijo Gide [. . .] nacemos cubiertos de arrugas y a medida que vamos viviendo esas arrugas desaparecen. Yo agrego que después aparecen esas arrugas. Nacemos viejísimos, viejísimos. Me impresionan mucho los recién nacidos, lo viejos que son. Y después son como las flores que se ponen en agua; se van abriendo, se van alisando, se van embelleciendo" (*Encuentros* 118).

[24] Mark Szuchman has undertaken an impressive study of the family and social order in the city of Buenos Aires of the first half of the nineteenth century. In the chapter "Children, Politics, and Education," he prefaces this section with an observation concerning the oversight of children in historical studies of Latin America: "The study of childhood in Latin America has not been the province of historians. And yet the transfer of values to children is one of the clearest expressions of a society's historical processes and cultural norms: praise and admonitions frame the boundaries of acceptable public behavior for citizenry and formulate limits on private activities. This is true of modern societies to the extent

that the transfer of values is assumed to be part of a youngster's education, as determined by the state; in turn, the educability of youth is itself a principle of action held by political elites that distinguishes modern Western societies from their medieval predecessors" (133).

[25] Borges finds disturbing Ocampo's "étrange amour pour une certaine cruauté innocente ou oblique"; yet he dispels any moral censure of her by assuring readers that this tendency is simply the attraction that evil inspires in "une âme noble" (*Fait divers de la Terre et du Ciel* 2).

Chapter Three

Silvina Ocampo's Authorial Self-Figuration: Fictive Metaphors and Intrusive Narration

Silvina Ocampo, writer, translator, playwright, painter, and poet, pursued her artistic endeavors at the periphery of the cultural and intellectual whirlwind created by *Sur*. Often pictured in the background peering through dark, cat-eye frames, Ocampo wrote in the shadows of her dynamic and very public sister, Victoria, her husband, Adolfo Bioy Casares, and her friend, Jorge Luis Borges. Since Silvina Ocampo left no autobiography and only a few personal letters in the public domain, we can retrieve pertinent biographical information only from the few interviews she granted, Victoria's multivolume *Autobiografía*, Bioy Casares's numerous references to her in interviews, personal letters, and autobiographical texts, and lastly, from occasional references to her by literary friends and acquaintances.[1] What emerges from the scant autobiographical material, whether in the form of introspective works of fiction, excerpts from interviews, or personal letters, is a telling absence. The remaining fragments emanating from this absence, persist in reference to some other, to the totality of a more complete being. In light of this absent original, which can only be imagined through its surviving pieces, we look for signs of the author.

In the search for indices of authorial self-figuration, it is important to note that the empirical individual, the person who was born in 1913 and died in 1993, the corporeal body possessing a consciousness identifying itself as Silvina Ocampo, was only extant within the inaccessible, ephemeral moments of her daily existence. This fact, however, recedes into the background as forms of memory--such as texts, interviews, photographs, and personal accounts--emerge as "unstable places," those signs that exceed, survive, and ultimately replace the empirical individual.[2] While

assessing the process of replacement, we must keep in mind that the basis of a trope, Jens Brockmeier explains, is the "interplay of linguistic substitutes" as the means by which the constituents of symbols, allegories, metonymies, and metaphors are coupled (182). Metaphors stand as discursive tools to extend our linguistic capabilities in the understanding, processing, and communication of the nature of human experience. Indeed, the simple act of self-affirmation "I am" already involves a metaphor, since rendering the "I" to language involves a displacement of the self, not the self itself, but a linguistic substitution for the self. This articulation of consciousness, Ted Cohen argues, "is an achievement in metaphor" (241).

In the course of the transmutation of experience into objects of consciousness through language, we apprehend the operations by which we engage with and organize the world. Along with the contemporary reevaluation of the subject and of its strategies in the formulation of selfhood, autobiography as a genre has now come under scrutiny. In the last four decades we have observed the emergence of tendencies that transgress the traditional limits of autobiography and fiction.[3] For example, in his study of the changing conceptualization of the subject in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Paul Jay nimbly discusses the self-reflexive dimension of such diverse works as Freidrich Nietzsche's philosophical texts, William Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1850), and James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Despite their different literary preferences and idiosyncrasies, these authors lay out the discrepancy between the self created through and projected in language and the I that writes. As Jay argues, "the textual 'I' is always partly a fictive Other" (116). Thus what remains within the confines of language on the written page is the self depicted through poetic self-creation. Any rendering in language occupies an ontological dimension separate from the realm of experiential reality. Once the self is transformed into language, the corporeal, biological being,

the originator and master of his text, must disappear, in other words die, in light of the linguistic life of the text. "As soon as a fact is narrated," Roland Barthes explains, "the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, [and] writing begins" ("The Death of the Author" 142). Here, then, we need to investigate the author as "écriture," as the product of "the interplay of signs," according to Michel Foucault (205-206). In lieu of the physical, bodily presence of the dead author, Foucault argues, we should examine the body or work that persists beyond the physical presence of the author. The author, therefore, survives through a textualized existence.

In Ocampo's literary production, the author's textualized life persists through a self-reflexive work that posits fictive metaphors in the articulation and the consequent display of the I as author. The concept of "fictive metaphor" as a discursive representational strategy has been proposed by William Spengemann in *Forms of the Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (1980), an engaging investigation of the historical reinterpretations undergone by this mode of literature.[4] Among the fictive metaphors yielded by Spengemann's analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example, are the chamber, the treasure, and the cavern as significant tropes illustrating the autobiographical problem that informed Hawthorne's entire career: the awareness of the moral struggle between his hidden, true, yet elusive self, and the Hawthorne occupying the public sphere.

In this vein, this chapter illuminates the literary forms assumed by consciousness of self in Ocampo's work. Her short stories serve as laboratory for investigating recurrent themes: the nature of the subject; spatial and temporal relationships constituting empirical reality; the properties of artistic creation; the deathbed as the moment of heightened perception; and the essence of the aesthetic experience in music, in the plastic arts, and, of course, in literature. The last chapter

investigated the ways in which Ocampo manipulated character and narrative to debunk rational concepts of the coherent, unitary self. In demonstrating the ways in which fictive metaphors reveal and refract a similarly destabilized authorial self, this chapter develops further this destabilization by moving from characters and narrative to the written text. Four salient fictive metaphors of self in her work include gestation, the elusive or lost masterpiece, mirrors, and the photograph. Through the development of these metaphors, Ocampo achieves a poetic self-invention that privileges a subjectivity lacking a fixed space, thus providing a seemingly infinite field for the exploration of the self and the formulation of an array of self-enactments. Along with examining the role of the fictive metaphors, this chapter will also explore the role of the intrusive narrator in Ocampo's authorial self-figuration. Ocampo's particular deployment of such narrative strategies has paradoxical ramifications for an understanding of the author and by extension, identity itself, as she simultaneously conceals and reveals a writerly self through obfuscation, replication, and refraction across stories, interviews, and genres. Through an apparent masking of the authorial voice with narrator and character enunciations, Ocampo's narrative strategies assert the authorial presence while reminding the reader of her participation in the text and challenging traditional notions governing fiction and reality.

Gestation

More than any of the fictive metaphors in Ocampo's work, gestation illustrates the necessity of self-construction in the emergence of a sense of self. The creation of a self connotes gestation, that is, the embryonic development of a self, as Ocampo suggested in her response to Danubio Torres Fierro's epistolary inquiry concerning the reasons she wrote: "escribo para vivir en otro mundo dentro de otros seres" (*Plural* 59). As her words illustrate, Ocampo observed a vital connection

similar to the umbilical chord linking a writer to her literary work. This being in embryonic growth represents the author while characters assume the role of the vessels of gestation. Furthermore, her response to Torres Fierro bears a striking resemblance to the words of the narrator in the story "La continuación" which was published in 1959, sixteen years before the interview. Addressing a letter (the story itself) to her unfaithful lover, the narrator--coincidentally a woman and a writer--describes how she has found refuge from his infidelities by immersing herself in the invention of characters.[5] Since the scenes and characters of her narrative worlds reflect the situations she is living, she assures her lover that the fictitious worlds will compensate for the dissatisfaction with her reality. Unable to find fulfillment within the circumstances of her life, the narrator seeks meaning and a sense of agency in her fictional worlds: "Yo vivía dentro de mi personaje, como un niño dentro de su madre: me alimentaba de él. Créeme, me importaba menos de mí que de él" (*RS* 380). Furthermore, the structure of this story connotes images of enclosure, of an interior, closed space, similar to that of a womb, as Klingenberg's description of "La continuación" demonstrates: "The fictional character's story creates an inner plot, a story-within-a story [. . .] whose intimate connections to the outer plot [. . .] demonstrate the ways in which the writer modifies reality for the sake of fiction" (*Fantasies* 175).

Layers of interpretation further unfurl when the reader considers the biographical detail of Silvina Ocampo's childless and tumultuous marriage. In 1954 Silvina adopted her only daughter, Martha, the child of one of Bioy Casares's numerous extramarital affairs. As in the case of the narrator of "La continuación," Ocampo embraced writing as a life-saving form of redemption in the face of emotional tribulations. "Y cuando nos falta el amor," Ocampo confided to Ulla, "y escribimos, eso nos salva" (*Encuentros* 118). In light of the complex and

unsatisfactory development of love, Ocampo paints this experience as one of lack, of unfulfilled desire. "Eso es el amor," she explains, "el eco. Es el poder de encerrar en algo, algo precioso. Es el poder de poder vivir dentro de un deseo que nunca parece realizarse, inagotable" (*Encuentros* 145). In developing the metaphor of gestation as she does, the generation of life through literary creation holds resounding significance when juxtaposed with this writer's biological sterility and difficult amorous experience.

The roles in the generative dynamic between the writer and her characters can also be reversed. When Ocampo discussed with Ulla the intrinsic connection between the story-maker and the story, she relied on a biological metaphor to explain that "vos lo tenés [el cuento] dentro tuyo y te parece que ya existe" (*Encuentros* 112). Continuing with this biological language, Ocampo remarked, "La intimidad de un cuento es prenatal" (*Encuentros* 33). Along the same lines, the narrator of "La pluma mágica," also a writer, refers to the texts that he has unsuccessfully submitted for publication as "engendros" (*INV* 152). Also, the external narrator of "Del color de los vidrios" comments that "el cuento [. . .] en la memoria se va modificando hasta llegar a ser el mejor cuento del mundo" (*CF* 65). Here Ocampo posits the writer as the temporary host-body for what is germinating and what will ultimately become a separate, independent entity in the form of a text. We observe, then, parallel processes: as the literary text takes on identifiable contours the author achieves self-invention and constitution.

Investigating the intimate connection between the literary object and its creator, Roman Ingarden has written that the "genesis of the literary work [. . .] may be conditioned by the author's determinate experiences" and that its structure and properties stem from the "psychic qualities of the author, his talent, and the type of his 'world ideas' and his feelings" (22). The work, therefore, embodies features of its

creator's "total personality" (22). Aware of this procreative vinculum, Ocampo expressed the link between life and writing in a most dramatic way: "¡por qué escribo! [. . .] se me ocurre contestar para no morir" (Torres Fierro 59). As she argued in one of her last interviews conducted by María Esther Gilio, life emanates from the pages of her texts: "La verdadera vida pasa por lo que escribo [. . .] . Y cuando escribo siento que la vida se escapa, que no tiene realidad" (Gilio 6). When Gilio asked Ocampo what her life would have been without writing, she responded dramatically, "Un suicidio" (6). Moreover, in a paraphrase of Gustave Flaubert's famous "Madame Bovary, C'est moi," Ocampo readily agreed with Gilio's observation that all her female characters are versions of herself (7). As Ocampo textualizes herself through her writing and spoken enunciations, she performs a self-masking as well as a self-creation. The fictive metaphor of gestation connotes both the birth of the authorial self and a deferral of the fixing of the self. By conflating parts of her life story with her short stories, Ocampo comes into view while simultaneously eluding her readers.

In a more conspicuous example of the textualized self, the beginning of the story "La nave" reiterates a conversation between Ulla and Ocampo in which she recalled: "Una vez me asomé a la ventana, vi un barco enorme a través de los vidrios" (*Encuentros* 69). Six years after this conversation, the narrator of "La nave" begins her story: "Para dormir siempre imaginaba una nave, que terminaba por volverse real. [. . .] La puedo vislumbrar a través de la ventana de mi cuarto" (*CF* 199). As author and character enunciations coincide, Ocampo achieves a fluid image of self, not fixed in a particular time or space. Though we grasp only fragments of a persona, rather than the totality of an authorial self, the self-masking exercised by the author actualizes signs of an imminent presence, a self that is coming into being, a self that is perhaps most alive in the gestating space.

The Elusive or Lost Masterpiece

This emphasis on prolonged gestation can be seen from another angle in the fictive metaphor of the elusive or lost masterpiece that characterizes Ocampo's work as well as her life. Her insistence on an unstable, wandering selfhood constitutes an ongoing process with no specific beginning or end, a perpetual shaping of the work of art and the authorial self, both in search of form that will assert their being. On the relationship between a work of art and the artist, Martin Heidegger illuminates their intimate, integral bond: "The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist" (17). One cannot exist without the other. Furthermore, despite extensive inquiries into the properties of the work of art, the "essence of an object's identity" and its exact delimitations continue to elude precise definition (Ingarden 354). Though philosophers and aestheticians agree that there is a concrete, material dimension to a work of art, "[it] is something else over and above the thingly element" (Heidegger 19). Because of its undefined, ambiguous nature, the elusive masterpiece promises a seemingly infinite potentiality in its inexistent status. An oeuvre that will represent the culmination of a life's work and accomplishments seems imminent and feasible in the openness of the future. In the quest for an aesthetic form that will ultimately embody the artist's creative vision and technical mastery, Ocampo's short stories explore the intimate connection between this artistic pursuit and the forging of the self. Curiously, unable to achieve the masterpiece she seeks, Ocampo cites her shortcomings in painting as the reason for abandoning this art form and concentrating on writing: "Me despedí un buen día de la pintura y de sus desencantos porque nunca llegué [. . .] a realizar la obra que yo deaseaba" (Torres Fierro 60).[6] In her fiction, the developing literary work is also portrayed as an ongoing process, growing and continuously changing inside the writer's imagination. The exterior narrator of "Del color de los vidrios," for example, remarks

that "el cuento también en la memoria se va modificando hasta llegar a ser el mejor cuento del mundo. ¡Con qué nostalgia lo recordamos!" (*CF* 65). According to Ocampo, insofar as the work appears safeguarded within the confines of the imagination, once the object exists outside of the mind, the world can usurp and modify it, and in this manner, destroy the story-maker's imprint, the identifying strokes of the pen. Ocampo articulated this fear to Ulla during their conversations: "es peligroso porque vos [. . .] tenés [el cuento] adentro tuyo y te parece que ya existe, que es un objeto sólido ya hecho, y es peligroso que lo cuentes o lo comentes-por lo menos a mí me sucede-porque después soy capaz de no escribirlo, porque ya vive fuera de uno" (*Encuentros* 112). Moreover, when Ulla tried to elicit more information on Ocampo's plans to write a story based on the legend of Bluebeard with an inversion of gender roles, Ocampo's response revealed her apprehensions of losing an original idea: "Es mejor no distribuir la idea porque todo el mundo va a empezar a escribirla" (*Encuentros* 109).[7]

Along these same lines, the narrator of "Los retratos apócrifos" relates that she once knew a man who, in order to protect the fruits of his imagination, never committed his literary ideas to writing: "Hasta el aire se ocupa de hacer propaganda con lo escrito. Hay que pensar en secreto, porque toda idea se vuelve plagio. Conocí a un escritor que jamás escribió sus mejores páginas, por miedo al plagio. No era generoso: decía frases que despreciaba, para guardarse las mejores" (*CF* 117). The narrator, who is not a writer but a portrait artist, briefly adds that her life goal has been to achieve a particular work: "Toda mi vida dibujé como una alumna de Dios, preparándome para hacer un enorme cuadro" (*CF* 116). Distraught over a damaged oil painting of her sister, the narrator harbors doubts concerning her ability to restore the original work: "¿Volvería a pintar la cara? ¿Podría?, me dije a mí misma en secreto. Busqué colores en mi mesa. Vi que había mcuhos rosados y ocres

en una caja de pinturas al pastel. Conservaba los colores. Había estudiado pintura durante muchos años" (*CF* 120). This narrator suggests that her training as a painter will finally culminate in this test of her abilities to restore the portrait.

Thus in Ocampo's stories and in her interviews we see a preoccupation with the loss of control that the post-gestation state brings. In Ocampo's world view, any exteriorization of the artistic process through the materialization of the internal mechanism of the imaginary carries with it the threat of losing mastery over the work; therefore, any manifestation of the work must be protected. It is no surprise then, that Ocampo often voiced her anxiety at having lost a manuscript. In 1983, when Gilio arrived at her home for a prearranged interview, Ocampo, emerging from behind her desk, appeared flustered not only because she didn't expect Gilio, but also because she had misplaced a short story. Sorting through piles of books, papers, and notebooks, Ocampo asked, "Usted aquí? Yo no la esperaba hoy. Estaba buscando un cuento que he perdido. No sé dónde lo puse. En algún lugar tiene que estar" (5). Coincidentally, Ocampo expressed this same perplexity during one of her conversations with Ulla in 1982: "No hay nada más desconcertante que perder un cuento [. . .] perder un cuento y pensar que fue el mejor cuento que haya escrito. Es como si perdiera parte de mí misma" (*Encuentros* 109). This apprehension at misplacing a text or fragments of texts emerges as well in Ocampo's stories. For example, the dying woman of "La próxima vez" prays: 'Dios mío, no tengo valijas, baúles donde llevar mis manuscritos y prefiero morir mil veces antes que perderlos' (*CF* 146). In another story from *Cornelia frente al espejo*, the exterior narrator of "Del color de los vidrios" is troubled by a misplaced story:

> [H]e perdido un cuento y es tan importante que me hace olvidar todo el resto de cuentos infinitos que he perdido. [. . .] Lo más terrible es sentir en nuestra vida, en la que todo parece repetirse, la incapacidad de volver a escribir un

> cuento que hemos perdido. Lo perdido está inexorablemente perdido [. . .] . Pero el cuento también en la memoria se va modificando hasta llegar a ser el mejor cuento del mundo. ¡Con qué nostalgia lo recordamos! (*CF* 65)

Accustomed to jotting down fragments of stories, poems, and ideas on apparently worthless bits of paper, Ocampo said that she often found comfort in the thought of safely storing and later retrieving these pieces from the protective womb of a drawer. In one particular moment in her conversations with Ulla, Ocampo anguished over lost shreds of texts and hoped to find and give them formal existence through publication: "Cómo se puede convencer a alguien que eso es más importante, que un papel así no debe tirarse" (*Encuentros* 143). However, perhaps the value of this piece of paper of jottings hinged only on its lost status. "Tal vez encuentre el papel," she admitted, "y descubra que no era maravilloso" (*Encuentros* 143). Her drawers, depository of years of potential texts, seemed bottomless: "Los míos son cajones sin fondo, uno no sale si llega al otro lado del mundo" (*Encuentros* 143). A similar ambiguous and imprecise space inhabited by embryonic forms of texts also troubles Cristián of the story "Los pies desnudos," a character who populates his study with piles of notebooks and bits of paper to insure that nothing is lost:

> [M]ientras agravaba [Cristián] el desorden de su escritorio apilando libros y papeles nuevos, [. . .] agrandaba las cordilleras que crecían sin cesar sobre la mesa. Tenía el temor constante de morir asfixiado debajo de los papeles perdidos para siempre en el desorden, papeles que se buscan y no se encuentran nunca, porque nadan en una zona indefinida de otros papeles detrás de los estantes, enredados para siempre en la obscuridad de los rincones empolvados de tierra. (*VO* 175)

The description of Cristián's obsessive salvaging of scraps of paper could also be applied to the author herself. This character "guardaba todo, hasta algunos

cuadernos de infancia, y sin embargo vivía en una perpetua angustia de haber perdido todo" (*VO* 176). Again, this leaves us with a paradox, for there is both anxiety and safety in the lost yet unborn or unfixed gestating texts. The lost or unfinished work of art exists in the world of possibility in the rich, hopeful place of the eternally becoming. Furthermore, this deferral of actual manifestation protects the work (and by extension the author) from the public gaze. In this way, the works can exist in an indefinite, idealized state in the author's mind. On the other hand, the lost manuscript provokes anxiety for a couple of reasons. First, it is an incomplete, indeterminate being that may fall under the scrutiny of someone other than the author. Second, in its lost or elusive state, the manuscript is not fully available to the author. Such an absence is more than unsettling if we accept Heidegger's aforementioned dictum in which "the work is the origin of the artist." The text is thus essential to Ocampo's very being, and yet, the text's physical reality in the world exposes it and the author to the dangers of being located, fixed, and refracted in ways she cannot control.

However promising and troubling the implications of irreclaimable germinating pieces of texts might be, there is no greater threat to the aesthetic pursuit of the masterpiece, and to the evolving self, than the inevitable finality brought by death. The achievement of the masterpiece, however, offers the best if not the only compensation for the overwhelming loss of death. As Susan Sontag has written in regards to the artistic work in general, the "important function of form [. . .] is to preserve the works of the mind from oblivion" (*Against Interpretation* 34). Furthermore, the act of storytelling is embedded within the narrative of life since order and development in both narrative and life depend on causal momentum and transpire within time thus displaying a beginning and an end analogous to birth and death. In his essay, "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin observes that the death bed

in literature stems from the revelatory moment of death at which the totality and meaning of a life crystallizes in an epiphanic moment as past events assume new and unsuspected significance. In this manner, the dying self identifies significant events of the story of his life that will conclude with death: "Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end [. . .] the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses [. . .] . This authority is at the very source of the story" (94). Considered in this light, the death bed scenes in Ocampo's stories project aesthetic authority that is procured through the heightened awareness of the expiring consciousness. In this ostensible state of acute perception the door is opened for contemplation of the artistic perfection manifest in the masterpiece.

Two stories in particular, "La creación" and "La sinfonía," posit the course of artistic actualization as a perilous experience that transcends everyday consciousness. According to Ocampo, belonging to an order separate from empirical reality, the mechanisms involved in the attainment of the masterpiece often present dangers to the integrity of the self. In the story "La creación," which bears the suggestive subtitle "Cuento autobiográfico," the narrator writes about a mysterious melody that one night invades the city of Buenos Aires. Bewildered by the unidentifiable source of the melody, the narrator discovers the next morning that the musical piece had never been composed, much less performed: "Ninguna orquesta la ejecutó, no fué grabada en ningún disco, ni silbada por nadie" (*F* 155). At the end of this story the narrator offers a brief explanation: the captivating, unearthly melody had apparently been produced by her delirious, near-death condition of that night. The elusive masterpiece crystallizes as the result of an experience that is alien to everyday, conscious life: "Tal vez (esta idea ahora me obceca)," the narrator explains, "la obra más importante de la vida se produce en horas de inconciencia [. .

.] sospecho que la mía andará perdida por el mundo, buscando asidero, con voluntad y vida propia" (*F* 155). Though the musical piece remains inaccessible, it will continue to haunt the narrator: "no [puedo] olvidar esta música que compuse cuando estuve a punto de morir, como no podría olvidar, por cansada que estuviera de ellos, el Trío en A menor de Brahms, el Concierto para cuatro pianos de Vivaldi o la Sonata en D menor de Schumann" (*F* 155). Here the altered condition produces the optimal state for aesthetic contemplation.

Whereas the narrator of "La creación" survives the near-death experience, only to live haunted by pieces of a melody that she is incapable of reproducing in its entirety, the female composer of the story "La sinfonía" collapses mortally as she is on the verge of putting to paper her masterpiece, a work inspired by the simple acoustic phenomenon of two iron rings dropping on the ground: "Su melodía, su ritmo, su composión estaban ya en su mente, sólo le faltaba escribirla, cuando la muerte la sorprendió" (*YASI* 118). Because death is the last thing on her mind, for she is in "perfecto estado de salud," the cruel irony of the moment is clear: "mirándose sin verse en el espejo de su cuarto, absorta en el pensamiento de la sinfonía, sobrevino la oscuridad total, [que] en un relámpago le indicó que su vida había alcanzado la meta inevitable" (*YASI* 118). In a plot development that recalls Maria Luisa Bombal's *La amortajada* (1938), the deceased composer's soul hovers over her own burial as she witnesses the activities of the people who have gathered to pay their respects. When night falls, the mourners' conversations slowly give way to soft prayers. Then, a mysterious melody is heard: "Entonces se operó el milagro inesperado del silencio [. . .] se oyó una vaga música [. . .] . Al principio supuso que se trataba de una radio portátil" (*YASI* 120). While other characters guess at the source of the music, the deceased woman expresses a vehement desire to correct them: 'Esa música no viene de la casa vecina [. . .] sale de mi cabeza o de mi corazón

o Dios sabe de dónde, del hígado tal vez. [. . .] Soy una caja de música' (*YASI* 121). The burial marks the definitive abandonment of the body by her consciousness, which is now free to meander through the city. Days later she discovers that various musicians have been playing versions of the work that she had composed at the brink of death. The narrator claims to have reached "la meta inevitable," a phrase whose referent can be interpreted as either the inescapable fact of death or the materialization of her artistic tour de force. Unfortunately, there is no tangible evidence of her artistic accomplishment, only of the climax of her life through her death. Along with the stories "La creación" and "La sinfonía," the narrator's final utterance in the story "El piano encendiado," establishes the link between the aesthetic experience and the death scene: "Yo quisiera morir un día de la perfección de un cuadro o de una música o de un poema" (*CF* 92). Garrett Stewart's observation concerning the death bed scene in English literature could also be applied to Ocampo's short stories in which the epiphany of aesthetic perception and death coincide in "the satisfied sigh of recognition and acceptance that is comparable to a last quiet gasp" (144). In the journey of aesthetic achievement, Ocampo's texts reveal an authorial preoccupation with the composition of the masterpiece that parallels images of the emerging and, paradoxically, disappearing self.

Mirrors

In Ocampo's work, the fictive metaphors of gestation and the lost masterpiece stand in for the author, although this textualized existence is provisional and dependent upon the shifting exigencies of language. The mirror, however, stands as a particularly troubling sign of selfhood in her writing. In general, the mirror affirms existence while it simultaneously renders the self as other. After all, the mirror functions as a bridge from the self to some displaced self, a process Eugene Stelzig has described as "the allegory of the 'not-me'" (10). In this vein, Borges

commented on this writer's tendency towards a self that is not fixed but rather in flux with a series of other selves: "para Silvina Ocampo, Silvina Ocampo es una de tantas personas con las que tiene que alternar durante su residencia en la tierra" ("Rev. of *Enumeración de la patria*" 65). Although the author herself expressed a predilection for a deviation from a secure sense of self, this inclination was not without its discomforts. "Hay una ubicuidad en mí," Ocampo confessed to Ulla, "que me hace sufrir mucho" (*Encuentros* 89). As previously noted, Ocampo's writing offered opportunities for self-disclosure through authorial self-masking. In a letter to Torres Fierro, she explicitly stated that in her poem "Acto de contrición" the words "fui y soy la espectadora de mí misma" are about herself (60). Ocampo's quote from one of her own texts to speak about herself provides another instance of the textualization of the author, this time through the fictive metaphor of the mirror. In the same letter, she underscores her self-awareness at an early age: "Desde la más tierna infancia vi reflejados mis actos como en un espejo. Fui partidaria y enemiga de mí misma" (Torres Fierro 60). Through these words, Ocampo constructs a divided subject as the self gazes at itself. When we encounter the many instances of Ocampo's use of the mirror in her stories, we are thus predisposed to consider the mirror as a sign of authorial self-figuration in her work.

The discrepancy between the self and its reflected image, for example, emerges as a central theme in Ocampo's melancholic, introspective text in Sara Facio and Alicia D'Amico's *Retratos y autorretratos: Escritores de América Latina* (1973), a unique collection of pictures of well-known Latin American writers. An intriguing feature distinguishes this collection: verbal self-portraits written by the authors themselves accompany their photographs. These short texts, which were composed specifically for the collection, were to be inspired by the writers' impressions of the pictures taken of them for Facio and D'Amico's project. Ocampo's contribution, "La

cara," stands as a painful, nostalgic yearning for a past self whose image she regards more akin to her real self, her fundamental self. From the first lines of the poem, the reader confronts the discomfort provoked by a face that no longer seems to belong to the author:

> Me sigue, sombra
> o latido del corazón,
> sin hacerse ver por mí pero mostrándose a los demás
> como una máscara
> que jamás me quita. (115)

Although the referent of these lines is the author's face, instead of a possessive adjective "mi," the title "La cara" bears the anonymous definite article that illustrates the disjunction between the experiencing self and the reflected versions. A deep rejection of the present face, as captured in the picture for *Retratos*, characterizes the text: "deseaba a veces que no fuera mía [esa cara]" (115). She describes that, as a child, she first grasped a sense of herself in the discovery of her face, "diminuta / adentro de una luciente cuchara de plata" (116). Later on, a mirror reinforces the image reflected in the spoons. To recreate the illusion of temporal progression in this text, the poetic voice marks the passage of time with a description of ten pictures that single out chronologically sequenced moments in the process of growth, development, and, inevitably, aging. The signs of physical deterioration are subtle, barely visible: "En qué momento nacen? Nunca se sabe" (118). The inability to recognize herself as in the past--when the soft images of youth and beauty used to beam back at her from the depths of spoons, glass, and mirrors--provokes Ocampo's refusal to be photographed again:

> No quiero más fotografías de esa cara
> que no es la misma cara que estaba adentro de una cuchara

ni en el vidrio, ni el cuchillo, ni en el aljibe,

ni siquiera en el espejo. (118)

A similar crisis in the representation of the self afflicts many of Ocampo's fictional characters. Since she shared with Borges the preoccupation with the processes of representation and its pitfalls and contradictions, images that are linked to the concept of representation--mirrors, reflections, and duplications--abound in Ocampo's work. We are thus invited to consider such reflections and refractions as commentary on the authorial self whose manipulation of character is often also an exercise in self-representation. Her characters often gaze at their reflections in disconcerting, incomplete identification as they wonder about their split or vanishing selves or doubles, for example in "El miedo," "El impostor," and "La vida clandestina." Moreover, when the narrator of "Cornelia frente al espejo" asks Cristina Ladivina if she has ever gazed at her image in a mirror, this character responds affirmatively, "En el agua, en el barro de los ríos, en el filo de un cuchillo" (*CF* 19). Her words resemble closely Ocampo's verses quoted above from her composition for *Retratos*. The aqueous reflective surface of "aljibe" coincides with Cristina Ladivina's reference to water and rivers while Ocampo's mention of the reflective properties of a knife are observed again in her character's words, "en el filo de un cuchillo." Associating the mirror with fear of the unknown, the narrator of "El miedo" warns, "Yo aconsejo no consultar ningún espejo cuando el miedo coloca la mano sobre la garganta" (*CF* 167). After years of viewing one's reflection in the mirror, he assures, "se agrega a nuestro ser otro ser como un mellizo que nadie ve pero que está latente con su propia voz" (*CF* 169). In "El impostor" an ambivalent sense of self torments Armando Heredia, a character who kills himself in an attempt to shed his alter ego, a sort of double forged by his own mind. In the presence of reflective surfaces, the faulty recognition of his own reflection embodies this

estrangement from himself: "miré el fondo del agua que me reflejaba; la imagen que vi era extraña. Sentí miedo que sienten los niños o los perros ante un espejo" (*RS* 331). Fear also obfuscates the main character of "La vida clandestina" who experiences the intrusion of another entity in his own being. His loss of self begins when he perceives an unidentifiable voice coming from his basement: "Cuando grito, no es con mis palabras, ni con mi voz, que el eco responde. No sólo eso me da miedo; me dan miedo los espejos, donde no me veo a mí mismo reflejado, sino a otro muchacho diferente, totalmente diferente" (*INV* 99).

Because the mirror poses such challenges to the stability of the subject, this said object takes on a life of its own in Ocampo's stories. The narrator of "La nave," who eventually transforms into the voluptuous African woman of the film shown on the deserted ship she is sailing on, exclaims before her complete metamorphosis: "Qué bonita luz baña las caras oscuras de los hombres [en la película] que no serían negros, sino moros extrovertidos que saludan, y yo contesto el saludo con una sonrisa que sólo un espejo sabría interpretar" (*CF* 201). Upon completion of the transformation, she wants a mirror to acknowledge the change: "Ya estoy tranquila, tan tranquila que no me reconozco y que sólo me falta un espejo pequeño para mirarme cuando siento cosas ajenas a mi modo de pensar" (*CF* 203). In this story, it is as if only a mirror could bear witness to the phenomenon of the metamorphosis and the blurring of the boundaries separating film from reality. Also experiencing isolation, the narrator of "Hombres animales enredaderas," who is the victim of an airplane crash and is stranded on a deserted island, seeks comfort from his solitude in a mirror: "No extraño mi casa; eso sí que no, pero un espejo es una compañía, mala o buena, como todas las compañías, y allí tenía mi espejo redondo como la luna" (*RS* 203). Here again we observe an insistence on an unstable subjectivity. The mirror, symbolizing the estrangement of the self from itself, defers further a secure

notion of selfhood. The revelation and estrangement peculiar to mirrors is similar to the dual processes of marking and concealment inherent in the fictive metaphors already discussed in this chapter. As with gestation and the lost or elusive masterpiece, the fictive metaphor of the mirror further configures Ocampo's authorial self as dependent on discursive and recurrent processes.

The Photograph

In the gestating space of the imaginary or the elusive masterpiece and in the "othering" space of the mirror, the signs of the author appear and disappear on the textual screen of absences, projections, and reflections. The anxiety and possibility of the liminal space between absence and presence is intensified by the fictive metaphor of the photograph in Ocampo's life and work. Though the mirror and the photograph provide means by which a consciousness can view physical images of itself, there exists a profound difference between the experience of gazing into the mirror and that of viewing pictures of oneself. Since perception is simultaneous to presence, looking at oneself in a mirror or any other reflective surface is an act limited to the present moment. Viewing oneself in a picture, however, divides the self even further through time because of the tangible evidence of having been photographed in a particular moment in time and space in the past. Thus a photograph captures apparently irrefutable evidence of the ways we were, of versions of ourselves in the past. In light of the properties of the process by which the subject contemplates photographic images of itself, Linda Rugg argues that the photograph poses a "visual metaphor for the divided and multiple self" (1). As indicated earlier in the discussion of Ocampo's text accompanying her photograph in *Retratos*, the complexities surrounding the referential powers of the photographic image have profound implications for authorial self-figuration: pictures provide irrefutable evidence of the author's presence, "the author's body in the world," while

at the same time the photograph sabotages her uniform identity by the multiplicity of selves conferred by the infinite possibilities of "posed presentations" (1). Like the mirror, "the Photograph is the advent of myself as other, " as Barthes observes (*Camera Lucida* 12). The photograph may be even more problematic than the mirror in that the self now becomes an object not simply of self-gazing, but a proliferated image susceptible to the displacing gaze of others. The self's capacity to contemplate and evaluate some form of itself as a gazed object already underscores the multiplicity of versions of the self, a division that manifests itself in the process of writing.

Indeed, both the photograph of Ocampo and her accompanying text in *Retratos* profoundly communicate her aversion to the photographic reproduction of her physical image. As Sontag reminds us, the nature of the photographic act is intrusive: "To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them, they can never have" (*On Photography* 14). The photograph taken for *Retratos* shows Ocampo seated on the floor with her legs bent sideways; her left forearm lies across her stomach as if protecting a vulnerable area. The other arm extends out toward the camera with an imperative hand that shields her face. This is one of Ocampo's last photographs, a faceless photograph that corroborated rumors about her circulating in Argentine society, that she was a recluse, an eccentric, an enigma protected in the stronghold of her solitude. The writer herself acknowledged hiding away in her "torre [. . .] de arena": "he preferido la invisibilidad" (Grondona 177-78). Always receding into the background, averting the spotlight or the camera flash, Ocampo preferred the anonymity of her dark glasses as the more extroverted members of *Sur* occupied center stage. In one such famous picture, Alicia Jurado, Eduardo Mallea, and Bioy Casares flank Victoria Ocampo and a seated Borges, both of whom occupy the

center of the photograph. Silvina is barely visible in the remote, right-hand corner.[8] An earlier snapshot of the fifties shows Ocampo sitting on a ladder between Mallea and Helena Muñoz Larreta. Avoiding direct contact with the camera, her face is turned sideways, to the right, and her hands protectively frame her face.[9] Again in the background wearing dark glasses, Ocampo barely looks at the camera while Bioy Casares, Dwight MacDonald (a writer for the *New Yorker*) and Félix de la Paolera pose with a smile for a photograph taken to commemorate a gathering at "La Silvina" in Mar del Plata in 1960.[10] Conscious of the permeable boundary between public and private, Ocampo repudiated the invasive impulse behind the photographic act. In fact, María Salgado, one of the few critics to comment (albeit briefly) on the relationship between Ocampo's faceless picture and her text for *Retratos*, has correctly pointed out that the items enumerated in "La cara" create a "barrier of objects" that further obscures the subject's identity instead of revealing it: "Her insistence in portraying external action and events turns her portrait into a social parade and succeeds in keeping her private life private. Aside from the fact that she wants to forget her age and her approaching death, one never learns anything about her character or personality" (290).[11]

In the composition written for *Retratos*, painfully aware of the passage of time and its consequences, Ocampo demands, "No quiero más fotografías de esa cara" (118). Because the photograph attests to the deteriorating effects of time, Sontag observes that the act of taking a picture is "to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability" (*On Photography* 14). In Ocampo's fiction, this aversion towards aging goes hand in hand with the estrangement caused by the irrecognition of the younger versions of the self. Her characters and narrators often ponder the transformation of personal identity through aging. The narrator of

"Los retratos apócrifos," for example, reflects: "Envejecer también es cruzar un mar de humillaciones cada día; es mirar a la víctima de lejos, con una perspectiva que en lugar de disminuir los detalles los agranda. [. . .] Nunca pensé que envejecer fuera el más arduo de los ejercicios" (*CF* 116). Emphasizing the slippery nature of identity by noting that nobody's projected image corresponds to the elusive, real self, the narrator states: "Toda persona es en cierto modo una caricatura de sí misma" (*CF* 115). Furthermore, underscoring the photograph's dubious ability to reveal some essence of the self, the title "Los retratos apócrifos" ("The apocryphal pictures") foregrounds the fictional and false nature of the reproduced image. The self divided through time is further dramatized by the narrator's description of aging as the gradual accumulation of undesirable accoutrements in a guise that one reluctantly must wear: "Todo disfraz repugna al que lo lleva. La vejez es un disfraz con aditamientos inútiles" (*CF* 116). Though a natural and inevitable part of living, for Ocampo, the effects of time on the physical and psychological self impose on the body and mind "el más arduo de los ejercicios" (*CF* 116).

Similarly, the self-reflexive narrator of "La máscara" begins her story by underscoring the gap between the narrating self and the experiencing self: "Soy como un árbol sin belleza, pensaba; las marcas que dejó el tiempo se borran, pero peores son las marcas de las marcas" (*CF* 93). The subject of the verb "pensaba" is the same of the first verb of the story, "Soy." Illuminating the ontological differences between the various selves involved in the writing process, Barthes has observed that "the one who speaks (in narrative) is not the one who writes (in real life) and the one who writes is not the one who is" ("Introduction" 111-12). In "La máscara" the narrating self reflects on her experience at another moment of time when she thought of the analogy between an older person's aging beauty and a tree's minuscule, less obvious details that contribute to its beauty: "Hay hojas en este árbol que podrían ser

preciosas, pero quién descubre la belleza cuando descifrarla lleva paciencia y tiempo, [. . .] . Soy un mero disfraz de mí misma. Si algún crimen cometí, ¿estaré pagándolo?" (*CF* 93).[12] A comparable sense of loss experienced through the transformative process of aging preoccupies the eccentric pianist of the story "La música de la lluvia," who plays the piano with his toes and avoids mirrors to ward off the effects of aging in order to conserve his child-like approach to music: "Nunca quiso mirarse en un espejo, en la ilusión quizá de conservarse siempre niño" (*YASI* 38). In Ocampo's text for *Retratos*, and in her implementation of gestation and the elusive masterpiece as founding metaphors of the self, we hear a similar yearning for the artist to preserve an original, perhaps idealized state by refusing the mirror and / or deferring the physical manifestation of the completed text.

If every photograph, as Barthes argues, represents a "certificate of presence" (*Camera lucida* 87), then the act of gazing at the reproduced image of the self accentuates the distance between the reflective consciousness in some present moment of perception and past, irretrievable selves that have been frozen in time through the photographic event. Thus we apprehend the transformative power of the passing of time through aging. However, the reproduced image does indeed serve as proof of "stature and agency," as observed in bureaucratic documents such as driver's licenses, passports, and other forms of identification that support with tangible evidence the presence of a self in a particular moment in time and space. Ocampo's stories also offer the lingering, unsettling notion that perhaps the image in the picture does hold some degree of referentiality to the real self. Two stories in particular, "El pasaporte perdido" and "La nave," thematize the precarious relationship of the photographic image with the operations involved in the formation of idenity. As the female character of "El pasaporte perdido" prepares to embark on her first transatlantic voyage from Buenos Aires to Liverpool, she traces her facial

features with both hands while looking at her passport picture and thinks: "No tengo que perder este pasaporte. Soy Claude Vildrac y tengo 14 años. No tengo que olvidarme; si pierdo este pasaporte ya nadie me reconocería, ni yo misma" (*VO* 50). Weighed down by the apprehension of losing her identity along with her passport, Claude adds to her worries the possibility of a shipwreck. Unfortunately, both fears become realities: "El barco se hundía para siempre, llevándose su nombre y su rostro sin copia al fondo del mar" (*VO* 58). Significantly, this last sentence concludes the story and Claude's existence; there will no longer be either an original, Claude's physical presence, or its copy, the passport picture.

Similarly, the narrator of "La nave" ponders the dependency of her identity on this piece of documentation: "He perdido mi pasaporte. ¿Quién me lo devolverá? ¿Nadie? He perdido mi árbol genealógico, toda mi documentación, con números, fechas y señales. Sólo encontré una fotografía de mi cara. ¿Sería realmente mi cara o la de otra persona? Nunca me miré mucho en el espejo. Me parecía inútil" (*CF* 200). The moorings of identity--pictures, birth certificate, passports--prove to be flimsy buttresses of reality since the narrator of this story suffers the ultimate loss of her being as she is absorbed by the movie shown on the ship that she has imagined in order to fall asleep. The beginning of the story sets up this scenario: "Para dormir siempre imaginaba una nave, que terminaba por volverse real. No me costaba mucho. Ahora tampoco. La puedo vislumbrar a través de la ventana de mi cuarto" (*CF* 199). Because of an erratic usage of present and past tenses and sections of endless narrator musings, it is almost impossible to apprehend the threads of this story's plot. Nonetheless, the reader perceives that the boundaries of the dream world, reality, and film progressively grow lax as these different ontological realities contaminate one another. The process of reorganizing these boundaries allows the narrator to gradually transform herself into the "reina de la selva," a character in the

movie she has been watching on board the ship.[13] A story such as this invites contemplation on the nature of narrative as it functions in both visual and verbal realms. The narrator's transformation in "La nave" carries paradoxical meaning. Traditionally, the narrator is a stable controlling force within a text, and indeed, this narrator may be seen as demonstrating such control in that she "authors" the movie in which she transforms herself into the "reina de la selva." This control is undermined, however, in the shifting tenses and in the rambling nature of the narrator's musings. Furthermore, the narrator migrates from the genre of the verbal text to the genre of film. It might be said, then, that although the narrator exhibits creative power and control while imagining a movie for the practical, biological need for sleep, she is ultimately captured by that movie she so vividly imagines. The essential possibilities and dangers that the created work holds for the artist thus remain an abiding concern for Ocampo. In this story, given Ocampo's deep misgivings regarding visual representations of herself, it is noteworthy that the visual, the "moving picture," has the ability to trump the verbal narrative voice and not only captures the speaker but also alters her identity.

The ambiguous relationship between reality and the disturbingly unruly narrative powers of photographic or visual reproduction is further explored in two other stories by Ocampo. The problematic representation of reality through the reproduced image, whether in the form of a photograph or a painting, emerges in Ocampo's work. In "El cuaderno" and "El goce y la penitencia," for example, the desires of characters and narrators find concrete embodiment in pictures and paintings that represent a reality not yet tangible. The pregnant character of "El cuaderno" concentrates successfully on a specific picture in her neighbor's baby book in order to will the same features onto her developing child. After giving birth, the

mother cradles her newborn and verifies the results: "Entre envoltorios de llantos y pañales Ermelina reconoció [en su hijo] la cara rosada pegada contra las lilias del cuaderno" (*F* 51). In "El goce y la penitencia" a painting reveals the narrator's adulterous activities with the artist who has been commissioned with the portrait of her five-year-old son. Upon completion of the portrait that never quite resembles the boy, the narrator's unsuspecting husband abandons the painting in the attic. With the portrait's conclusion comes the end of the affair and a suspicious pregnancy. Only five years later does the adulterous wife discover that the artist had painted the portrait of his future son at the age of five. Here Ocampo both manifests and thwarts Sontag's assessment of a photograph (or portrait) as "something stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask" (*On Photography* 154). A footprint and a death mask allude to a past presence; thus in Sontag's description the reproduced image may be read as a vestige of something that used to exist but is now absent. We could read the portrait in Ocampo's story as a reminder of the now absent affair. On the other hand, we must also consider the way in which the portrait and the photograph in both "El cuaderno" and "El goce y la penitencia" bring into being that which was formerly absent. Even more provocative is the fact that what is brought into being in each story--a child--represents the ultimate act of creation, the engendering of life itself.

In Ocampo's fiction the photograph can also uncover unsuspected connections between an image and its referent, as in "La paciente y el médico" (*F*) and "La revelación" (*INV*). Believing that he can appease an infatuated patient by giving her a framed picture of himself, the doctor of "La paciente y el médico" becomes the prisoner of his own image: "desde ese marco día y noche comencé a inaginarla involuntariamente durante todas las horas del día. [. . .] Como si yo estuviese dentro del retrato, como si yo mismo fuera el retrato, veo las escenas que se

desarrollan dentro de su habitación" (*RS* 400). In "La revelación," Valentín Brumana, the town idiot, lies at the brink of death and asks the narrator to take a picture of him and his phantom girlfriend on his bed. After developing the film, the narrator is astonished by what she sees: "La figura central, nítida, terriblemente nítida, era la de una mujer cubierta de velos y escapularios, un poco vieja y con grandes ojos hambrientos, que resultó ser Pola Negri" (INV 25). The title of the story, "La revelación," lends itself to various interpretations. While it suggests the processing of the film, at another level, the title reflects the narrator's awakening to the idea that reality consists of elements that she cannot perceive or understand through her senses. Such double meaning refers us back to the idea that photographs or reproductions are suspect in that they can fall short of capturing reality, and in the process, they can replace or displace the original. Furthermore, those who try to manipulate reality--for example, artists--must exercise a significant control while also accepting that to be involved in such an endeavor is to potentially unleash processes that will extend beyond one's control.

The most salient example of Ocampo's interest in the relationship between a copy and its referent or original, whether through photography or painting, is "Ocho alas" (*CF*). One day, as the narrator strolls in the woods of Palermo, she comes upon two butterflies in the moment of copulation. Her first interpretation of the scene leads her to believe that she has found a butterfly with an abnormal number of wings: "pensé que para una mariposa era muy natural, pero muy incómodo, tener ocho alas" (CF 142). However, she is overcome by the discovery that what she had interpreted as an aberration of nature was in fact two butterflies: "El viento las arrastraba, las movía, las sacudía, las embestía; ellas no sentían nada de lo que sucedía a su alrededor, indiferentes a la realidad en su abstracción" (*CF* 142). After various attempts to capture the mating insects, she finally succeeds in whisking them

away to her home where she hopes that her husband will be able to photograph them. Once at home, she notes the limitations of the camera in its attempt to capture the weighty significance of a moment of acute awareness: "¿Qué hace la cámara fotográfica ante una escena como está? ¿Qué le presta a la imagen? ¿La mata, la conserva?" (*CF* 143). The narrator concludes that something is irrevocably lost forever, "algo infinitamente inasible, como la vida misma de estas mariposas, con tanto olvido del mundo, con ocho alas anaranjadas" (*CF* 143). A similar disillusionment with the photographic representation of humans affects the narrator of "El piano incendiado" (CF). While going over family pictures and coming across one of herself, this narrator expresses frustration at the fact that the picture fails to capture the intense beauty of her eyes: "Los ojos son lo mejor que tenemos, pero el color desaparecía en esa foto" (*CF* 89). Thus, although the photograph provides tangible evidence of a presence, the disjunction between an original self and its reproduced images divides further the self through time.

The fictive metaphor of the photograph (or painting) reveals Ocampo's preoccupation with origins and reproduction. In this manner, Ocampo's use of visual representation in her stories becomes a meditation on the relationship between life and art and on the unpredictable reflexivity between the creator and her artistic "progeny." Repeatedly we see examples of an artist who is both made manifest and somehow challenged or undermined by the physical presence of that work of art. Just as the artist is the origin, the progenitor of the work of art, so does the work of art have the ability to actuate the presence of the artist. At the same time, however, the work can displace or deform the identity of its author. Present in Ocampo's life and works, then, is a tension between absence and presence, between the inchoate generative state and the fully manifested object. This tension is salient whether we

are talking about the difference between a nascent identity and a fully figured self or the difference between an elusive masterpiece and an actual, physical text.

Intrusive Narration and the Role of the Reader

In Ocampo's work, the strategies of authorial self-representation through fictive metaphors produce profiles of a consciousness. In the process of poetic self-creation, the author performs a simultaneous self-exposure and self-masking. As the intricate processes of meaning unfold, the persona that takes form in the reader's mind assumes constantly shifting surfaces. As soon as we catch glimpses of a person in the "event of being," this persona is replaced by another mask from an array of sources of identity.[14] Writing about the complex mechanisms in the fabrication of meaning and authorial self-representation in texts, Michel Beaujour recognizes "ancestors, contemporaries, fictitious characters whom [the writer] or others have created, and, of course, the masks of the readers who 'will recognize themselves' in the deployment--or in the invention--of the masked places of their own culture" (33-34). Along with the poetic self-creation through fictive metaphors, Ocampo further represents the self through an authorial consciousness that exposes the machinery and openendedness of a work while underscoring the participation of the reader in the making of authorial selfhood. A consciousness keenly aware of the fact of the reader's presence emphasizes the function of the reader in the production of meaning. As Hutcheon explains, the activities of writing and reading stand as "processes of life," as well as of art. The necessary engagement of the reader with a text involves a paradox. Although the reader is conscious of the artifice of the text, in order to make sense of the work he must assume the task of co-creator while exercising the "intellectual and affective responses comparable in scope and intensity to those of his life experiences" (Hutcheon 5). In this vein, Ocampo's fiction disrupts the illusion of the fictional worlds and challenges the reader's conventions concerning

reality and fiction. Because her narrative strategies bring to the forefront the role of the reader in the functions of the text while at the same time asserting the author's existence and identity as creator of the literary work, Ocampo's stories posit the essential role of the readers in the author's self-figuration.

Early in her life Ocampo became cognizant of the demands of imaginative activity on writers and readers. Her initiation into literature began, as she relates to Adela Grondona, through exercises in exaggeration in letters to friends: "[Escribía] cartas donde exageraba (hasta no conocerlos) mis sentimientos, porque los adaptaba a las frases en lugar de adaptar las frases a mis sentimientos" (*¿Por qué escribimos?* 177).[15] In her fiction this awareness of the artifice of writing and of the presence of an audience is expressed by the narrator of "El cerrajero" who explains, "Cuando era chica, los cuentos me gustaban porque inventaba por curiosidad, absurdamente" (*YASI* 181). Similarly, the narrator of "Hombres animales enredaderas" displays a strikingly comparable concern for readers: "Me hace gracia porque pienso en la risa que les va a dar a mis amigos esta anécdota. No me creerán" (*DN* 17). Often employed by Ocampo, the epistolary form provides a narrative structure that refers self-reflexively to its intention of telling a story. Through its very format, the letter form also makes evident the transaction and vital complicity between a narrator and the narratee. A number of Ocampo's short stories, such as "La continuación" (*F*), "La casa de los relojes" (*F*), "El fantasma" (*INV*), "El miedo" (*CF*), and "La pluma mágica" (*INV*), follow the letter form while others contain references to letter writing in the title: "Carta perdida en un cajón" (*F*), "Carta bajo la cama" (*INV*), "Carta de despedida" (*INV*), and "Cartas confidenciales" (*DN*). The reader also encounters in Ocampo's stories narrators who, as writers themselves, include in their narrations references to the activity of writing, as in "Algo inolvidable" (*YASI*) and "La pluma mágica" (*INV*), and the

previously discussed "La continuación" (*F*). As she knits to calm her fears of being alone in her home at night, the narrator of "Algo inolvidable" sustains a strange conversation with an unknown man who enters her home. After a brief dialogue covering the topics of death, literature, and censorship, the intruder, for no apparent reason, lays down at her feet. The narrator then concludes the story: "Ahora soy víctima de un crimen que no he cometido. Pronto estará mi libro en todas las librerías" (*YASI* 143). Upon reading this line, the reader cannot help but reflect on the fact that she holds a printed text in her hands. Thus, behind this ambiguous manner of closing the story an authorial consciousness seems to wink at the passive and gullible reader who accepts without question the conventional separation of fiction and reality. Furthermore, since the narrator sells her knitting to earn a living, and she writes whenever she is not knitting, we can draw parallels between these two activities. Both require the combination of diverse elements to form a cohesive, singular structure. Moreover, as with Daedalus's thread that aids Theseus out of the Minotaur's labyrinth, the author marks a path to be followed by the reader who must find her way through the text by making sense of the narrative components woven together by the author. While this narrative persona may be asserting superiority in mocking the gullible reader, the fact that the narrator is so keenly aware reveals the extent to which she--the narrator and by extension the author--is dependent upon the reader as co-producer. In other words, the engendering of authorial self-figuration is beyond the understanding and activity of a single writing self; it is co-produced by writer and reader.

Another example of Ocampo's use of such self-referentiality can be found in the story "La pluma mágica" in which the male narrator, also a writer, addresses the story as a letter to his devious friend who has stolen his priceless pen. His friend is the only person to whom the narrator has divulged the secret of his literary success,

his magic pen. Soon after he notices the disappearance of the pen while in the presence of the trusted friend, the narrator's suspicions intensify as he reads stories in newspapers and magazines that correspond to the pen's style. One final piece of evidence confirms his doubts: "Por fin en el escaparate de una librería encontré, con el término de mis dudas, un libro titulado *La pluma mágica*" (*INV* 153). Again, the reader's notions regarding fiction and reality are challenged, for this last line of the story contains the title of the story itself, "La pluma mágica," which occupies the real world as one of Silvina Ocampo's short stories that the reader physically holds.

A more explicit example of Ocampo's metafictive strategies can be seen in her frequent utilization of the epistolary form. This form provides opportunities for communicating with the reader, thus unveiling the machinery of narration by calling attention to its own composition. Ocampo further challenges the conventions of reality and fiction while directing the reader's attention to the artifice of the literary work by suddenly introducing a first-person narrator within a story that is told primarily by a supposed third-person speaker. Concerning these sudden changes in narrators, she once compared herself to Julio Cortázar: "[él] cambia de sujeto sin que uno lo sepa, entonces obliga al lector a ser más atento, cosa que no le gusta a veces . . . le gusta a veces leer distraídamente" (*Encuentros* 123). Acknowledging the reader, she declared, "Claro, es un colaborador el lector. Ahora, yo no sé si al lector le gusta eso, porque hay que pensar en el lector. Yo nunca pensaba, pero siempre se tiene un lector que uno prefiere" (*Encuentros* 124). Ocampo's reader often confronts these intrusions on the part of anonymous narrators who have no direct connection to the situations related but who purport to exercise some degree of authority to validate the events. For example, in "Epitafio romano" the narrator attests, "Sé que amaba, como Virgilio, los perfumes del laurel y del mirto," and later on the same voice assures that "ningún busto de mármol me [guía]" upon describing Claudio Emilio's

facial features (*AI* 7). Also, when the supposed third-person narrator describes the manner in which a group of mentally retarded children jump out of a plane in the story "Tales eran sus rostros," the following enunciation surfaces without explanation: "y digo llegaron" (*INV* 10). Beyond this self-reference by a narrator, there is no other intervention by a first-person voice.

A similar intrusion occurs in "La sinfonía" in which the reader encounters two interventions by a first-person narrator who never explains his or her affiliation to the events of the story. The most interesting and jarring example can be found in the story "Del color de los vidrios" in which a first-person narrator, whose voice remains ungendered, prefaces the narrated events by lamenting the misplacement of a story: "¿Hay algo más terrible que perder algo? [. . .] [H]e perdido un cuento y es tan importante ahora que me hace olvidar todo el resto de cuentos infinitos que he perdido" (*CF* 65). For a page and a half this voice reflects on the loss of a story, the human inability to grasp meaning in the present of experience, and the "infierno descartable" invented by the Americans in their demand for disposable goods. The external narrator finally concludes this introductory section with a brief background on the context of the events about to be presented: "En una casa bastante abandonada, así empieza el cuento, de noche o a distintas horas del día, se oye entrechocar botellas. Son las botellas que llegan a la casa donde vive Inés, que está de novia y tan enamorada que no se entera de nada de lo que sucede en la casa ni fuera de ella" (*CF* 66). Following this, the male, first-person narrator, now Inés's husband, begins to tell the story of how he and his fiancee came to live in a house made of glass bottles. Since the character-narrator occupies a diegetic level inferior to the self-reflexive narrator who first introduces the story and who remarks on the fact that he or she is about tell a story, the reader must accept the fact that the text is something invented by the external narrator and exists only in the external

narrator's mind. From here, then, as readers we can make yet another leap to the ontological reality of the author. "By breaking the frame around his world," Brian McHale observes of postmodern narratives in general, "the author foregrounds his own superior reality" (197). Instead of a reader who submits to the events presented by a supposedly invisible third-person narrator, Ocampo's works awaken the reader to the text's artifice and by doing so challenges the realist conceptualization of the transparency of the literary work. By dispensing with the illusion of transparency she calls attention to the crafted nature of the text and by extension, the presence of the writer manipulating the production of the text. Ironically, by interrupting realist expectations, the writer previously concealed in the narrative conventions accepted by the reader, is now revealed by the departure from those expectations. Thus, once again, Ocampo relies on the subversion of absences to manifest authorial presence in the liminal narrative spaces in which the reader must participate in the operations of sense-making.

Ocampo's fiction further highlights the contract between writer and reader by making explicit the expectations to be fulfilled in their respective activities. In other words, the need to escape boredom links the two. The tacit agreement between one who writes and one who reads is that both will momentarily escape their own propensity to boredom by carrying out their duties. Although the narrator of "Los objetos" refers to herself only once in the story, this self-reflexive interjection accentuates the responsibility of the narrator to her audience: "Me da vergüenza decirlo, porque ustedes, lectores, pensarán que sólo busco el asombro y que no digo la verdad. [. . .] Si no fuera tan patética, esta historia resultaría tediosa. Si no les parece patética, lectores, por lo menos es breve, y contarla me servirá de ejercicio" (*F* 77). In the story "Los objetos, " as in "Del color de los vidrios," this self-conscious deviation from the conventional separation of fiction and reality represents a

straightforward acknowledgment of the presence and participation of the reader. In his analysis of vanguard aesthetics in novels of Latin America and Spain, Gustavo Pérez-Firmat underscores the implications of addresses to the reader: "It goes without saying that asides to the reader are by nature always indices of self-consciousness" (121-22). These "indices of self-consciousness" can only refer to the entity responsible for the literary creation. Furthermore, interventions that invoke the reader's collaboration are "both an invitation to interpret and a guide to interpretation" (Pérez-Firmat 122). Therefore, although the territories of fiction and reality remain separate, their boundaries suffer some deterioration as these narrators directly solicit the reader while reminding him of his protagonistic role in the text.

Other intrusive interventions that defy the reader's conventions governing a work of fiction and that foreground Ocampo's desire for co-production can be seen in the endings of her stories. As if indulging (with duplicitous motives) the reader's search for logic, the internal narrator of "Los sueños de Leopoldina" identifies himself as Changuito in the first sentence of the story. With the last sentence of the story, however, the diligent reader discovers that the narrator has actually been a dog all along: "en un remolino levantó con el aire a Leopoldina y a mí, su perro pila, llamado Changuito, que escribió esta historia en el penúltimo sueño de su patrona" (*F* 115). Employing narrators that ultimately negate the validity of the events recounted, Ocampo sheds light on the mechanics of writing, and in doing so directs attention to her own role as creator. In another example, the narrator of "La nube" gently reproaches the passive reader by stating that the conclusion of the story "es la única verdad de este cuento" (*CF* 156). Also, the narrator of "La vida clandestina" explains that the ending of the story itself will remain within the fictional world because the invisible being following the main character whispers "el final de esta historia que nadie sabrá" (*INV* 100). In each of these instances, the narrating figure

intrudes by virtue of its unreliability or literally fictitious nature. As previously noted, this "exposure" of the narrator calls attention to the act of text-making and thus to the original creator of the text, the writer. Through these reflexive processes, the intruding narrator functions as a strategy of authorial self-figuration.

Multiple and ambiguous endings also confront the naive reader's traditional notion of the text as a complete, self-contained unit. For example, the narrator of "Epitafio romano" offers three different endings for the story of the Roman poet Claudio Emilio who secretly stages the burning death of his wife, the beautiful, adulterous Flavia, only to keep her locked up in his farmhouse on the Tiber.

> La antigüedad nos propone tres finales para esta historia: En el primero, el más previsible, Flavia agradece a Claudio Emilio la salvación del honor de sus hijos y de su familia por haberla ennoblecido prematuramente con los privilegios que sólo puede otorgar la muerte. [. . .] En el segundo, Flavia, después de leer su epitafio [. . .] exclama: '¡Esto se parece mucho a un sueño!' [. . .] En el tercero, después de leer el epitafio, Flavia, con renovado esplendor, le dice: '¡No soy bastante seria! ¡No merezco estar muerta!' El fulgor de su cabellera suelta ilumina la noche y Claudio Emilio pide clemencia a los dioses y amor a Flavia. La lleva a su casa. Nadie la reconoce y ella asegura ser una mendiga que un demente ha violado, después de vestirla con las túnicas que robó de una urna sagrada. (*AI* 13 - 14)

Instead of an ending that concludes the story in a manner that solves the mysteries it proposes throughout, this open-ending winks at the traditional reader's search for resolution and closure. Along the same lines, Ocampo's last collection of short stories, *Cornelia frente al espejo* (1988), closes with a peculiar text that bears the title "Anotaciones." Having no plot or characters, this composition defies traditional literary categories and seems, more than a short story, to be a very personal,

introspective meditation on the meaning of death and a playful challenge to our expectations concerning a short story collection. Two lines deserve particular attention in this text. First, after reading "The only thing I love, A. B. C. <<the rest is lies>>" (*CF* 226), the reader can hardly resist the urge to interpret the initials as those of Ocampo's husband, Adolfo Bioy Casares. Ocampo herself makes reference to the ABC's of her life when she writes to Torres Fierro that "Convivir con un escritor es espléndido: es el a. b. c. de mi vida" (60). The ABC's of her life appears again in the dedication ("a A. B. C. ") of the sonnets grouped under the title "Sonetos a la imaginación" published in the collection *Los nombres* (1953). Also noteworthy is the metafictional tone latent in the last line of the story "Anotaciones": "Quisiera escribir un libro sobre nada" (*CF* 227). This line is not only the last one of the collection *Cornelia frente al espejo* but also Ocampo's final printed line as this collection was her last major publication. Considering the heterogeneity and ambiguity that characterize many of the stories found in *Cornelia*, the collection, which consists of strange, difficult-to-categorize texts of varying quality, has somehow perversely fulfilled the stated authorial intention of writing about nothing in particular.[16] Such an intention coincides with the Ocampean perspective in which writing, rather than a realist frame or story, is the purpose of life itself, is the thing which staves off "un suicidio" (Gilio 6). Furthermore, as we have seen again, the act of writing offers Ocampo an arena in which she can simultaneously create an identity (that of the writer) and potentially thwart a fixation of that identity through multiplicity and rupture.

Along with these loosely structured stories that oblige the reader to contemplate their nature as something made-up, Ocampo also employed schematic characterization techniques that ultimately call the reader's attention to the authorial role. As discussed in chapter one, many of Ocampo's characters are not formed

through the usual techniques of the realist tradition in which the reader should readily identify with the society depicted. In nineteenth-century realism, for example, the reader feels that she knows the characters since they correspond to specific social types, answer to a name, possess specific physical and moral traits, and have a past and a future in the form of memories and expectations. It is the image of a stable, unitary self that underlies character in traditional realist narrative. Ocampo's characters, on the other hand, correspond more to Christine Brooke-Rose's notion of the "emptiness of characters" in postmodern narrative. According to Brooke-Rose, "we have a raging despair at the emptiness of D or E, mere supports for [. . .] [the writers'] own self-reflections and quickly replaced by G or K. They express all frustrated attempts at character making and all versions of the author's various selves, lasting but a few seconds and presumably torn up and thrown into the wastepaper basket" ("The Dissolution of Character" 184).

I would expand Brooke-Rose's concept of "character making" to include the participation of the reader in the making of the authorial persona. For if meaning can be forged only through the collaboration between writer and reader, and if the text, the source of significance, replaces the "dead" author, then the reader also engages in the composition of the authorial self. The "emptiness" of her characters thus facilitates Ocampo's working through of guises of herself. In fact, Fabienne Bradu asserts that Ocampo's characters are versions of the writer herself, experiments in her desire to "dejarse libremente encarnar en una amplia diversidad de personajes, temas, objetos" ("La pareja fantástica" 53). Bradu describes Ocampo's literary activities as risky exercises in self-recognition and adventures in "el continuo inventarse" ("La pareja fantástica" 53-54). For Ocampo, the freedom that writing confers allows the creator to perform "milagros de una transfiguración" in that infinite space where literary creation takes place: "No sé muy bien dónde es

allí, pero indudablemente me encuentro en ese allí mejor, porque hay muchos allí y un solo mundo literario donde se puede sin ser estar" (Grondona 177-78). An ambiguous, unstable sense of self, clearly preferred by Ocampo, finds in literary practice a locus to exist without a fixed identity: "Hay una ubicuidad en mí que me hace sufrir mucho," she confessed, "y caigo en eso con mucha frecuencia" (*Encuentros* 89). Insofar as literature offers a space for being, Ocampo judges that "su panorama es infinito" (Gilio 6).

Although literature and the arts entail a certain degree of imaginative freedom evidently relished by Ocampo, paradoxically, the finished work, whether a text, a painting, or a musical composition, has an aura of finality and of delimitations because of its physical existence. As noted before, the fixed nature of the completed physical work, essential to her self-figuration as a writer, was also a source of anxiety for Ocampo. With respect to writing, the narrator of "Fragmentos del libro invisible" judges the instruments of writing as "esos enemigos de la metamorfosis y de la colaboración" (*RS* 294). In the context of painting, the narrator of "Los retratos apócrifos," a painter, judges that "El marco es una prisión para la imagen" (*CF* 121). Perhaps to circumvent the finite nature of a work after it has achieved aesthetic, material reality, Ocampo sometimes pursued a theme or situation in more than one genre. This kind of genre migration allows her to at once proliferate and problematize her identity as a writer. For example, the title "Autobiografía de Irene," she explained to Ulla, belongs to a short story in the 1948 collection by the same name, and a poem published in *Cornelia frente al espejo*: "El cuento en prosa fue anterior al cuento en verso" (*Encuentros* 89). The poetic composition, "Del diario de Porfiria," which was published in the pages of *Sur* in 1943, precedes the story "El diario de Porfiria Bernal," which appears in 1961 in the collection *Las invitadas*. "Las formas en que quiero expresar algo, ya sea prosa, verso, teatro," she related to Ulla,

"son distintas. [. . .] Todo cambia en mí, busco todas las formas distintas, y eso me hace sufrir mucho porque me quiero encauzar en una cosa. [. . .] ¿Por qué [. . .] ? Es un enigma" (*Encuentros* 89). When Adela Grondona asked Ocampo how she discovered her literary vocation, she responded: "Escribiendo lo que no podía dibujar, dibujando lo que hubiera escrito" (177). An example of the intersection of two genres in her work can be seen, for example, in "El bosque de Turcos" which bears the following preliminary explanation: "Inspirado por un grabado de Durero: El Caballero, la Muerte y el Diablo" (*YASI* 39). Consistent with Ocampo's aesthetic search, then, the narrator of "Okno, el esclavo," who suffers a sexual and a species transformation, writes: "Dibujo y escribo. Escribo y dibujo. A veces un dibujo me obliga a escribir un cuento o un poema, otras veces un cuento me obliga a dibujar algo, algo que nunca pensé dibujar" (*CF* 221). As if functioning as a mouthpiece for the author, the poet Claudio Emilio of "Epitafio romano" eloquently proposes the creative powers of the mind as a means of circumventing the limitations that the human being encounters throughout life: "La vida nos encierra continuamente en invisibles prisiones, de las cuales sólo nuestra inteligencia o nuestro espíritu creador pueden liberarnos" (*AI* 7).

Ocampo further counteracts the finitude of the completed literary work, and, consequently, of language, by probing the zone between words or within a single word in search of unexpected significance. The narrator of "Hombres animales enredaderas," the only survivor of a plane crash, plays with the sound of the words "celda y selva" and "sociedad y soledad": "No supuse que celda y selva se parecieran tanto, que sociedad y soledad tuvieran tantos puntos de contacto" (*RS* 201). Significantly, before this verbal exploration, the narrator states his dislike of the urban space: "Todos mis pensamientos me llevan a la ciudad que odié; a los alrededores de la ciudad que desprecié" (*RS* 198). However, he explains, he found

ways to express his animosity for the order governing city life: "siempre preferí la selva a un jardín civilizado. Por eso mismo andaba siempre despeinado, me dejaba crecer la barba y, a veces, el aseo de mi ropa no era impecable" (*RS* 198). The verbal game, in which the narrator assesses the affinities in structures and sounds of words, significantly opens a door of awareness to a common semantic field that refers to the relationship between the individual and society.

A linguistic inquiry that leads to similarly weightier implications can be found in the very brief narrative poem "Arácnidas" (*CF*) whose narrator is inspired by the contemplation of a chandelier that reminds her of a similar one that hung in her childhood home.

> Una araña reluce en este cuarto,
> la memoria de muchos días queda en sus caireles,
> [. . . . .]
> Ahora me pregunto por qué se llama araña
> este adorno que cuelga del techo
> y que me inspira estúpidas frases. (*CF* 109)

An exploration of the relationship between the meanings of "araña," which in Spanish can mean either spider or chandelier, leads her to meditate on the mortal tenacity with which spiders in her childhood home would hide in the feather duster in order to jump to the chandelier when it would later be cleaned. However, once a spider web was detected, it would be whisked away immediately, along with the diligent spider. The narrator closes the fifty-two line text by saying that if she heard someone ask for the whereabouts of the feather duster, as she often heard at night in her childhood home, she would be weighed down by the thought of "[. . .] la incongruencia de la vida / que busca a veces amparo / en el arma que nos va a matar" (*CF* 110). Thus the text closes with a contemplation on the fatal attraction,

one analogous to the moth drawn to the flame, that eventually destroys the pursuer. The title of this text, "Arácnidas," suggests a desire to fix meaning as this word does not pose the linguistic variability of "araña."

These examples from "Hombres animales enredaderas" and "Arácnidas" illustrate an underlying anxiety about the limitations confronted by the author when representing the author's connection to the world and its objects. The most concise and unambiguous expression of this authorial concern with language and representation in Ocampo's work is the whimsical yet pertinent preoccupation with dictionaries and the existence of mermaids. The narrator of the story "El novio de Sibila" recalls that his girlfriend "Creía que las sirenas existían porque figuraban en los diccionarios" (*INV* 68). Also, the nameless character of "Y así sucesivamente," who falls in love with a mermaid whom he meets at the beach, remembers with satisfaction his response to his mother's perplexity at his belief in the existence of mermaids. His unwavering conviction hinges on one detail: "Porque están [las sirenas] en el diccionario" (*YASI* 150). This character's childlike trust in words in the context of Ocampo's strategies that unveil the author's operation in the text manifest the lingering hope that words will indeed somehow attest to the author's existence.

Ocampo's self-reflexive strategies also move beyond the zone between words to the zone between the genres of poetry, fiction, and biography. Ocampo's most interesting example of her own fictionalization and thus authorial self-figuration occurs in a reflexive maneuvering through time and between genres in the connection she establishes between her poem "'Sueña con su muerte una prostituta'/'Death of a Harlot'" published in 1984 in the pages of *Vuelta* and the story "George Selwyn" published in 1987. According to the notes prefacing the poem in *Vuelta,* Ocampo had originally written the poem in English under the pseudonym George Selwyn. She did not know until after writing her composition, as the introductory notes explain,

that Selwyn had been an eccentric Englishman of the eighteenth century. Rumor had it that he often witnessed public executions of criminals and studied cadavers. In the story "George Selwyn," the narrator announces the finding of a peculiar text attributed to Selwyn:

> "Hoy día en la Argentina, en 1945, se ha descubierto un poema en una revista literaria, atribuido a George Selwyn. Una trayectoria tan larga de tiempo entre la vida de George Selwyn y el poema que apareció resulta incongruente. Nadie puede creerlo; por más esfuerzos que se hagan no se ha llegado a dilucidar si realmente le pertenece y quién era la mujer que lo inspiró. El lenguaje no concuerda con la época, pertenece más bien a la época pre-rafaelista. ¡Es tan largo el tiempo, tan parecidos sus cambios! (*YASI* 87)

In Ocampo's story, the only time Selwyn was seen emotionally moved by a public execution was at the death of a prostitute who had drowned her child to prove that she loved only her lover. Thus Ocampo establishes the link between her texts--the story and the poem--in two ways. First, the poetic voice of "Sueña con su muerte una prostituta" coincides with the characterization of the prostitute whose death so affected Selwyn, the character of Ocampo's story. In this manner, she provides through an alternate text a voice for the tragic woman. Second, the narrator of the story of 1987 refers to a poem that had been recently found and attributed to Selwyn. Rather than quoting from the poem, the narrator only enumerates its features. These characteristics coincidentally describe the structure and style of Ocampo's poem printed in English and Spanish in *Vuelta* in 1984. In this manner, she intensifies her trust (or capitulation?) in the survival of signs of the authorial self through the indices of consciousness, the texts she penned. As Genevieve Lloyd eloquently explains, "As a knowing self, I am not merely an object of knowledge, but its luminous, though elusive, source of structuring center" (168). In a strategy that

paradoxically affirms yet delays complete apprehension of the "source of structuring center," Ocampo privileges the signs of the author over reality and the represented itself.

Conclusion

The contours of an authorial self come into view in Ocampo's work in the interplay of the fictive metaphors of gestation, the elusive or lost masterpiece, the photograph, and mirrors. The recurring themes and images generated by these metaphors reveal signs of an authorial persona preoccupied with the complex properties of selfhood and reality and the pitfalls in their representations, as well as with the relation between the creator and her literary world. Through these metaphors, instead of a subject that is considered a given, stable entity, we discern the need to imagine the self to project a sense of identity. Thus the fabricated nature of the self emerges. Though the profile of the authorial silhouette constantly changes, through a textualized existence, some form of transient unity survives in place of the "dead author" and transcends the empirical being that participated in experiential reality.

The strategies of representation of the authorial self in Ocampo's fiction also concern those aspects of her texts that draw attention to their own constructed nature. The text's status as something made implies an author who orchestrates its composition. Through the epistolary form coupled with metafictive features, direct addresses to the reader, and references to the text that is being read and held by the reader, the intrusive author awakens the reader to her function in the text while also challenging traditional conventions separating fiction and reality. Furthermore, direct addresses to readers highlight their role in the activity of making sense of the literary world imagined and then erected by the author. In this manner, the reader's role is that of co-producer; in the simultaneous composition of the text and of the

self, the reader's participation appears critical. Borrowing Barthes words, "a text's unity lies not its origin but in its destination" ("Death of the Author" 148). At the heart of this collaboration lies the writer's awareness of the responsibility of luring the reader and prolonging the engagement. Writing in general about the relationship between the reader and the literary work, Ingarden argues that the reader "concretizes" a work of art through his search for meaning (352). We can extend this vital role of the reader as co-producer of the text to the generation of the authorial self.

Silvina Ocampo vehemently avoided the capture of her image by the camera, the interviewer, and the spotlight. The slightest curiosity about her life elicited strong objections: "Basta que me hagan preguntas para que me crea en el departamento de la policía o en un confesionario o en el consultorio de un psicoanalista mirando el cielorraso" (Torre Fierro 59). Fully aware of the consequent scrutiny that a fixed and situated identity would incur, Ocampo confessed: "he preferido siempre la invisiblidad (lo más parecido a la ubicuidad)" (Grondona 178). Yet, as character, narrator, and authorial enunciations coincide in her fiction, Ocampo explicitly used her work to illuminate aspects of her personality while paradoxically achieving a form of textualized existence. Because we are limited to fragments of a consciousness, pieces that we seek to assemble into a coherent whole, this whole will always represent another mask rather than an original, essential, ultimately unknowable self. In light of the irretrievable person, of the lost origin, only a memory survives and we are left to contemplate the appearing and disappearing images of the writer that persist in those unstable places of memory of the being once called Silvina Ocampo.

Notes

[1] Ocampo granted only a few interviews during her lifetime. In 1975, Danubio Torres Fierro initiated one of her first major interviews. But she granted it under one condition: Torres Fierro would send his questions through the mail and she would respond in a letter. Ocampo's responses, which were incorporated into the body of a letter addressed to Torres Fierro, were later published under the title "Correspondencia con Silvina Ocampo." Six years later, one of Ocampo's close friends, Noemí Ulla, was able to conduct the most substantial inquiry into the writer's life by taping numerous conversations that were then transcribed and published in 1982 as *Encuentros con Silvina Ocampo*. In her prologue, however, Ulla cautions the reader not to expect any personal revelations from the writer: "Los pocos periodistas que lograron entrevistarla conocen muy bien de qué manera es fiel en negarse a dar ciertas informaciones, como las de su vida privada, por ejemplo. Sin embargo, a ésta suele referirse en nuestros diálogos, cuando responde a las relaciones que puedan tener con su vida literaria. Cuando traté de hacer alguna pregunta directa sobre su silencio como mujer del escritor Bioy Casares, se negó a responder. Quien se decide a conversar con ella con fines de publicación sabe, tácitamente, que su vida íntima no es tema que trata" (*Encuentros* 11). A year later, in 1983 Maria Esther Gilio interviewed a very reluctant Ocampo for *Revista de la Universidad de México*.

[2] The term "unstable places" can be found in Michel Beaujour's discussion of the autobiographical dimensions of texts by Michel Montaigne, Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Leiris, and André Malraux. "The empirical individual," Beaujour observes, "matters much less, we realize this at once, than the unstable places of an impersonal memory always exceeding with its 'wild poligraphy' the memories of an individual.

Because of this, each reader can put himself in the place of the self-portrayer, and yet never find his resting place there" (34).

[3] A perusal of the titles of the more widely known theoretical works underscores the notion of a decentered and constructed self: *The Fiction of the I* (1999) edited by Nicholas Meyerhofer; *Imagining Self* (1976) by Patricia Spacks; *Fabricating Lives* (1989) by Herbert Leibowitz; *Versions of the Self* (1964) by John Morris; *Metaphors of Self* (1972) edited by James Olney; and *Fictions in Autobiography* (1985) by Paul J. Eakin. Moreover, the difficulties of setting the boundaries of autobiography has inspired scholars to propose new taxonomies. As examples of what Lorraine York calls the "never-ending generic angst" (645), we encounter Eugene Stelzig's coinage of "alterbiographies" and Michel Beaujour's preference for the term "self-portraiture," while Marlene Kadar employs the term "life writing," and Serge Dubrovsky, "autofiction." All of these terms refer to texts that exhibit traits from both narrative and autobiography. Similar to theorists and critics, the writers themselves acknowledge, sometimes with disbelief and astonishment, the blurring of the boundaries between autobiography and the traditional literary genres.

[4] Spengemann investigates the different manifestations of the autobiographical genre, from its most intimate tie to a concrete biographical context, such as St. Augustine's *Confessions* (399) and Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1791), to the genre's complete detachment from any biographical reference while donning the "garb of fiction," as in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1844) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) (132). In Spengemann's most intrepid (and interesting) examination, Spengemann illuminates the nexus at which Hawthorne's notebooks, personal letters, and literary works intersect to compose "experimental presentations of himself" (142). Moreover, Spengemann distinguishes between biological metaphors, which clearly originate in the author's own experience

and serve a more anecdotal than allegorical function, and fictive metaphors, which represent a purely poetic form and whose "autobiographical import lies less in the fictionally encoded biographical data than in the symbolic uses to which the fictional metaphors themselves are put" (132). Using a methodology similiar to Spengemann's, Stelzig read Kafka's fiction through the lens of his journals, letters, and notebooks. In doing so, Stelzig regards Kafka's stories as "autobiographical parables" in light of their recurring ideas and symbols emerging from the "spiritual dilemmas of the agonized self. [. . .] Such exquisite symbolic self-fictionalization can [. . .] speak to a much larger audience than autobiography, for they can seem like echoes from our own depths, tropes of our own existence, ciphers of our own selves" (22).

[5] Patricia Klingenberg has written that neither the narrator nor the person she addresses "can be definitely identified by gender" (*Fantasies* 176). However, there is one gender marker. Pondering the moments when she abetted her lover's infidelities, the narrator of "La continuación" admits: "Yo facilitaba el encuentro de ustedes. Los dejaba siempre solos" (*RS* 382). Since Elena is the "other woman," we can assume that the narrator's lover is a male because of the masculine adjective "solos." Nonetheless, Klingenberg provides a thoughtful and illuminating discussion of strategies of female subjectivity in the context of literary creation. See *Fantasies* 175-84.

[6] Ocampo pursued the theme of the masterpiece not only in literature, but also in painting and indirectly in music. Only Ulla has written extensively on the themes of music and the plastic arts in Ocampo's literary work. She observes that a number of Ocampo's titles--"Cielo de claraboyas," "Paisaje de trapecios," "La siesta en el cedro," "El vendedor de estatuas," "El pabellón de los lagos," "El corredor ancho de sol"--are reminiscent of French Impressionism and that plot and character

development in her short stories reveal aspects of cubism and surrealism studied while under the direction of Giorgio de Chirico ("La música y la plástica" 408). Because music played an important role in Ocampo's childhood education and personal life, scholars and admirers have collected many entertaining anecdotes. See Ulla, "La música y la plástica en la literatura de Silvina Ocampo" and *Encuentros;* Liliana Hecker; Victoria Ocampo, *Autobiografía I;* and Klingenberg, "El infiel espejo." Bioy Casares also makes numerous references to Silvina's musical preferences and experiences in *Memorias* and *En viaje.*

[7] In 1988, seven years after her conversations with Ulla, Ocampo published the story "Jardín de infierno," in the collection *Cornelia frente al espejo.* In Ocampo's adaptation, instead of a husband, a wife keeps her dead spouses in a secret room.

[8] This photo can be found in Rodolfo Braceli's *Borges-Bioy.*

[9] This photograph has been reproduced in Oscar Hermes Villordo's *Genio y figura de Adolfo Bioy Casares.*

[10] Villordo has included this photo in his *Genio y figura de Adolfo Bioy Casares.*

[11] In "Divining the Self," Klingenberg briefly discusses "La cara" as a "clue to Ocampo's (de)construction of the feminine in fiction" (128). In her study Klingenberg underscores the mirror and its relationship to feminine subjectivity as observed in many stories of *Cornelia frente al espejo,* especially in the first story of this collection.

[12] The introductory paragraph, which offers the narrator's thoughts on aging, prefaces the story "La máscara," a peculiar text. The narrator recounts her mysterious experience during a costume party in her childhood home one night when the "careta [. . .] de sultana," an element of her costume, becomes permanently plastered on her face: "Debajo del cartón, el sudor cayó de mi frente a mis ojos, [. . .] pero nadie veía lo que pasaba detrás de ese cartón [. . .] . Poco a poco la careta

embelleció un poco. [. . .] Sentí renacer el triunfo de una pequeñísima belleza en aquella máscara extraña, porque se había humanizado" (*CF* 94). This short, two-page text, ends with a commentary that further emphasizes a destabilized selfhood: "Nunca fui tan linda, salvo algún día de extraordinaria felicidad en que tuve una cara idéntica a otra cara que me gustaba" (*CF* 94).

[13] In another story in which a character is watching a movie on board a ship, the palm reader of "La divina" embarks on a trip in which she suddenly finds herself experiencing the perils being played out in the movie *Titanic*. At first the eerie correspondence between reality and the movie causes only slight consternation in this character: "sintió que el barco daba un tumbo, que la alarmó un poco; pero siguió mirando, porque las imágenes la fascinaban. Cuando la vajilla del comedor del *Titanic* se amontona en un estruendoso caos y el agua entra por todos los resquicios, crujió el barco y otro tumbo brusco lo ladeó. Algunas sillas cayeron" (*DN* 154). The illusion of the movie becomes less and less convincing as the reality of the impending sinking of her own ship becomes more pronounced: "Fue como un relámpago. Del hundimiento del *Titanic*, pasó al real hundimiento del barco, sin saber cómo se había operado el cambio. Después (en un después que no recordaba con precisión, pues parecía parte de un sueño), perdió el conocimiento junto a los botes de salvataje y alguien la recogió" (*DN* 155). In other examples of Ocampo's work, the cinematographic medium appears linked to the blurring of the boundaries separating the natural and the supernatural and reality and dreams. For example, the narrator of "Soñadora compulsiva" is a young girl who can foresee the future through dreams that are difficult to decipher since characters and storylines from film and television populate her dreams: "todo se parecía a lo que veía en el cine y en el televisor" (*CF* 64). Also possessing special abilities, Magush (of the story by the same name) can

watch scenes form his clients' futures as moving images on the large windows of the building in front of his home.

[14] The phrase "event of being" belongs to Aldo Tassi's discussion of the mask as an essential metaphor for the metaphysical inquiry into the concept of person (201).

[15] At the end of the sixties, Adela Grondona interviewed the most renowned Argentine writers of the moment. Borges, Bioy Casares, Ocampo, and others responded to questions about their professions as writers, their reasons for writing, and their literary preferences.

[16] One of the few reviewers of *Cornelia frente al espejo*, Fabienne Bradu, remarks on the starkness of Ocampo's stories: "Los cuentos de *Cornelia frente al espejo* no son cuentos tradicionales, como casi nunca lo fueron, por lo demás, los escritos de Silvina Ocampo. Se sitúan en una intersección singular entre las visiones propias de la prosa poética, los recuerdos de lo que hubiera podido ser la escritora y los sueños permitidos por la casi irrestricta libertad de su imaginación. [. . .] No corre en pos de ninguna trama; salta de una idea a otra, de una visión a otra, de una persona a otra en la conducción del relato, de la prosa al verso, y siempre se adelanta a su lector por unos segundos" ("Tres pilares del Sur" 40). Ana Cara considers that in *Cornelia* Ocampo exposes "fragile private worlds [. . .] not without discomfort to the reader who relies on the illusion of order and boundaries in life and who is comforted by the safety of home and the conviction of happiness" (78).

Conclusion

Contemporary inquiries into the definition of the self have generated a variety of axioms whose common denominator is, paradoxically, the imprecision of the locus of the subject. Since the subject has been rendered a problematic concept, by extension any definition and representation of the elusive self suffers the same fate. In this vein, Silvina Ocampo's investigation of selfhood falls in line with contemporary reexamination of the subject. In the first chapter of this study, I explored the mechanisms by which self-generation paradoxically elicits the disappearance of the subject while the process of narration encounters repetition, coincidence, and cyclical movement. Furthermore, the narrative techniques analyzed in the three stories of the chapter, "El diario de Porfiria Bernal" (*F*), "Autobiografía de Irene" (*AI*), and "El castigo" (*INV*) produce temporal paradoxes, circular structures, and regressions. Along with the indicated narratological aspects that defy categorical conceptualizations of time and space, in these stories typical of the fantastic mode, we also observe the relinquishing of the narrating self's sense of physical and psychological density, a transformation that involves a radically changed as well as a muted, silenced self. A similar investigation of the problems of subjectivity continues in chapter two. This time, however, the focus is on the confrontation between the bourgeois, stable subject and the unstable, mutable subject. Readers of Ocampo's fiction agree that her characters are typical of the Argentine middle and upper classes. However, realist portrayals of the bourgeoisie are not encountered here. Though the bourgeois subject aligned with civilization presupposes a stable, discrete identify, while the barbaric other connotes a destabilized, irrational self, the semantic fields of the two poles, civilization and barbarism, overlap in Ocampo's stories. While undoing traditional dualisms, the physically and psychologically destabilized self challenges the social order, the

public and private spaces of bourgeois life, and the relations of power specific to these spaces. Instead of a firmly grounded identity, the veneer of gentility and pretentiousness masks a precarious subject on the verge of dissolution, division, metamorphosis, or insanity. A fluid and imprecise form of subjectivity also emerges in Ocampo's introspective work that investigates, while achieving in the process, the creation of authorial self. The contours of an authorial self come into view in the interplay of the fictive metaphors of gestation, the elusive or lost masterpiece, mirrors, and the photograph. The recurring themes and images generated by these metaphors reveal signs of an authorial persona preoccupied with the complex properties of selfhood and reality and the pitfalls in their representations, as well as with the relation between the creator and her literary world. Through the investigated metaphors, instead of a subject that is considered a given, stable entity, we discern the need to imagine the self to project some sense of identity, thus the fabricated nature of the "I" emerges. Though the profiles of the authorial silhouette are constantly changing, some form of transient unity of self survives in place of the "dead author" through a textualized existence. The strategies of self-figuration of the author in Ocampo's fiction also concern those aspects of her texts that draw attention to their own constructed nature. Furthermore, direct addresses to readers not only challenge the traditional conventions separating fiction and reality; they also highlight the reader's participation in making sense of the literary world imagined and then erected by the author.

Throughout Ocampo's fiction the referent of the "I" remains fleeting and movable. Although the mechanisms of self-representation evolve within language, these processes offer no precise referentiality as the plurality of meaning evades fixed signifiers. The self is everything but a given as it is continuously coming into being. Ocampo's approach to the self has been best expressed by the narrator of her

story "La nave" who ponders: "Hay momentos en que mi sombra me parece más cierta y real que yo misma. Abruptamente me doy vuelta; ella también se da vuelta. Nunca nos encontramos" (*CF* 214). While some might say that work like Ocampo's predates or anticipates postmodern strategies and commentaries on identity and literary production, it may be more accurate to theorize her work as standing within a long tradition of Hispanic literature reflecting historical and social uncertainties through the exploration of multiple identities and realities beginning with Cervantes and proliferated in the work of writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Elena Garro, Julio Cortázar, Rosario Ferré, Adolfo Bioy Casares, and numerous others. Furthermore, Ocampo emerges as a figure of study whose life processes mimic her literary process, a feature which points to the role of narrative and character development particular to the modern and postmodern world. Certainly more study would be fruitful here.

Since Ocampo's death, her work has continued to generate interest. In September 1997 her unedited play *Lluvia de fuego*, directed by Alfredo Arias, was staged at the Teatro de Bobigny in Paris. Attending the show were Pepe Fernández, the distinguished Argentine photographer to whom Ocampo dedicated "Las esclavas de las criadas" (*DN*), and Adolfo Bioy Casares. Also in 1997, Alejandro Maci's film adaptation of Ocampo's story "El impostor" (*AI*) figured among the twenty finalists of Quincena de los Realizadores del Festival de Cannes. Although her work has enjoyed a significant increase in critical study since the 1990s, Ocampo's theater and translations have not been the focus of these investigations. Moreover, the majority of her work in prose, which consists of more than 200 short stories, still awaits critical attention. Another interesting phenomenon is the scant critical study of her poetic corpus encompassing eight collections that have been recognized with literary prizes.

As I have noted in my introduction and throughout this study, critics such as Patricia Klingenberg, María Birgitta Clark, and Marjorie Agosín, and Cynthia Duncan have examined her work through a feminist lens. Their analyses are especially compelling in light of the absence of autobiographies by women in Argentina as observed by scholars, namely Sylvia Molloy, Sara Castro-Klaren, and Adriana Rosman-Askot. Rosman-Askot has even suggested reading short story collections such as Norah Lange's *Cuadernos de infancia* (1937) and Ocampo's *Viaje olvidado* (1937) as 'fictionalized autobiographies'(3). While my work has certainly been enriched by feminist inquiries of Ocampo's fiction, I also depart from a gendered focus to concentrate on literary strategies of identity formation as they pertain to both her work and her life. This study is less interested in historically discrete identity politics than with the larger issue of the role of narrative in identity formation, especially in terms of fractured or multiple identities. As more of Ocampo's personal papers and private correspondences enter the public domain, she remains a potentially rich area of study for both biographers and literary critics. During one of her conversations with Noemí Ulla, Ocampo eloquently described how a leaf reproduces in its veins a miniaturized image of the tree on which it grows. "Si fotografías las nervaduras de las hojas solas," Ocampo explained, "vas a ver un árbol, entonces el árbol lleva en sí 'autorretratos'" (*Encuentros* 55). Borrowing Ocampo's words, each of her texts represents invaluable "autorretratos" that preserves while disseminating images of this enigmatic writer.

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