

Identity, Nation, Discourse

Identity, Nation, Discourse:
Latin American Women Writers and Artists

Edited by

Claire Taylor

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

Identity, Nation, Discourse: Latin American Women Writers and Artists, Edited by Claire Taylor

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-0347-2, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-0347-2

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume would not have been possible without the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust, which financed the four-year Academic Network on Gender and Women's Writing from which this publication arose. Thanks are also due to all those who participated in the International Conference on Women, Gender and Discourse in Latin America/ Congreso Internacional sobre Mujer, Género y Discurso en América Latina held at the University of Liverpool in 2007, and who were instrumental in the development of the early ideas that shaped this volume. Especial thanks must go to Charlotte Gleghorn and Ben Hoff who chaired the postgraduate roundtable, as well as to Sara Beatriz Guardia for proposing one of the largest panels at the event. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Gorka Bilbao, for his untiring work at making the conference run so smoothly, as well as, at a later stage of the project, his expert formatting skills in the production of the final manuscript.

Thanks are also due to several people who made comments on the manuscript at various stages of its process, including Jackie Collins, Mary Green, Kirsty Hooper, Geoffrey Kantaris, Fiona Mackintosh, Rob Miles, Pat Odber, Thea Pitman, Marieke Riethof, Lisa Shaw and Claire Williams. I would also like to thank members of the Gender Research Group at the University of Liverpool, UK, and members of the Género, Literatura y Discurso Research Group at the Universidad del Valle, Colombia, who have provided fruitful opportunities for debate on the key issues raised by this volume. Finally, thanks are due to the contributors to this volume, who have made this volume what it is. Any errors are, of course, entirely my own.

INTRODUCTION

IDENTITY, NATION AND DISCOURSE: TACTIAL AGENCY AND LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS

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Scholarship on Latin American women authors undertaken in the twenty-first century must take into account a dilemma that has been raised in feminist criticism in recent decades: namely, how the dissolution of the subject enacted in poststructuralism impacts upon feminist praxis. The notion of the humanist subject has been resoundingly challenged by post-structuralist thought: ranging from thinkers such as Roland Barthes, who argued that ‘in the field of the subject, there is no referent’ (Barthes 1977, 56), to Michel Foucault, who argued that discourses of power constitute the subject through the process of ‘subjection’¹, the notion of the unified, bounded subject has been dismantled. In the light of this dismantling, as scholars have noted, the very foundations of Enlightenment-based feminism—the liberation of the (female) subject—are under question.² Nevertheless, if the dissolution of the subject has meant challenges to the monolithic subject of Enlightenment feminism, these challenges have been taken up in active and constructive ways by postcolonial and postmodern feminisms, amongst others.

One response to the dissolution of the subject can be located in postcolonial thought broadly speaking (including, although not limited to, postcolonial feminism). As some postcolonial scholars have claimed, the fracturing of the subject is in effect only the fracturing of the Western (colonial, European, elite), subject; this fracturing may, in fact, open up the subject to those previously excluded from subjectivity (women, non-metropolitan nations, indigenous communities, subaltern subjects, and so forth). Homi K. Bhabha, for instance, argued that the project of colonialism “required a system of subject formation [...] that would provide the colonial with ‘a sense of personal identity as we know it’” (Bhabha 1994, 124), and formed part of the post-Enlightenment project of

“‘normalizing’ the colonial state or subject” (Bhabha 1994, 123). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak has argued that “there is an affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism” (Spivak 1996, 210-11), thus suggesting that the humanist subject is implicated in imperial power structures. As Stephen Morton has summed up, for many postcolonial critics such as Bhabha or Spivak, poststructuralism, with its questioning of the subject, “is part of a broader questioning of the values of the European enlightenment, and its claims to universalism” (Morton 2007, 161). Thus, if the dissolution of the subject is in actuality the dissolution of the *colonial Enlightenment* subject, such a dissolution leaves room for new expressions of subject formation from non-metropolitan locations and subjects.

From a specifically Latin American perspective, Gabriela Castellanos and Simone Accorsi see the subject as part and parcel of an “etnocentrismo occidentalista”, arguing that the notion of the bounded, unified subject does not take into account the experiences of non-Western cultures which “no comparten esta división radical entre la interioridad de la conciencia y la exterioridad del mundo” (Castellanos and Accorsi 2001, 14). If, following Castellanos’s and Accorsi’s argument, the unified subject might have limited validity in a Latin American context, its dissolution could, therefore, offer fruitful possibilities for the articulation of alternative subjects.³

Another response to the dissolution of the subject can be found in what we might tentatively call postmodern feminism, exemplified by the works of Linda J. Nicholson, Judith Butler and others, who call for a reformulation of feminist projects which would question some of the assumptions of Enlightenment feminism. Nicholson has argued for a “postmodern-feminist theory” which would “dispense with the idea of a subject of history” and instead “replace unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity” (Nicholson 1990, 34). Butler, for her part, has provided a critique of the notion of “woman as the subject of feminism” (Butler 1999, 3 *passim*), and instead elaborates a theory of performativity, in which identity is understood as practice (Butler 1999, 184), and agency is produced through “the practices of a repetitive signifying” (Butler 1999, 185). Both these scholars, and others who engage in postmodern feminism, thus argue that postmodern approaches do not, in actuality, negate the project of feminism; on the contrary, for these scholars, postmodernism and its questioning of established categories (including the stable subject, but also the notion of “grand narratives”)⁴ can prove enabling for a different kind of feminist praxis. If

the unified subject, and the “grand narrative” (of female emancipation) were at the heart of humanist brands of feminism, for these scholars, the dismantling of the subject and the crumbling of “grand narratives” does not signal the end of feminism *per se*, but rather its reworking.

Meanwhile, at the crossroads of postmodern and postcolonial feminism, Chicana feminists have offered alternative feminist theories which go beyond notions of Enlightenment feminism. Sonia Saldívar-Hull’s notion of “feminism on the border” (Saldívar-Hull 2000), and Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of the “conciencia de la *mestiza*” (Anzaldúa 1999) provide reconfigurations of the monolithic subject of Enlightenment feminism: in the words of Norma Alarcón, Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness” involves “the recuperation and recodification of the multiple names of ‘Woman’” and which thus functions as a form of “oppositional consciousness” (Alarcón 2002, 119-120). This concept of an “oppositional consciousness” is further developed by Chela Sandoval, who argues that U.S. third-world feminism functions through an oppositional consciousness in which “U.S. third world feminists [...] identified oppositional subject positions and enacted them *differentially*” (Sandoval 2000, 54). In all of these cases, Chicana feminists critique the subject of Enlightenment feminism as an implicitly white, Anglo-Saxon subject, and argue for the opening up of the subject to alternative voices.

From these varied responses, it becomes clear that, whilst it is now widely acknowledged that post-structuralist thought has challenged the notion of the stable subject, this does not—and, many critics argue, should not—negate feminist praxis *per se*. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere (Taylor 2003, 151-152), post-structuralism’s destruction of the stable subject may, in fact, offer tentative spaces for the formulation of agency by Latin American women. Thus, whilst a particular—Western, colonial, Enlightenment—model of unified subjectivity is under threat, new formulations of subjectivity are enabled: in the interstices and fragments left by the deconstruction of the monolithic subject, Latin American women writers can find the space to articulate new forms of agency.

In the light of these debates, therefore, I propose the term “tactical agency” as a notion which encapsulates the expressive possibilities for Latin American women writers. By this term I mean a practice of subject formation which entails the tentative expression of new forms of agency in the interstices of the available discourses. Given that agency is seen by many feminist scholars as central to feminist practices⁵, I focus on this term as one which denotes the capacity for action, and for the expression of selfhood, in which women are conceived of as active agents. With regard to the notion of “the tactical”, I am here taking de Certeau’s

distinction between strategy and tactics, in which strategy refers to “the calculus of force-relationships” whilst a tactic “insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety” (de Certeau 1984, xix). In this way, I make use of the sense of fragmentary resistance which the notion of the tactic contains: a “tactical agency” would, thus, be one which is partial, knowing, and for particular (limited) purposes. In this way the notion of “tactical agency” provides an enabling concept with which to explore the literary-cultural praxis of the Latin American women studied in this volume. It is suggestive of the way in which they engage in, and interrogate, conscious moments and tactics of subject formation, and create forms of agency which are always contingent, but nevertheless enabling.

This notion of actively reworking subjectivity, of making tactical use of the contradictions and fragmentations of official discourse, thus proves a way of addressing the concerns of scholars who have expressed unease over the fact that, precisely at moment when marginalized groups—such as non-first-world nations, women, indigenous groups—are gaining access to agency and becoming subjects, discourses emanating from metropolitan centres are deconstructing the subject.⁶ Against this concern, the notion of tactical agency becomes a critical, active (and ethical) endeavour: a way of engaging with discourses of subject-formation which simultaneously critiques those processes of subject-formation, and also suggests tentative spaces for the expression of new forms of agency.

My notion here also dialogues with Chela Sandoval’s notion of “oppositional consciousness”, as mentioned above, and as developed at length in her groundbreaking volume, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). Sandoval evokes the term “tactical subjectivity” to describe the way in which US feminist of colour make use of what Sandoval identifies as the four stages of feminism (liberal, socialist, supremacist, and separatist), as “not overriding strategies, but as *tactics* for intervening in and transforming social relations” (Sandoval 2000, 62). If Sandoval explores here how feminist *theories* negotiate discourses of what she terms “hegemonic feminism”, my term explores how *writers themselves* negotiate similarly “hegemonic” discourses, with a focus on the creative, rather than the interpretative realm.

My notion of tactical agency as being contingent, and as being formed through the use of, and yet response to, existing discourses, is structured around the ways in which Latin American women writers negotiate spaces for self-expression with reference to *patrimonio*. If agency is founded upon the capacity for action and self-definition as an active agent, then I argue that, in a Latin American context, the notion of “tactical agency”

must be thought through via the concept of *patrimonio*. Or rather, that the spaces available in the production of “tactical agency” lie in Latin American women writers’ negotiations of the problematic concepts of *patrimonio*. Here I play on the double meaning of *patrimonio* as both literary heritage and the articulation of the *patria*: that is, *patrimonio literario* and *patrimonio nacional*. The negotiation of discourses of *patrimonio* in the formation of a tactical agency is at the heart of Latin American women’s writing, since these discourses cast large shadows over literary production in the region. National and literary discourses are strongly interconnected, and frequently, it is impossible to talk about one without mentioning the other, since national concerns inflect the literary discourse of the country, and, conversely, writers contribute to the national imaginary. Neatly summed up in Doris Sommer’s notion of “foundational fictions”, Latin American national literatures have been shown to actively create the nation in the act of writing. Given that, as Sommer points out, many Latin American statesmen were also men of letters, fictional writings shape the discourse of the nation, and impose gendered paradigms.⁷

Moreover, as will be detailed at length below, since women are frequently excluded from both forms of *patrimonio* – that is, that national discourse and literary discourse frequently construct themselves on the exclusion of women, or on the reduction of women to a set of particular types and tropes – then the creative ways in which women writers attempt to engage with these discourses is central to tactical agency. In this way, playing on the double meaning of *patrimonio* as both literary heritage and the articulation of the *patria*, this volume argues for a consideration of how women approach these two discourses. If *patrimonio*—whether *patrimonio nacional*, or *patrimonio literario*—entails, as its etymology shows, gendered hierarchies, where the *pater* is the source and controller of meaning, then gender is central to these debates. As scholars have revealed, it is no coincidence that the terms *patria* and *patriarchy* share the same root, and articulations of *patrimonio* are based on gendered hierarchies and exclusions.⁸ For this reason, this volume aims to explore how women writers approach and appropriate these discourses, and is structured around two sections: “Women and Nationhood” and “Models and Genres”. Moving in this way from the national to the transnational—from state-sanctioned rhetoric to globalised models of literary discourse—the volume traces women’s responses to these discourses in the construction of their agency and self-expression.

In this way, my notion of “tactical agency” explores how the construction of gender roles, and national and literary discourses in Latin America are intertwined – but that is not to say that their relationship is

straightforward. As the contributions to this volume reveal, even in the nation-building eras of the 19th and early 20th centuries, women writers were actively questioning their role as defined by state discourses. Thus the category of the stable self, and its relation to literary-national paradigms, far from being taken up unquestioningly by Latin American women in their writings, has constantly been, and is still a site of negotiation. Latin American women's literary praxis itself does not assume any stable, fixed categories of subject, nation, feminism or the literary; rather, it engages with these notions in an active, interrogative way. Latin American women's writing, then, becomes a zone of negotiation, understood as the spaces in which women writers attempt to write themselves into existing literary, national, and gendered discourses.

Women and Nationhood

A discussion of gender in relation to nationhood must start with the often problematic connection between woman and certain aspects of national identity.⁹ Within the imagined community that is the nation,¹⁰ roles for women have often been rigidly prescribed and controlled. Nira Yuval-Davis's work on gender and nation provided one of the first detailed studies of the subject, and highlighted how nationalist discourse figures women as having roles in the "biological reproduction of the nation" (Yuval-Davis 1997, 26, *passim*) and the "cultural reproduction of the nation" (Yuval-Davis 1997, 39, *passim*). These two notions explore how women's reproductive roles are controlled by state discourses (to give birth to new generation of citizens), and also how women are frequently encoded by national discourse as representative of the cultural values of that nation: in Yuval-Davis's terms, women are often required to carry a "burden of representation" since they are constructed as "the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour" (Yuval-Davis 1997, 45). These observations about national structures draw on data from a variety of national contexts, and Yuval-Davis cautions against identifying any one single model of women's roles within national discourse; what she proposes, then is not one uniform model which we could then "apply" to Latin America, but more an understanding of how gender and nation are linked in complex ways.

In a Latin American context, we can observe a variety of roles that woman has been made to represent within national discourse. Woman has often been represented as a particular national trope, with perhaps the most famous of these being La Malinche, who has become one of the most iconic figures of Mexican history and national identity. In Octavio Paz's

notorious classification, La Malinche is *la chingada*, emblematic of the Mexican nation; she becomes symbolic of the birth of the Mexican nation and mother of the nation's sons ("los hijos de la chingada" in Paz's terms), but does not exist in her own right.¹¹ Moreover, as simultaneously source of Mexico's hybridity, and of national shame, La Malinche provides a negative, restricting role for women in Mexico's national historiography. For Jean Franco, Paz's conceptualization of *La Malinche* as "la chingada" "restores the violence of the conquest [...] whilst at the same time reaffirming the identification of woman with territory, or with passive victimization" (Franco 1999, 77).

Meanwhile, in the Southern Cone, Francine Masiello has shown how particular historical women were made to function within national discourse in Argentina in different periods. Masiello gives, for example, the case of the Spanish heroine Lucía Miranda who, in the nineteenth century, appears as "a virtuous figure who humanized the mission of the conquest", but in the twentieth century is "characterised by her savage impulses" and "held responsible for the failures of the colonial enterprise". As Masiello astutely sums up, "she allowed men to mark the difference between civilization and savagery" (p.9), and as such, was used as a trope to engage with one of the defining binaries of Argentine national discourse.¹²

In another context, Ileana Rodríguez, writing on Caribbean narratives of nation-formation, notes particular configurations of women and ethnic groups in terms of their relationship to the land:

This "nation", whether Creole, narco, or begging, whether based on economic subsidy or linguistic union, is a nation in which neither Indians nor blacks nor women have a space, or, if they have it, it is akin to *Costumbrista* literature where the rural world and the space of women are romanticized—arcadia without conflicts, the picturesque. Women and ethnic groups are characters, beings reduced to the category of living, transhumant organisms simply spread out across an immense geography, essential components of an ever-natural landscape governed by books of both law and literature. (Rodríguez 1994, 4)

Rodríguez's observations here make clear how the nation-building narratives she studies link women to ethnic groups in order to render them passive non-agents: in essence, non-citizens who are not awarded full status as participants in the nation.

As well as association with particular ethnicities, perhaps the most enduring representations of women's roles in national contexts come in discourses about familial structures and maternal roles. To return to

Masiello, her study illustrates how in Argentina the “representation of the unified family [...] served the stability of the emerging nation” (Masiello 1992, 18). In particular, Masiello reveals how gendered roles for women within the home and the family unit were part of nationalist discourse:

Serving as a buffer between the civilizing purposes of Europe and the perceived barbarism of the American hinterland, Argentine women often became the focus of New World discourse. [...] Motherhood and domesticity played a significant part in the national program of advancement, and the family unit was perceived as an arena for the training of future citizens. (19)

In this way, nationalist discourses make use of—and reinforce particular versions of—women’s roles within familial structures. Discussions of familial roles, therefore, when mobilized by nationalist discourse, are never simply neutral, but are often used to disseminate and promote particular forms of conduct which reinforce the patriarchal nation-state as model.

Moreover, research regarding one particular aspect of women’s familial roles—motherhood—has shown how the concept of motherhood has been mobilized by national discourse for specific ends. With regard to nineteenth-century Argentina, for instance, Bonnie Frederick has argued that the “cultural memory” of the Rosas years was “a rhetorical heritage of casting national issues in gendered terms” (Frederick 2006, 105). In her examination of how this relates to particular roles for women, Frederick invokes the term “civic motherhood”:

This widely-held concept of civic motherhood limited women’s roles to bringing up enlightened (male) citizens and future (male) civic leaders; it was a view that justified greater access to education for women, while still keeping women out of the political and economic spheres that were the exclusive territory of men. That is, it sought limited reforms for women within the long-established roles of the patriarchal family-state, while leaving the structures (and strictures) of gender roles intact (Frederick 2006, 105)

In this way, even in cases where women were inserted into the discourse of the state and granted a role within this, it was, as Frederick demonstrates, in the name of *civic motherhood*, rather than as *citizens* in their own rights.

Whilst the scholars above concentrate on particular countries in their studies, others have suggested that certain gendered structures within state discourse were common across the region. Rebecca E. Biron sums up the

ways in which projects of nation-building encouraged particular formulations of the family and gendered conduct within it:

Modern nation-building projects in the region [i.e. Latin America] recognize themselves through analogy with the benevolent patriarchal nuclear family. National portraits insist on the importance of happy, healthy, productive, and patriotic women as well as men, yet national treasures often reflect government rhetoric in coding active citizenship as male. (Biron 2000, 1)

Biron's observations here highlight the fact that not only did (and, arguably, still does) nationalist discourse in Latin America reinforce the ideal of the nuclear family (thus revealing the heterosexist and bourgeois construction of national discourse), but also how, by coding "active citizenship as male", women were, in effect, excluded from citizenship.

Moreover, regarding the heterosexual relations underlying these familial structures, Doris Sommer's seminal work on nineteenth century novels of nation-formation in Latin America sheds light on the way in which nationalist discourse of the period framed women's roles. In her illuminating analysis of these novels, Sommer has argued that they were instrumental in the establishing of ideas of nationhood, and that this was done by means of using the heterosexual couple as a national allegory. In the words of Sommer, her study explores why "eroticism and nationalism become figures for each other in modernizing fictions" and how "the rhetorical relationship between heterosexual passion and hegemonic states functions as a mutual allegory, as if each discourse were grounded in the allegedly stable other" (Sommer 1991, 31). Again here, woman—and her relationship to the (dominant) male figure she is drawn to—is made to stand for issues such as the progress, unity, and non-violent consolidation of the nation-state. Here, therefore, "foundational fictions" are revealed to function through gendered paradigms, and thus reinforce a normalizing, heterosexist matrix.

All of the examples discussed above reveal the construction of women as problematic *figures* or *tropes* for different features related to nationhood, but not as citizens in their own rights. The crucial issue explored by contributors to the first half of this volume, then, is the following: if woman is conventionally conceived of in national discourse as the bearer of future generations of citizens, but not a citizen herself, what happens when *women* make use of the spaces opened up by modernity to write themselves into national discourse? By what devices do women writers make use of the available discourses in the construction of their tactical agency?

Models and Genres

While the first section focuses, thus, on women's responses to discourses of the nation, the second section proceeds to a consideration of how women writers negotiate literary discourse. Features examined here include woman's function as a literary trope, the gendered hierarchies underlying literary genres, and, subsequently, how Latin American women writers re-engage with this literary heritage. The figure of woman—and I again use the term “woman” here rather than “women”—has had a long history in literature, where woman often appears in particular guises. From classical antiquity, through Romanticism and up to the present day, woman has frequently been cast in the form of the literary muse. Under this guise, woman is evoked by the (male) poet/writer, yet denied a voice of her own since “the muses, evoked by philosophers even prior to the time of Socrates, have been traditionally posited as the “other”, forever, outside the activity of philosophizing” (Allen and Young 1989, 1).

Woman within literature has also, as scholars have revealed, been represented as the problematic “eternal feminine”, a set of mythical characteristics far removed from the lives of real women. In one of the most influential early studies of woman's role within literature (and of feminist inquiry more broadly), *Le deuxième sexe* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir provides a detailed analysis of writers such as Breton, Stendhal and Montherlant, amongst others, to reveal how woman has functioned as myth in literary discourse. Beauvoir reveals that, ranging from Montherlant who inveighs against woman, to Breton who purportedly exalts woman, what predominates in their work are male projections of woman, rather than a consideration of women as subjects in themselves. For Beauvoir, these projections reinforce myths of woman as flesh, woman as nature, and woman as the “other” against which the (male) subject defines himself (Beauvoir 1949, 389).¹³ This research by Beauvoir can be seen as an early example of what has been termed “images of women” criticism,¹⁴ and, whilst Beauvoir's analysis is based predominantly on the classics of French literature, subsequent scholars in a variety of national contexts have explored the construction of female characters in their national classics. In a Latin American context, there have been many such examples, including, most recently, Debra Castillo's, *Easy Women: Sex and Gender in Modern Mexican Fiction* which includes chapters on male writers' representations of women, or Carmiña Navia Velasco's *La mujer protagonista en la narrativa colombiana* (1992), which includes a discussion of the female protagonists

of some of the canonical works of Colombian literature by male writers, including *María*, *Manuela*, and *Cien años de soledad*.

If these are the examples of woman as trope or type within literature, other feminist scholars have also examined the functioning of woman within the mechanisms of literary discourse itself. Susan Gubar has famously argued that literary discourse perpetuates a “predominant model of ‘the pen-penis writing on the virgin page’ which participates in a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive companion” (Gubar 1982, 77). If literary discourse functions primarily on this patriarchal model identified by Gubar, within which the female author is inconceivable, then women writers are permitted neither a role nor the right to author(ity). Women writers therefore, of necessity will need to engage with, or challenge, such a model, and address the very status of writerly activity itself. More generally, with regard to the very medium of literary discourse itself—language—it is almost a commonplace amongst (French) feminist theory to posit woman as silence, woman as lack, woman as excluded from the symbolic order. Luce Irigaray, for instance, in her close reading of leading figures in the Western canon, has argued that patriarchal discourse—and indeed, Western metaphysics—relegates woman to the space of silence, or negation: “La femme n’a pas accès au langage, sinon par le recours à des systèmes de représentations ‘masculines’” (Irigaray 1977, 81). Irigaray’s observations here and in other of her works reveal how discourse functions by assigning woman as a blank space, outside of all systems of representation. In Shoshana Felman’s words, summing up Irigaray: “the woman’s silence or the repression of her capacity to speak, are constitutive of philosophical and of theoretical discourse” (Felman 1975, 3).¹⁵ In this way, for French feminists, for women to write means to engage with and face the challenges of the patriarchal symbolic whose very basis is the exclusion of the category “woman”.¹⁶

Meanwhile, in a more specifically Latin American context, theories about literary discourse have also revealed gender biases. The most notorious of these is Julio Cortázar’s *lector hembra*, a theory advanced vicariously through his “surrogate author” (Vernon 1986, 264) Morelli in *Rayuela*. Here, the *lector hembra* represents a kind of lazy, non-intellectual, passive reader, who lacks the vitality, intellect, and active mind of the *lector cómplice*. If the *lector cómplice* would “llegar a ser copartícipe y copadeciente” in the work of fiction, the *lector hembra* “se quedará con la fachada” (Cortázar 1963, 561), and would read the work on a purely superficial level. Although Cortázar later professed he did not mean the term “hembra” to refer exclusively to the female sex, the fact

that reading styles are encoded in gendered terms, and that these terms are expressed in a hierarchy, are evidence of the gendered assumptions implicit in his model of literary discourse.¹⁷

Thus Latin American women are writing and expressing themselves against a literary heritage which has figured woman as a variety of problematic literary tropes. These figurations are all characterised by their passivity: the various examples noted above illustrate women being enshrined as symbols, tropes or metaphors, but not as agents (authors) in their own right. Latin American women, then, when they take up the word to express themselves, of necessity find themselves forced to engage with this problematic literary heritage. This engagement frequently takes the form of a questioning and challenging of established literary discourse and genres, as will be explored in the chapters making up this volume.

In this way, the two threads of discourse structuring this volume provide for an investigation of how women respond to the ambiguous roles and types embedded within national discourse and literary heritage. That is not to say, however, that these two forms of discourse are always distinct; clearly, there are cross-overs between the two discourses, and many of the examples given above of either national or literary tropes are one and the same. In a specifically Latin American context, scholars such as Doris Sommer have shown that questions of literature and the nation are intricately linked. In Sommer's words, regarding nineteenth-century Latin American literature:

The relationship between novels and new states has a Möbius-like continuity where public and private planes, apparent causes and putative effects, have a way of twisting into one another. "These fictions have helped, from the very beginning, to shape the history which has engendered them", as Djelal Kadir has put it. (Sommer 1991, 7)

In this way, what are in some cases national tropes will be expressed through literary discourse; similarly, what appear to be examples of literary tropes will have resonances with national issues (one could, for example, read Cortázar's *lector hembra* as representative of Argentinean *machismo*, as much as of the patriarchal nature of literary discourse *per se*).

Indeed, the joint issues of national and literary discourse segue most clearly in a particular literary-national feature that has been the subject of much feminist criticism: the national canon. It is in the politics of canon-formation, in which literature is chosen to serve the interests and preserve the values of the nation, where the national-gendered construction of literature most clearly comes to the fore. From this national canon, as has

been widely noted by feminist critics, women are frequently excluded; from the first canon debates informing US feminist criticism (see Fetterley 1978) to recent works of scholarship in Latin America which either lament the lack of women within particular national canons (see Navia Velasco 2006, 4), or, conversely, propose to “re-leer bajo un nuevo canon” (Agosin 1986, 7), the sexual politics of canon formation remain a pressing concern. Whilst it is not the aim of this volume to propose a new national (or international) canon, nor to take the canon as its particular focus, what can be drawn from these canon debates is the way in which established national and literary values are often intertwined. If notions of national heritage and literary heritage frequently converge, then women writers’ responses to these will often be ways of challenging both established literary discourse *and* women’s place within the nation, as will be seen below.

Overview of chapters

Women and Nationhood

The first section of this volume includes six chapters which examine women’s responses to, and attempts to carve out space within, national discourses in a Latin American context. Spanning the nineteenth century to the present day, the chapters offer an insight into the ways in which Latin American women have constructed themselves as modern subjects of the nation, and made use of the ambiguous spaces created by modernization and national discourses. The section starts firstly with a focus on the Southern Cone, covering Chile and Argentina, and then moves geographically northward, to Colombia and Bolivia.

The section opens with a chapter by Iona Macintyre, “*La Argentina* and *La Aljaba*: Analytical Approaches”, which considers two periodicals published between 1830 and 1831 in Buenos Aires. Macintyre reveals that, although the periodicals emphasise and explore the question of female identity, a close attention to issues such as authorship reveals that these publications cannot simply be classified as feminist. Challenging accepted views about *La Argentina* in particular, which have championed it as a recuperation of marginalized women’s writing, Macintyre argues that the feminist label given to it is inaccurate. With regard to the latter, Macintyre illustrates how *La Aljiba* upheld traditional feminine values such as maternity and domesticity, and highlights how its championing of women’s education took place in the context of social stability and national progress.

Following on from this, Claudia Montero's chapter, "Feminist Journals in Latin America 1920-1940: A Space for the Construction of Modern Subjects", continues with the investigation of women's press, but focuses on the early twentieth century. Arguing that they are both product of, and reaction to, the complex spaces opened up by modernization, Montero analyses feminist journals in Chile and Argentina to reveal how they develop feminine subjects and respond to the contradictions of modernity. Montero argues that it is precisely the ambivalence of the process of modernization that creates spaces for women's voices which attempt to legitimate themselves as new social subjects in the complex arena of public debate in Latin America. Montero concludes that in this Latin American context, the weight of traditional roles assigned to women, coupled with the strong presence of the Catholic Church, leads to a feminism which mediates between social liberation and the maternal function.

Continuing with the theme of the construction of identity in relation to modernity, the subsequent chapter by Gloria Hintze "Modernity and Identity: Clorinda Matto de Turner and Alfonsina Storni", analyses texts by two women who participated in Latin America's public spaces during the early twentieth century, and reveals how they critiqued the existing social order. Hintze argues that their writing must be seen as a form of questioning and an act of rebellion, and analyses the way in which they appropriate spaces for new social subjects. Considering their discourse as a way of creating specific social and cultural positions, Hintze analyses how they generate a space for the creation of new identities and new formulations of the national subject. Her examination of their treatment of topics such as women's social roles and economic independence reveals how these two writers defied traditional constructions regarding the position of women in society, and demanded that women's position within the nation be recognised.

Lorna Dillon's chapter which follows continues with the theme of women's dialogue with discourses of the nation, although now with a focus on the representation of national folk culture. In "Defiant Art: The Feminist Dialectic in Violeta Parra's *Arpilleras*", Dillon examines the work of the Chilean artist Violeta Parra, considering in particular the way testimonial and folk elements are evident in her *arpilleras*. Arguing that the choice of the *arpillera* as an artistic medium is reflective of Parra's desire to revive and disseminate folk culture, Dillon considers the ethos and semiotics of Mapuche textiles that are present in her work. Moreover, considering Parra's decision to exhibit her *arpilleras* in a variety of public spaces, Dillon illustrates how this act of bringing the domestic medium to

the public realm can be considered a feminist act, and a form of privileging female folk art. The chapter ends by summarising how Parra sought to preserve and regenerate national folk culture through her art, and to privilege arts and practices traditionally associated with the feminine realm.

Carmina Navia Velasco's chapter, "Writing and Identity in Colombian Women Writers", returns to the written word as a medium, but continues with the consideration of how women's writing is both inflected by, and is an engagement with, national concerns. Starting with Soledad Acosta of the nineteenth century, Navia Velasco examines how her writing reveals the limitations placed on women in an environment hostile to women's education, and how she advocated alternative destinies for women, beyond those of the convent or marriage. Moving into the mid-twentieth century, Navia Velasco explores how, although many of the established traditions in Colombia had started to change, and women made some advances towards autonomy, these advances took place in a contradictory process. Finally, Navia Velasco ends on late 20th and early 21st century literature, focussing on Vera Grave and Luz María Echeverri Lara. Navia Velasco argues that these writers intimately relate their personal tales to the country's political and social movements, and, following Molloy, sees their autobiographical writings as intertwined with the utopian construction of a national alternative.

The final chapter of this section is Gabriela Ovando's "Three Women Articulating their Voices from *el chaupi* in Upper Perú and Bolivia: Catalina de Erauso, Adela Zamudio and Domitila Chungara". Here, Ovando makes use of the notion of *chaupi* as a form of border zone from which these women write, and explores how these three different writers observe their environment and its contradictions in order to question their subaltern, marginalized position, and, in the case of Zamudio and Chungara, help promote significant social change on a national level. With regard to de Erauso, Ovando argues she must be considered a border subject who both challenged, and yet was accepted within, the social structures of her time. Moving onto Zamudio, Ovando explores how she confronted the ecclesiastical hierarchy in defence of Bolivian women's rights to education and by advocating civil marriages and divorce, and highlights her importance in fighting for a greater participation for Bolivian women in national public life. On Chungara, Ovando emphasizes the significant role she played in the process towards democracy on the fall of the Banzer dictatorship, and explores her championing of rights for subaltern subjects and new roles for women as agents of change on the national scene.

Models and Genres

The second section comprises six chapters that examine how women writers engage with, and critically re-work, existing literary discourses and paradigms. Considering phenomena such as detective fiction, fairy tales, and classical mythological figures, the chapters illustrate how these genres and models—frequently coded as masculine—are given new inflections, both as a result of their deployment by women, and as a result of their re-working in a Latin American context.

The section opens with a chapter by Esther María Villegas de la Torre which examines some early examples of women's writing in a Latin American context, and how they engage with existing literary tropes. Entitled "Transatlantic Interactions: Seventeenth-Century Women Authors and Literary Self-Consciousness", her chapter charts the place of women authors in the "Republic of Letters", arguing that they fully embraced the secular, and so did the ways in which they manifested literary self-consciousness. Taking two *relaciones*, one printed in Madrid and one in Mexico, Villegas de la Torre examines their paratexts, which served to validate a public image of the woman author, before moving to a discussion of women's metadiscursive practices. She illustrates how these women authors self-consciously manipulated certain humility tropes with irony and for self-promotional ends, and promoted women's poetic skills from an overtly gendered perspective.

Following on from this, Tania Pleitez Vela, in her "From Antigone to Creon: Traditional Masculine Models in the Poetry of Alfonsina Storni and Rosario Castellanos" considers how models from classical mythology are re-worked in the poetry of Storni and Castellanos. Considering in particular the figure of Antigone as revised by the philosopher María Zambrano, in which Antigone is saved from death and gains self-awareness and self-expression, Pleitez Vela argues that this figure is representative of the poetic self of Storni and Castellanos. Pleitez Vela examines how their poems engage with masculine points of reference from which they have been marginalized, and how the poetic self questions the possibility of establishing a non-hierarchical relationship with the other.

Soledad Montañez's chapter which follows, "The Perverse Comedy: Genre, Gender and Identity in Marosa di Giorgio's *Misales*, *Camino de las Pedrerías*, and *Rosa Mística*", takes as its focus mythical and fairy tale paradigms as they are re-fashioned in the works of Marosa di Giorgio. Montañez illustrates how Marosa di Giorgio makes use of these paradigms to write about eroticism, desire and sexuality within patriarchal, conservative and repressive societies. Montañez further argues that, contrary

to what some critics have stated regarding di Giorgio, these mythical and fairy tale paradigms do not negate the relationship of her work to the social reality in which she lives. Indeed, Montañez argues, the mythical character of Marosa di Giorgio's oeuvre only reaffirms its condition of being a product and a manifestation of society, and thus is in fact closely tied to the contemporary milieu in which she was immersed.

Following on from this, Ana García Chichester examines another literary paradigm, in this case the detective novel, and how it is reworked by Argentine writer Angélica Gorodischer. Entitled "Representing the Female Sleuth: Logic and Femininity in Angélica Gorodischer's *Floreros de alabastro, alfombras de Bokhara*", García Chichester's chapter illustrates how Gorodischer explores the conceptual dilemma of a female detective who is a public, rational and professional woman, on the one hand, and a private, nurturing and emotional person on the other. García Chichester reveals how Gorodischer takes on the challenges of the genre by offering a reluctant practitioner of the craft, and argues that such an approach constitutes a conscious political strategy to explore the social construction of women's lives.

María Teresa Medeiros-Lichem's chapter which follows, "Poligonal Prism of Writing: *Cuentos de Hades* by Luisa Valenzuela", examines the work of the Argentine author Luisa Valenzuela, and reads it through Valenzuela's own literary theories of gender and writing. Taking up Valenzuela's notion of the "lenguaje hémbrico" as developed in "Mis brujas favoritas" (1982), which re-works the literary-cultural myth of woman as witch, Medeiros-Lichem studies the use of fairy tale and mythical figures in Valenzuela's short stories. Paying particular attention to the stories "No se detiene el progreso", "Si esto es la vida, yo soy Caperucita Roja", and "La llave", Medeiros-Lichem reveals how Valenzuela re-works the literary figures of the witch/fairy, Little Red Riding Hood, and Bluebeard, in ways which reverse gender norms and provide for new readings of these patriarchal archetypes. Medeiros-Lichem's chapter thus reveals how Valenzuela's narrative output is marked by a constant concern to develop discursive strategies that textualize gender difference and create a "discourse of one's own" to challenge established patriarchal literary codes.

The final chapter of this section by Mercedes Maroto Camino, "'Ser mujer, ni estar ausente': Sor Juana's Silence in María Luisa Bemberg's *Yo, la peor de todas*", engages with one of Latin America's most prominent female literary figures: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Concentrating on María Luisa Bemberg's biopic of the writer, Maroto Camino pays particular attention to the issue of silence and its representation. Re-working the

traditional figuring of woman as silence, Maroto Camino reads Sor Juana's final silence against Sor Juana's own musings on silence in her *Respuesta*. Maroto Camino argues that silence in this filmic adaptation is ambiguous, being not only a form of "decir nada", but is also an eloquent testimony to Sor Juana's struggle. Maroto Camino thus concludes that Sor Juana's life and work, as depicted by Bemberg, highlights the destruction inflicted on women who dare to think independently in a repressive world run by men, and that her silence becomes a persuasive and powerful statement against misogyny and repression.

Taken together, these chapters explore the variety of engagements with, and responses to, established national-literary paradigms that are undertaken by Latin American women writers. There is, as the contributions show, no one privileged way of making a space for the woman writer in national discourse; similarly, there is no one preferred form for women writers to address and rework literary paradigms. There is no one stance, icon, or literary genre that is more "feminist" per se; it is in their tactical re-use that women writers find the opportunities for self-expression and for challenging patriarchal norms. Thus it is not a case of creating new universals; rather, it is particulars, not universals, that can form a tactic of contestation. It is these particulars—tactical, specific, and localized re-workings—which provide the women writers in this volume with their forms of contestation to existing paradigms.

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Notes

¹ See Foucault's *Surveiller et punir* (1975), in which he argues that subjection ("assujettissement") is both subordination and the putting into place of the subject (Foucault 1975: 34).

² See for instance Di Stefano (1990) for a useful summary of the challenges facing Enlightenment feminism based on humanistic rationalism.

³ Other examples of engagements with post-structuralist critiques of the subject in a Latin American context include John Beverley's arguments that the subject in *testimonio* is not the "coherent, self-evident, self-conscious commanding subject", but instead has the grammatical status of a "shifter" in which it has the "ability to stand for the experience of [the] community as a whole" (Beverley 1993, 83).

⁴ The term "grand narrative" or "metanarrative" was used by Jean-François Lyotard in his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), in which he argues that the postmodern era is characterized by increasing scepticism towards grand narratives, conceived of as universal truths.

⁵ See for instance Sue Clegg, who notes that 'agency, both individual and collective, is at the heart of the feminist [...] projects' (Clegg 2006, 309)

⁶ See for instance, bell hooks's question over whether we should be "suspicious of postmodern critiques of the 'subject' when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people find themselves coming to voice for the first time" (hooks 1989, 425).

⁷ My use of the terms 'statesmen' and 'men of letters' is intentional here: what becomes clear from the study of foundational fictions is not merely the fact that nation and literature are allied, but that the discourses established and perpetuated by both are gendered.

⁸ See for instance Diana Taylor's comments on the links between the terms 'patria' and 'patriarchy' (Taylor 1997, 77-78).

⁹ Here, and throughout this section, I use the term “woman” to indicate the artificial and universalising concepts of woman as established by official discourses. This contrasts to “women”, which would refer to real women and their lived experience.

¹⁰ I am here of course making reference to Benedict Andersen’s famous formulation of the nation as “imagined community” (Andersen 1983).

¹¹ See Octavio Paz, “Los hijos de la Malinche” in his *El laberinto de la soledad* (1998), pp. 202-227. The extent to which Paz is actually endorsing the model he explores in this chapter is of course under question; nevertheless, the fact that he fails to offer any viable alternative means that his analysis of necessity remains within the terms he is critiquing.

¹² The defining binary referred to here is that first expounded by Domingo F. Sarmiento in his influential but controversial *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie* of 1848 which presented his native Argentina as being characterized by the binary of civilization and barbarism. This binary has remained one of the central points of discussion in Argentine national discourse, with subsequent generations of writers and thinkers returning to Sarmiento’s binary to engage with, modify, or challenge it.

¹³ In the original French, this reads “*l’Autre privilégiée à travers lequel le sujet s’accomplit*”.

¹⁴ See K. K. Ruthven, *Feminist Literary Studies*, for a discussion of the boundaries of, and problems with, “images of women” criticism (pp. 70-83).

¹⁵ Felman then goes on to critique Irigaray’s insistence on woman as silence, by raising a series of questions about Irigaray’s own enunciatory position.

¹⁶ Irigaray has theorized that the patriarchal system of language leaves women with only two options: babble or mimicry. In the words of Toril Moi, Irigaray argues that “woman can choose either to remain silent, producing incomprehensible babble [...] or to *enact* the specular representation of herself as a lesser male” (p.135). I would not, however, want to restrict women’s self-expression to these two modes solely; rather, what I take from Irigaray is her critique of literary-philosophical discourse which excludes the feminine. From this starting point a variety of writers and theorists have argued for different strategies of expressing the feminine. Just as other French feminists proposed alternative models—amongst the most famous of these being Hélène Cixous’s *écriture féminine*, (Cixous 1975) and Julia Kristeva’s semiotic (Kristeva 1980)—so too, Latin American women in their writings and self-expressions make use of a variety of tactics for self-expression.

¹⁷ Indeed, although Cortázar later said he regretted the phrase, Jean Franco has argued that in fact his perceptions of gender difference did not undergo any radical change, as evinced in his replies to Evelyn Picón Garfield in *Cortázar por Cortázar*, and in his articles on Nicaragua (Franco 1999, 422).