WHENCE THE OTHER SPEAKS: A TRANSNATIONAL APPROACH TO HOME AND DISCOURSE IN THE FICTIONAL NARRATIVES OF MARÍA AMPARO RUIZ DE BURTON AND TERESA DE LA PARRA

A Dissertation

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Abstract

by

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Californian María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832-1895), considered the first U.S. Latina writer, and Venezuelan author Teresa de la Parra (1889-1936) shattered cultural boundaries as public critics who exposed social oppression and exclusion from citizenship while situating their works in the domestic, private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy and gendered subjectivities. Along with gender, class, and race, “home” operates as an ideological marker of the subject, where exclusionary practices and repetitions construct self-identity as much as they establish difference, otherness. Stemming from these concepts, my thesis draws on the Foucauldian rendition of discourse as a medium through which relations of power produce speaking subjects and the realities of which they speak. Building on this model, I propose we approach home as a discursive site (and product of discourse) that is no longer simply the domain of the domestic sphere. Rather, this new idea of home is an in-between space where silence becomes voice, located in an unstable, uncomfortable place of enunciation. It is the perspective of the other made manifest.
Home, then, becomes the site where the other becomes self in the narratives of these women writers.

My dissertation explores how María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s and Teresa de la Parra’s novels manipulate dominant discourses through different linguistic and narrative strategies that privilege the other, ultimately rendering the discursive object into a subject, a speaking agent who reclaims the power of voice. Their fiction thus complicates established sites of power and dichotomies delineated by gendered and racialized borders (public/private, white/non-white) while creating a space of their own, a conceptual home from where the historically home-bound object, as it were, speaks, thus transforming itself into a privileged subject. The conventional notions of home, then, are questioned and expanded, and home transcends bounded definitions of belonging and permanence to suggest, instead, the possibility of reshaping subjectivities, allowing us to rethink designations of class, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and how these affect and influence the way in which we see ourselves with relation to the world. Oftentimes, the abstractions that outline and that are at the same time contained in this conception of home are rendered visible in the novels precisely by way of discursive strategies.
This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Tomás Rodrigo Pérez Rodríguez, whose unreserved love, relentless encouragement, and everlasting presence continue to guide me patiently throughout every stage of my life.

Verdad, papá.
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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

America has a deeply confused image of itself that is in perpetual tension. We are a nation that takes pride in our ethnic diversity, recognizing its importance in shaping our society and in adding richness to its existence. Yet, we simultaneously insist that we can and must function and live in a race and color-blind way that ignores these very differences .... Many of us struggle with this tension and attempt to maintain and promote our cultural and ethnic identities in a society that is often ambivalent about how to deal with its differences .... [W]e must remember that it is not political struggles that create a Latino or Latina identity. But achieving success here is no easy accomplishment for Latinos or Latinas, and although that struggle did not and does not create a Latina identity, it does inspire how I live my life.

- Sonia Sotomayor (2001)¹

1.1 “A Wise Latina Woman”

Sonia Sotomayor, the first Hispanic judge ever nominated to the Supreme Court, awaits confirmation by the United States Senate,² a confirmation that could well “hinge

¹ Sonia Sotomayor, the daughter of Puerto Rican immigrants, was born and raised in New York. A graduate of Princeton and Harvard Law School, Sotomayor has been a judge on the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for a decade, having previously worked as a district judge for six years. The biography of Sotomayor can be found on a variety of websites, including Wikipedia. This information was taken from ABC News: http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/popup?id=7715533.

² The confirmation hearings are expected to begin in October of the current year (2009), thus the controversy remains such at the moment of revising this introduction.
on one sentence she uttered more than seven years ago,” as reported by CNN on May 28, 2009. The sentence itself covers thirty two out of the almost four thousand words she articulated as part of her address as speaker of the Judge Mario G. Olmos Memorial Lecture at the University of California School of Law in Berkeley: “… I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn’t lived that life.” The reaction brought about by this sole sentence, divorced entirely of its context, raises significant questions related not only to the place of gender and ethnicity in current political and national debates, but also with relation to individual preconceptions inherent in perceptions of gender and ethnicity.

Much of this reaction, of course, is influenced by political ideologies. Former Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich, radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, and some Republican members of Congress expressed their concerns about Sotomayor’s “racism.” Employing a popular social network, Gingrich twittered his remark, maintaining that “white man racist nominee would be forced to withdraw. Latina woman racist nominee should also withdraw” (qtd. in Condon). Limbaugh articulated his opinion using the sort of language for which he is well known: “Obama is the greatest living example of a reverse racist, and now he’s appointed one … to the U.S. Supreme Court …. We are confronting a radical assault on this nation, a radical assault today on the U.S. Supreme Court” (qtd. in Condon). These join other public declarations, made

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3 This article, produced by John King and Eliott C. McLaughlin, is available online: http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/05/28/sotomayor.latina.remark.reax.

primarily by conservative public figures, to classify the first African American (first non-white) President of the nation and the first Hispanic judge to be appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court as “reverse racists.”

Sotomayor’s “radical assault” on the nation, or racism against white men, stems from her acknowledgment that ethnicity matters. As we read through her entire lecture, we learn that her own ethnicity is rooted in how her subjecthood was formed, in family traditions cultivated within her childhood home: “The story of [my family’s] success [in immigrating to this country and securing a better life] is what made me and what makes me the Latina that I am. The Latina side of my identity was forged and closely nurtured by my family through our shared experiences and traditions.”5 As she points out that there is no single Latina identity that defines all Latina women, and that being of Hispanic heritage is but one aspect of her identity, Sotomayor also stresses that speaking Spanish does not define a Latino citizen. After sharing some of the personal “ingredients” that delineate the “Latina side of [her] identity” (food, music, playing dominoes and bingo, etc.), she presents her audience with “a very academic description of what being a Latino or Latina means”: “… those peoples and cultures populated or colonized by Spain who maintained or adopted Spanish or Spanish Creole as their language or communication.” Given that humor, as she states, is ingrained in a Latino/a identity, she follows that definition asserting, “[y]ou can tell that I have been very well educated.” But such an academic description is so “antiseptic,” she adds, that it does not

5 This and following passages from Judge Sotomayor’s lecture are cited from the reproduction of her speech on The New York Times on May 14, 2009, located online at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/15/us/politics/15judge.text.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all. Being an electronic document, it also lacks pagination.
explain adequately why individuals like herself identify so deeply with the communities whence their parents came.

Such academic descriptions, uncontaminated by any affective dimension (“antiseptic,” as she calls it), to define what makes up one’s identity, one’s self, reminds us of Edward Said’s objection “of an almost purely academic version of multiculturalism with which many people in the real world of ethnic division, conflict, and chauvinism would find it difficult to identify” (“Globalizing” 66). A public woman like Sonia Sotomayor, with political and judicial power, who has experienced both the “purely academic” and the “real world” of ethnic difference, embodies hope to other women and minorities: “I warn Latinos in this room: Latinas are making a lot of progress in the old-boy network.” And even though the emphasis of the cited reactions has been placed on a “racial” matter, it appears she also embodies a threat based on her gender. The outrage thus far claims offense founded on the “white” aspect of her sentence (“wise Latina” versus “white male”), but it becomes clear that the “male” component has indeed marred certain sensibilities in some of these reactors. Former presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, for instance, has stated that “[t]he notion that appellate court decisions are to be interpreted by the ‘feelings’ of the judge is a direct affront of the basic premise of our judicial system that is supposed to apply the law without personal emotion” (CNN).6 Sonia Sotomayor does not mention either “feelings” or “emotion” in the referenced address with regard to the judicial system, except when she refers to the language embedded in paternalistic laws that denied women the right to vote because they acted

6 This passage is found on a report by CNN published on their website on May 28, 2009: http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/05/28/sotomayor.latina.remark.reax/. Mike Huckabee, incidentally, also refers to the judge as “Maria,” an “error” that was promptly corrected.
“intuitively” owing to their innate inability for “reasoning and [for] thinking logically.” Huckabee’s use of such affective terms points to the preconceptions alluded at the beginning of this section.

Questioning such preconceptions of race and gender publicly is bound to bring conflicting rejoinders. When Sotomayor wonders “whether by ignoring our differences as women and men of color we do a disservice to the law and society,” she is postulating the need for theories that explore the different “ways of being” that cannot be addressed by traditional legal doctrines. As she states, “[n]o one person, judge or nominee will speak in a female or people of color voice.” She further cites Professor Martha Minnow of Harvard Law School, agreeing that “there is no objective stance but only a series of perspectives – no neutrality, no escape from choice in judging.” She aspires to impartiality, she says, while accepting that people’s experiences as women and ethnic minorities indeed affect their decisions even when they are “based on the reason of law.” Whether acquired through experience or inherent in cultural differences, Sotomayor admits that gender and national heritage influence how a judge will lean on specific laws related to race and sex discrimination cases.

As a prelude to the now famous sentence, Sotomayor mentions that Justice Sandra Day O’Connor has often been cited as saying that “a wise old man and wise old woman” will decide cases rooted on the same approach. Sotomayor disagrees. First, she states, there can never be one universal definition of wise. Second, a white male will never be able to reach the same conclusion as a “wise Latina woman” with her specific personal experiences as such. It is this second aspect of her clarification that has made such a splash on current news media – on print, radio, television, and electronic venues alike.
Although she believes that individuals of different experiences and backgrounds can be capable of understanding the needs of people from a different group, the truth is that “to understand takes time and effort, something that not all people are willing to give.” This points to the heart of her lecture: she hopes to extrapolate her own experiences into areas with which she is unfamiliar, she states, but she accepts that she will probably make some legal decisions based on her gender and her Latina heritage, especially related to cases involving race and sex discrimination.

Aspiring to be “greater than the sum total” of her experiences, Sotomayor “willingly accept[s] that we who judge must not deny the differences resulting from experience and heritage but attempt, as the Supreme Court suggests, continuously to judge when those opinions, sympathies and prejudices are appropriate” (emphasis added). Though we do not intend to argue when it is appropriate to employ “relative morality,” it is important to note that the context surrounding the much criticized sentence has been cut out in its entirety from this debate on “reverse racism.” In fact, these differences are continuously disregarded in public discourse while enforced in public practice. Consider this article published by the American Civil Rights Institute, stating that “[i]t doesn’t matter whether the Constitution’s drafters owned slaves or believed blacks were subhuman. It really doesn’t. What matters is the U.S. Constitution, as ratified, provides the best protection against discrimination based on the color of one’s skin” (emphasis in original). Identity politics, the article continues to claim, has rendered a “mind-numbingly politically correct atmosphere” in which Sotomayor can

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7 Published on the American Civil Rights Institute website, and accessible here: http://www.acri.org/blog/2009/05/26/sonia-sotomayor-obamas-wise-latina-woman/.
make such outrageous claims and not be penalized for it. The article, interestingly enough, suggests that removing her as a nominee would be “politically incorrect” because she is a woman and a Latina, while at the same time it chastises her precisely for making claims that defy “politically correct” discourse.

1.2 Locating Feminist Spaces in Modernity

Claiming that experiences based on our gender, ethnicity, and class influence our decisions as judges, students, teachers, or writers, Sotomayor joins the sometimes purely academic, but obviously also public and national, debate on global and minority studies. Maria Echaveste, President Clinton’s former deputy chief of staff, agrees with Sonia Sotomayor, declaring, “What is wisdom but knowledge and experience – and experience that comes from being who you are?” (CNN.com). How we are formed epistemologically is what makes us who we are. Selfhood is made up of individual experience that comes from particular knowledges influenced by our gender, class, and ethnicity. The studies that focus on how the self is constructed and shaped vary in disciplines almost as sundry as their object of study. Where the self is formed, that space that is both physical and psychic, is where the interest of this dissertation falls. That space, which we are calling “home” in this project, is manifested in diverse ways across the novels here examined. Sonia Sotomayor’s well-known case, thus, is a modern example that serves as a springboard spanning a variety of vectors. The Latina part of her self clashes with the history that precedes it, a history pervaded with similar instances where issues of race, gender, and class conflate with the spaces that fill nation, community, and home – both as household and as metaphor for self. This is of particular
relevance to the second and third chapters of this dissertation, both of which involve the novels of the first known Latina writer from over a century ago. Gender, class, and ethnicity adhere here to concepts of self, subjectivity, and subjecthood, as found in current critical and theoretical debates.

In the last two or three decades, for instance, feminist criticism has readopted the concept of home to examine the influence that “home” – both as physical and psychic spaces – has on the construction of subjecthood. Many scholars share the belief that one’s identity is formed by one’s experience of home. Justine Lloyd and Lesley Johnson, for instance, study and polemicize popular narratives and films about women’s lives in the 1940s and 1950s, arguing that such post-war histories reveal a tension between domesticity as woman’s proper social role, the domestic as a contested space of male and female subjectivity, and the construction of the figure of the housewife as problematic with modernity.\^8 Modernity, understood here in its broad description as the past several hundred years in Western history, may also be defined “by the rise to prominence of the self, or at least as the phase in which the concept of the self became fixed in Western culture” (Worthington 1). The worldview grounded on scientific advances in the late sixteenth century engendered new ways of conceiving the universe, separate from the old Aristotelian school of thought that searched for meaning “out there,” outside of the individual. With the Enlightenment came the promotion of reasoning, free-thinking

\^8 In their article, “The Three Faces of Eve: The Post-War Housewife, Melodrama, and Home” (2003), Lloyd and Johnson explore the contradictions found in such texts and films, suggesting that the tension between the discourses of modernity and femininity found in them demonstrates a shift in the roles of modern subjects as shaped by the domestic space. In other words, the concepts of woman as subject of home and woman as participant in the public sphere (defined by them in traditional terms as the gendered space associated with male power) were beginning to be recognized and questioned even if not yet reconciled.
subjects who would challenge established dogma by turning inward “in the search for grounding authority” (2). The Romantic period celebrated self-expression and autonomous minds. Concurring with philosopher and literary critic Rodolphe Gasché, Kim Worthington holds that post-Enlightenment thought might be understood as “a metaphysics of subjectivity” founded in the capacity to be sovereign and self-reflexive human beings (3). The past several decades have likewise produced a number of critical and theoretical studies that focus on self-formation and, inherent with it, the construction of the Other. A much more limited body of work examines home as a site where these processes take place.

Almost two decades prior to Lloyd’s and Johnson’s article, for instance, Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty had published “Feminist Politics: What’s Home Got to Do with It?” (1986), a study of home as desire and as metaphor in feminist writings, and its configuration with relation to identity and community. Their article is in turn a response to Minnie Bruce Pratt’s own text, “Identity: Skin Blood Heart” (1984), in which home appears as a desirable place, but also as a complicated and painful site where one may feel at home only to be rejected, and where one’s identity is constructed based on what one is not. These and other notable feminists question not only the concept of home, but the notions of identity and subjectivity as well. In her introduction to Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, Chandra Mohanty also emphasizes the need to think outside the preconception that “simply being a woman, or being poor or black or Latino, is sufficient ground to assume a politicized oppositional identity” (33). As Sotomayor reiterates, political struggle does not define ethnic or gender identity, but it does influence how an individual lives her life.
The concepts of subjectivity and identity, then, have become essential in the definition of home as the space of self-formation, particularly in recent feminist scholarship. Space dichotomies, such as the public/private sphere opposition, have delineated the discursive boundaries that situate women inside while men hold authority and create laws in the space beyond the domestic walls. According to Cubitt and Greenslade, the distinction created between the public sphere as equivalent to men and the private sphere as the apolitical domestic space of women has also fostered an essentialist version of women’s subjectivities that reinforces the space dichotomy and, therefore, the social roles played by both men and women (Vargas Arenas 235). Hence some feminists have argued that the history of modernity has focused primarily on the experiences of men, given that modernity is often studied in terms of work, politics, and city living. Lesley Johnson (1999), for instance, examines modernity in light of feminist thought, and critiques Betty Friedan’s work in The Feminine Mystique (1963) for her emphasis on defining tradition as a form of oppression, as something women must reject if they are to liberate themselves from ascribed roles of wife and mother. Home, then, as domestic space, is defined as a space of subjugation by Friedan. Teresa de

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9 My dissertation supports this idea along with the deconstruction of binary opposites such as this one. We will engage, nonetheless, in the use of these terms only as they apply to specific circumstances within our analysis. For, as Nikki Craske asserts, “[b]y linking their activities in the public and private spheres, and not seeing one as subordinate of the other, but both as equally important parts of their lives and identities, women are taking political action around these identities” (104).

10 Janet Wolff (1990) argues that the “public sphere” is an area in which women have been historically excluded. Wolff also argues that the literature of modernity has, nevertheless, also been silent about the lives of women and “a crucial part of men’s lives” in the private space (qtd. in Johnson “Housewives” 476).

11 In this introduction, we do not contextualize Betty Friedan and her work within the 1950s and 1960s simply because the emphasis lies on Johnson’s critique about the connection between the domestic space and the construction of oppression through tradition.
Lauretis, quoting Simone de Beauvoir, writes, “Humanity is male … and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being …. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (“Eccentric Subjects” 116). Using de Beauvoir’s words as a theoretical springboard, de Lauretis suggests that feminism today is a community whose boundaries are not absolute; they shift in historical consciousness, and this shift entails

…a dis-placement and a self-displacement: leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is "home" – physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically – for another place that is unknown and risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually other; a place of discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain, unguaranteed. (138)

This new approach to feminist thinking, what Latina feminist writer Cherríe Moraga would call “theory of the flesh” (23), characterizes a perpetual crossing of the border, an in-between place that is “unstable, unpredictable, precarious” and that Gloria Anzaldúa connects to nepantla, “a constant state of displacement – an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling” (1). Fittingly for my purposes in this dissertation, the definition of “home” as applied to each chapter – sometimes as metaphor and other times as

12 In a critical compilation that followed This Bridge Called My Back (1983), Gloria Anzaldúa presents nepantla as “tierra desconocida” “unknown land,” a liminal space where “the new mestiza” moves: “I use the word nepantla to theorize liminality and to talk about those who facilitate passages between worlds, whom I’ve named nepantleras. I associate nepantla with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another” (This Bridge We Call Home 1). De Lauretis’ revision of feminist theory indeed verges on Anzaldúa’s theoretical approach to the “new” feminist thinking that must be done in this liminal, insecure space that she nevertheless also calls “home.”
conventional household – also resembles a liminal space of unpredictable nature, at times described in similar affective terms, yet it is a space created by the authors, and represented within their respective novels, as a site from which they speak.

1.3 A Question of Gender

Just as Sotomayor has indicated that her “Latinness” does not conflate with ethnic struggle, and as Mohanty proposes we move beyond the notion that being a woman or ethnic minority does not imply a political oppositional identity, so historian Linda Gordon reminds us of our misled tendency of equating women with feminism, stressing that femaleness and feminist consciousness are not equivalent terms:

If there are contradictions within feminism, it should be understood that there are traditions of female thought, women’s culture, and female consciousness that are not feminist…. The female is ourselves, our bodies and our socially constructed experience. It is not the same as feminism, which is not a ‘natural’ excretion of that experience but a controversial political interpretation and struggle, by no means universal to women. (30)

While proposing a new feminist scholarship that also questions what is constituted as female, Gordon envisions this scholarship as a liminal method, as “a condition of being constantly pulled, usually off balance, sometimes teetering wildly, almost always tense” (22). Her vision of a new way of producing history certainly echoes that of Anzaldúa and Moraga, as cited above, with relation to studying and producing women’s writings: we
should stop attempting to find resolutions that cancel out both poles of this tension – poles that are defined by femaleness/feminism, male/female, dominance/resistance, etc.  

This dissertation will certainly not attempt a similar resolution. Nor will it even endeavor to analyze the texts employing purely feminist methods. The purpose of this dissertation was clear when it began: to propose a way of reading these particular texts that emphasized a re-appropriation of traditional “feminine” spaces, such as the household as represented in fiction as well as “less physical” sites like “sentimental” writing modes, to empower their own functions as women writers. Along the way, this previously unambiguous intention became disjointed to a certain degree, as capricious as the analyses of the texts themselves. Nonetheless, this project continues to strive to that end, and hopes that it will prove to be a valuable contribution to the scholarship that dedicates itself to the revision of fiction written by women. I also agree with poet Adrienne Rich when she claims that “[r]e-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (35). It is in this spirit that this project was created.

Oftentimes women’s writings are mined for and read under a light of resistance to some type of male domination. Gordon highlights two tendencies in this respect. She underscores Simone de Beauvoir’s efforts in defining women as the Other, thus inviting them to confront their pain and disillusion (23). But she also cites Mary Beard, much

13 Gordon’s opposing poles are constituted by dissimilar ways of approaching history: one pole directed historians to rectify past errors through the assumption of truth; the other rejects the possibility of objectivity and accepts the “humanistic” story-telling function of history.

14 I believe Gordon refers to de Beauvoir’s argument in The Second Sex that men had rendered women the Other in society by putting a false aura of “mystery” around them. But she also argues that this
less well known than de Beauvoir, “the no-nonsense capable matron [who] wrote and embodied women’s capability, not their fragility” (23). I do not agree that one necessarily excludes the other, for we can empower women – or even the “idea” of women – through writing, and one way of doing so is to show their various “capabilities” – as the women here studied have done. However, that does not suppose a non-resistance element. In other words, the mere act of writing already assumes a quality of resistance, particularly in the nineteenth century and early twentieth, in the United States as much as in Venezuela. Furthermore, I do agree that the traditions of women’s writings should not be regarded as subordinate or simply relative to fiction produced by male authors. Both traditions ought to be considered parallel to each other. Bearing this in mind, nonetheless, it evidently has become necessary to dedicate specialized research and critical reviews to women’s writings precisely because men’s literature dominated the study of literature, on a universal scale, for so long. The women writers here examined represent traditions other than the historically dominant literary institution. They also correspond to “the other” as regarded by their respective nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century societies. However, today, as teachers and academics, we must study them as primary and not simply as relational to the male tradition any longer. As in world literature, seeing men’s and women’s literatures as separate yet related (not

stereotyping was always carried out in societies by the group higher in the hierarchy to the “lower” groups. She further reasons that this also happens on the basis of other categories of identity, such as race, class, and religion, although she does stress that it is nowhere more true than with sex and gender, which men use as an excuse to organize society into a patriarchy. As an existentialist, Beauvoir accepted Sartre’s precept that existence precedes essence; hence one is not born a woman, but becomes one. Her analysis focuses on the Hegelian concept of the Other: it is the social construction of Woman as the quintessential Other that Beauvoir identifies as fundamental to women’s oppression. For feminism to move forward, she believed, we must put aside the belief that men (or Man) are the ideal toward which women should aspire, given that women were perceived as “deviations” from the normal, in a constant struggle to “normalize” or become “men-like.”
relative) by sociohistorical circumstances or simply by aesthetic dispositions can only help to suspend the tension to which Linda Gordon alludes, and which can illuminate new paths of reading such literatures and histories. Joyce W. Warren writes that “in world literature, traditions … which focus on interpersonal relationships between men and women, relating the individual to society, are the major traditions” (ix). The novels studied in this dissertation engage a thematic framework where those relationships come afloat while they are questioned and challenged. Looking at the works produced by these women writers helps to locate them within a tradition of world literature, at the same time remapping literary history within and beyond national borders.

The fact that Californian María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832-1895) and Venezuelan Teresa de la Parra (1889-1936) were both women authors should not, however, immediately insinuate that they were feminists, or that they even held feminist “agendas” while writing their novels. In fact, their approaches to gender roles vary significantly as represented in the female characters and the thematic frameworks, not to mention their own private correspondence. Both writers certainly defended their personal values, but they did so in varying degrees and differing manners. They used narrative strategies to either conceal or illustrate their purposes, and it is through these that we can begin to examine whether and to what extent their fictional texts constitute sites of resistance. As Teresa de Lauretis states in the introduction to Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, the very notion of resistance has varied historically through rather diverse meanings, “translating into different practices and strategies that must be assessed and developed each in its concrete sociohistorical situation” (3). Indeed, all chapters in this dissertation situate each text in its particular sociohistorical context, and it is in keeping
with such contextualization that they are examined. Each woman, likewise, is different from other women, and bearing in mind this “difference-within-difference” stance has been essential in the approach of each of the three novels, in which women characters vary from each other about as much as men and women do.

1.4 Ideology Meets Pragmatism

An important aspect to keep in mind while studying women’s writings that may challenge prescribed social norms are what Susan K. Harris calls “the conditions of production” (266). That is, the demands and expectations by publishing houses, reviewers, and readers (“buyers”) that women writers could not ignore if they wanted to publish their work. With an acute awareness of her intended readership, for instance, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton needed, first of all, to write in English. Owing to the dual purpose embedded in Ruiz de Burton’s endeavor, her strategies within the narrative seem to have been guided by the need to render her books accepted and recognized. Her objective, in other words, embraced both ideological and economic purposes.

15 For an extensive and well-researched study on American fiction written by women authors, see Mary Kelley’s Private Woman, Public Stage (1984). In her book, Kelley examines twelve women writers who were “commercially successful” insofar as they not only were able to publish their work, but also privileged and challenged “domestic expectations” within a culture a domesticity. That is, they managed to reconcile public recognition with traditional roles ascribed to women, like those of mother and wife. The fiction these women created is what Kelley calls “literary domesticity.” Susan K. Harris veers somewhat from the authors’ biographical circumstances, which is the focus of Kelley’s book, and directs our attention instead to what is at the heart’s interest in this dissertation: how the writers managed to privilege “the other” while at the same time maintaining the social sense of public morality. Each writer approaches this position in distinctive ways.
1.4.1 María Amparo Ruiz de Burton

In *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872), analyzed in the second chapter of this dissertation, Ruiz de Burton critiques deep-seated racist practices in the ideologically abolitionist New English society. Written in the wake of the Civil War, it is significant to note that the issue of slavery is absent in this novel. Nonetheless, the question of race – and how it is perceived – is at the heart of this story about an apparently dark-skinned girl, Lola, living with a white, abolitionist New England family in the years preceding the war. The novel exposes significant race and class contradictions in the ante-bellum period, such as the pronounced racial prejudice among some Christian abolitionists. In this chapter, I examine the complexities of racial perception in the novel with relation to class. While the novel satirizes and critiques the injustice of racial prejudice embodied in the character of “painted” Lola, I argue that the novel itself also contributes to and reinforces the problem it critiques: from the onset of the novel, for instance, it is emphasized that Lola’s skin – “stained” by a southwestern Indian tribe – will not only be beautiful once her darkness disappears, but her wealth will no longer contradict her perceived “race.” Once the threat of difference has been abolished in this upper-middle-class home, a happy marriage ensues. This chapter concludes, finally, that Ruiz de Burton’s critique, far from suggesting an end to a socially perpetuated racial prejudice, in fact reinforces the social and legal construction of race and white entitlement through the elimination of difference within the domestic sphere.

The author’s ideological intent is not simply to critique New Englanders’ racism, but to “privilege” the new Mexican-American citizens by likening them to morally upright white American characters in the novel like Dr. Norval, his daughter Mattie, and
his son (Lola’s would-be husband), Julian. Opposite to these virtuous characters stand Mrs. Norval and other characters that mirror her hypocritical and racist values. Represented as a Puritan Yankee, Mrs. Norval embodies the household matron in charge of the domestic administration. At first sight of “the little black girl,” Lola, Mrs. Norval protests against Lola’s dark skin color and demands that she sleep in the maids’ chambers, that she work to earn food and housing, and that she keep away from other family members lest the girl contaminate the racial purity of their home. In fact, it is Mrs. Norval who first associates Lola with a diseased body. The story quickly turns as Mrs. Norval surrenders such demands in exchange for Lola’s fortune, which the family uses to escalate the socioeconomic ladder throughout the novel. Mrs. Norval’s rise and fall from social privilege revolves around Lola’s gold and precious gems, which had been collected by her Spanish mother while they were captives by an Apache tribe. As Dr. Norval leaves New England in a sort of self exile to Egypt to avoid political persecution for being “a good-for-nothing Democrat” during the Civil War, Mrs. Norval has unguarded access to Lola’s wealth and it is here that the narrative shifts focus to underscore the ingrained corruption in the New England middle-class Christian abolitionist circles. The Protestant Christian religion is critiqued through the character of Mr. Hackwell, Mrs. Norval’s minister and another exploiter of Lola’s wealth, who eventually marries Mrs. Norval when her husband is presumed dead. Lola, on the other hand, is Catholic, like the noble Dr. Norval, and her respectable behavior throughout the novel, even during Mrs. Norval’s malicious demeanor, only serves to render her and her “pure Spanish” heritage as superior. Lola, then, presents herself as worthy of citizenship through her wealth and her ultimate whiteness.
Some critics have read the death of Lola’s mother in the Southwest as emblematic of the eighty thousand Mexicans who were in effect “orphaned” by the resulting consequences of the Mexican-American War in 1848. Julie Ruiz has suggested that Lola’s “escape from Indian captivity in the Southwest symbolizes the cleansing of Mexican national identity from the ‘stain’ of U.S. imperialism during the Mexican War” (112). But it is important to note that the critique is not simply focused on an American/Mexican dichotomy. Indeed, the narrative’s insistence on Lola’s whiteness and European lineage as contrasted to mestizo Mexicans expounds the nuances within the heirs of colonial Spanish culture. In Mexico as well as in the Spanish Southwest during the nineteenth century, and particularly in California, there was a social hierarchy marked by purity of heritage and skin color: gente de razón (“people of reason”) included Spanish criollos or Creole, the direct descendants of Spaniards; while the gente sin razón category (“people without reason”) designated Native Americans (dark-skinned laborers, primarily). Lola’s mother, Doña Teresa, insists that Lola be raised as gente de razón and as Roman Catholic (another prerequisite for being gente de razón). Using Indian labor, Doña Teresa is able to amass the great fortune she leaves her daughter. Jesse Alemán argues that her use of Indian labor and natural resources relate to the indigenous exploitation of Spanish colonization (“Citizenship” 11), although it would be difficult to reconcile this scenario with Ruiz de Burton’s intent, particularly because it contradicts the overriding defense of the Spanish elite in the United States during that time period. Nevertheless, Alemán attempts to deconstruct the narrative, asserting that it inadvertently

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connects Lola, as a sort of white Spanish colonizer, to Anglo-American colonialism in that both construct whiteness by racializing and subjugating Others.

Ruiz de Burton, then, creates and maintains a cultural whiteness that allows her characters to appear worthy of American citizenship rights. As Alemán observes, Lola changes “from black to white, and [is] seen as Indian and Spanish, [thus passing] through various stages of racial identity – black, Indian, brown, spotted’ white, and finally, ‘pure’ white.” Through this metamorphosis, “Lola’s racial ambiguity thus draws on two competing codes: an Anglo American one that defines race as white or black, and a Spanish/Mexican caste system that recognizes multiple levels of hybrid racial identity” (“Citizenship” 10). The recognition of hybrid racial identities notwithstanding, the Spanish caste does privilege the “pure” white over the rest, as does María Amparo Ruiz de Burton in this narrative to facilitate acceptance of the (white, if at least “culturally”) Mexican as the newly acquired citizens by the United States entitled to the same rights as the Anglo American.

Ruiz de Burton’s ideological purpose is perhaps best outlined in her second novel, and the focus of our third chapter, The Squatter and the Don (1885). In keeping with a defense of the elite Mexican population of California after it became a territory of the United States, Ruiz de Burton fashions this novel around a Californio family, the Alamars, struggling to retain their property, which is at risk owing to American laws that

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17 The term Californio points to the heritage shared by descendants of Spaniards who settled in California as part of the colonization process. It is equivalent to criollo in that it denotes the absence of mixing with non-European groups like Native Americans. It is thus a label that designates “racial purity”: “Californio whiteness is not just any kind of whiteness, but the most genteel kind,” writes Carrie Tirado Bramen in The Uses of Variety (2000). It also assumes a privileged social position, oftentimes accompanied by an advantaged economic situation as well. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton was a Californio woman who enjoyed social advantages due to her class position, although she also engaged in land litigation for many years up to her death in 1895.
benefit Anglos who settle on their farm land. José F. Aranda, Jr. states that Ruiz de Burton’s intent with this novel is to “wage a rhetorical war on the conquerors” (“Impulses” 554). Through this narrative, Ruiz de Burton hopes to bring the predicament of land litigation to public light and to persuade Anglo readers that the treatment received by upper-class Californios via the American legal system is both unjust and unjustified. In acquiring the “language of authority” (Bourdieu 113), Ruiz de Burton does not simply employ a language that can be understood by her intended readers, but she must manipulate it in such a way as to demonstrate the worthiness and legitimacy of the Californio people. In order to enter into the legal and moral contract as American citizens, the Californios are represented, once again, as highly morally principled and as a people whose conduct is honorable, beyond any reproach. The Californio rancher, embodied in the novel by Don Mariano Alamar and his family, is contrasted with the newly arrived Anglos, some of whom are honest settlers but most of whom are depicted as uncouth, violent, and greedy squatters.

Home in this novel is approached primarily as land, and its loss is read not unlike the process that “orphaned” the Mexican citizens after the war, as mentioned above with relation to Ruiz de Burton’s first novel. This chapter, however, focuses more on how laws not only define “home,” but how the legal construction of race justifies, and in fact encourages, the appropriation of another’s space. Along with the American legal system and the corruption embedded in Congress, the displacement of an older economic order by an emerging capitalist monopoly represents another crucial ingredient in the central theme of this story. The new economic system is part of the political web responsible for entangling the Californian constituencies and expropriating their lands after the Mexican-American war. The discourses surrounding conflicts of nationality, gender, class, and race serve as a
foundation for understanding the meaning of home in the decades that followed the annexation of California in mid-nineteenth century.

As her first novel, The Squatter and the Don can be read as a sentimental romance, in which the main romantic characters, Don Mariano’s daughter Mercedes Alamar and Clarence Darrell, son of settler William Darrell (the “squatter” in the title), confront difficulties such as the conflict between William Darrell and don Mariano Alamar over the latter’s land, don Mariano’s illness and eventual death, and the overall loss of wealth and social status of the Californios. In the end, the marriage between Mercedes and Clarence in effect rescues the Alamar family’s economic interests and assures an alliance between both elites and the promise of a new “true community” (Pérez 48, 78). As the novel comes to a conclusion, the narrator’s voice becomes ever more present as it pleads for a savior who will emancipate the “white slaves” of California through the creation of just laws that may also thwart corrupt monopolistic practices.

Ruiz de Burton’s second purpose, noted at the beginning of this section, is of a more pragmatic nature. She makes this clear in a letter written to S. L. M. Barlow in 1872: “I hope you will give me all the benefit of your influence with the New York Press for I would like to make the venture a little profitable. I did not write for glory” (Conflicts 556-57). Commercial success would have helped alleviate her precarious financial situation. Often cited as possessing an entrepreneurial spirit, Ruiz de Burton took advantage of this moment of modernization with its new ways of accumulating capital.18 In fact, she was able to borrow enough funds to cover publication expenses like the stenotype plates (Moyna

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18 See “Portrayals of Spanish in 19th-century American Prose: María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s The Squatter and the Don” (241) by María Irene Moyna. Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita often refer to Ruiz de Burton’s interests in entrepreneurship in the introductions to both novels as well as in Conflicts of Interest: The Letters of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (xiv, 184).
241). Her borrowing exploits for this purpose may point to her appreciation that, in the emerging capital world, whoever financed publication would also benefit from the profits. Furthermore, editorial houses determined what texts would be printed unless publishing expenses were covered by the writer (Sánchez “Narratives” 279-80).

Despite her success in securing funds for publication as well as publicity, Ruiz de Burton was also keenly aware of her intended audience’s demographics, thus she “[balanced] her need for self-expression with the self-censorship necessary to gain access to the market” (Moyna 241). María Irene Moyna views Ruiz de Burton’s success in accumulating the necessary capital for publication as “a measure of her access to the instruments of cultural production, a prerequisite to participate in the linguistic market and to reap its economic benefits” (241). These also represent the “conditions of production” to which Susan K. Harris alludes (266), conditions that are established by the marketplace, and which are much more contingent in women authors. Always conscious of the limitations imposed on women, that may have been another reason why Ruiz de Burton published her first novel anonymously and her second under the pseudonym C. Loyal. She claimed that “everyone would … criticize her work” if they learned that English was not her native language (Who Would Have Thought It? vii). Besides the issue of Spanish being her mother tongue, Ruiz de Burton often expressed frustration about the fact that gender determined access to the marketplace.

Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita assert that “[Ruiz de Burton’s] sense of her gender handicap is closely linked to her sense of belonging to an increasingly politically...

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19 Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, in the introduction to The Squatter and the Don, contend that C. Loyal in fact stands for Citizen Loyal. They maintain this is yet another strategy to prove to her readers that the Mexican population was indeed worthy of citizenship rights.
and economically weak ethnic group” (Conflicts xi, xii). In a letter to her friend don Mariano Vallejo, the rumored model for the character of don Mariano Alamar, she bemoans her doubly marginalized status as woman and Californio, a status that would prevent her from investing in new enterprises in California. In claiming she does not wish to become enthused about progress in California, Ruiz de Burton shows “an acute race and gender consciousness”: “¿Para qué? Ni mi raza ni mi sexo van a sacar mejora alguna” (“What for? Neither my race nor my gender will gain anything from it”; Conflicts xii). Hence in her novels she pushed forward to attempt to change the perception of her race, at least, as revealed in this passage from The Squatter and the Don: “The thriving American says that the native Spaniards are lazy and stupid and thriftless... the fiat has gone forth, and the Spaniards of CA are not only despoiled of all their earthly possessions, but must also be bereft of sympathy, because the world says they do not deserve it” (325).

In addition, and in keeping with outlined expectations for women’s writings in the nineteenth century, Ruiz de Burton produces a historical romance that helps to create the “tensions between structure and theme” (Harris 266) necessary to render their texts accessible by pretending to abide by generic requirements as well as bearing dominant discourse while also conveying her personal critique. She accomplishes this by employing the form of the historical romance and charging it with subversive language. One example of this follows Mercedes’ relief at discovering that Clarence has indeed bought the land taken up by his family from her father, which is in itself in line with Ruiz de Burton’s own political message – that paying for the land was the proper thing to do even if the law did not require it: “Are you regretting that, after all, you cannot sacrifice
to love your patrician pride by marrying a land-shark, thus proving you are a heroine?’ Mercedes’ sister Elvira teases her. ‘Really, I think our romance is spoiled. It would have been so fine – like a dime novel’” (132). This type of metatextual language collapses the generic framework, according to Anne E. Goldman, while it substitutes the love story with “an expressly political history: of class conflict, racial injustice, land theft” (131). Ruiz de Burton appropriates the historical romance as a strategy that will help her get published (her economic purpose) while also permitting her to accomplish her ideological objective.

1.4.2 Teresa de la Parra

Ruiz de Burton, then, manipulated the tensions between structural and thematic frameworks to reach her dual goal. Her case is unique insofar as it presents these tensions from the perspective of the Californio, of a “racial” Other, but Susan K. Harris makes a convincing case that the creation of such tensions can be found in other American women’s fiction of the nineteenth century. With relation to such tensions, Harris writes that “[f]or the novels to be published and favorably reviewed, they had to conform to [the dominant discourse regarding women’s place in society]; for them to achieve their ‘subversive’ objects, they had to find a form that would embody these dual, and often contradictory, ideas” (270). This juggling of contradictory ideas is by no means exclusive in American fiction. In fact, I argue that the same strategies are found in Venezuelan Teresa de la Parra’s Ifígenia.

Published in 1924 and written a few years earlier, Ifígenia was received with mixed opinions in Venezuela, but it was above all controversial in light of the strict religious, social, and political regime of the time. Broadly speaking, the fourth chapter of
this dissertation examines de la Parra’s contentious, if somewhat contradicting, position on the roles, rights, and alternatives available for upper-middle class women in the Venezuela of 1920s. More specifically, this chapter focuses on the language used in this autobiographical novel; that is, I explore key linguistic strategies – irony, character voices, descriptive discourse, etc. – that in part reveal the palpable tension between deep-seated aristocratic traditions and emerging modern ideas in a period of national transformation that would eventually reposition a totalitarian Venezuela as an industrialized capitalist regime.

The novel is made up of a long letter and a diary, both written by the protagonist, quick-witted turn-of-the-century caraqueña María Eugenia Alonso, during the course of two years. Through the letter, written to her childhood friend Cristina de Iturbe, we learn that she has recently arrived in Caracas after having lived in France since she was a child. She has just spent three months living freely in Paris, representing in the narrative the “modern” place where she was able to acquire the “worldly experience” and the necessary material to transform herself, body and mind, into a modern woman; a woman who is about to reveal an entirely different civilization where women are far from being modern, and whose traditions and convictions are imposed upon her by the very people who love her.

Teresa de la Parra’s specific objective when writing the novel – as she so candidly confesses in her own letters – was to give voice to the many women whose aspirations, like María Eugenia’s, had been silenced by chains of tradition; traditions that bounded women’s voices in a quietness of bricks and plaster. Akin to nineteenth-century American women’s literature, this “womanly” space became their locus of enunciation...
and denunciation. The conventionally “safe” space for women was turned into grounds of confrontation whence their voices filled the pages of what Helen Waite Papashvily calls their “manual of arms” and “handbook of strategy” that would become the domestic novel (24). In this last chapter, I examine narrative strategies used by de la Parra in the process of capturing the voices of many and making them speak in her autobiographical novel, Ifigenia. As de la Parra confessed in an autobiographical letter written in 1931, seven years after the novel had been published, capturing those silenced women’s voices was a primary inspiration in writing Ifigenia:

En Caracas me puse por primera vez en contacto con el mundo y la sociedad. Observé el conflicto continuo que existía entre la nueva mentalidad de las mujeres jóvenes despiertas al modernismo por los viajes y las lecturas, y la vida real que llevaban, encadenadas por prejuicios y costumbres de otra época. Sin fe en tales prejuicios se dejaban sin embargo a todas horas dominar por ellos, suspirando, sólo en deseo, por la independencia de vida y de ideas, hasta que llegaba el matrimonio que las hacía renunciar y las entregaba a la sumisión… Este continuo conflicto femenino con su final de renunciamiento me inspiró la idea de mi primera novela, Ifigenia. (Obras completas 901-02)

In Caracas I came in contact with the world and society for the first time. I observed the continuous conflict that existed between the new mentality of women awakened to modernity through their traveling and reading, and the real life they lived, chained by prejudice and traditions from a different era. Without believing in such preconceptions they nevertheless allowed themselves to be dominated by them, sighing, only through desire, over an independence of life.
and ideas, until marriage came and rendered them resigned and submissive… This continuous feminine conflict with its final resignation inspired the idea for my first novel, Ifigenia.

Besides the linguistic structure employed in the novel to build this theme of a young woman yearning to be free of prejudiced chains that imprisoned so many women in her own social class, I also explore the period of modernization in Venezuela that framed the historical time of writing, and how traditions continue to reign behind old colonial households despite the modern shell emerging around them. All of these elements – strategic discourse, socioeconomic realities of the 1920s, the stronghold of tradition in a modernizing society, etc. – begin to draw and shape the (re)presentation of home as a space of conflict, as the stage where modern and traditional forces collide and coexist at the same time. One of the faces of home in this chapter, then, is represented by the main traditional household.

It is a common concurrence that the domestic space has been central to the definition of womanhood in Western societies. Relegation to the domestic sphere, together with political oppression and economic dependence are only a few of the conditions that cultural feminism – based on historical and anthropological studies – theorizes to have formed a sort of women’s historical consciousness, a particular world perspective. 20 This “female consciousness” entails the development of an environmental awareness since, as Josephine Donovan explains, “[t]he primary condition of

20 Donovan clarifies that, although a great part of feminist cultural theory is based on the experience of Western women, this type of theorizing may also prove useful in the study of women worldwide (185).
powerlessness has necessarily meant that women have had to be aware of their environment to survive, for that environment – insofar as it is patriarchal – has continually impinged upon them” (185). Although women have often served as “household administrators” while imparting traditions within the home, even in this relegated space they have been “at their masters’ beck and call” (186). This is certainly true of the society illustrated in Ifigenia, where “the masters,” although physically absent from the domestic space – albeit symbolized by the ideologies of the patriarchate embodied in the protagonist’s grandmother and aunt – administrated the lives of the women who inhabited it. The home shared by María Eugenia, her grandmother, and her aunt challenges essentialist models of domestic space as the women confront each other – and later, their own consciousnesses – in a struggle for social survival.

María Eugenia Alonso emerges as a vibrant, colorful figure from the first words of her letter. Before the readers begin to know the protagonist, María Eugenia as narrator captivates their attention through the use of her animated, expressive language. From the start, the reader cheers her on as she transforms from a seemingly shy and unadorned adolescent into a young woman of “modern” taste, both in fashion and in thought. When María Eugenia leaves Europe for her native Caracas, she also leaves behind her Catholic schoolgirl ethics – which apparently dwelled in her very long and straight hair, for as soon as she acquires a new, very short garçonne hairstyle of “covered temples,” her thoughts become more focused on matter and less interested in dogmatic tenets; while shoes, dresses, and fashionable accessories develop into deities worthy of her adoration and devotion. In a Samsonian twist, with her long hair María Eugenia loses her uncomplicated sense of blind obedience to become a free-spirited, “free-thinking”
woman of tighter dress and colored lips. She had entered the realm of what the school nuns called, with grave disdain, “the world” (1: 33). María Eugenia, alas, embarked on a cross-Atlantic journey embodying foreign values that were destined to be consumed by the thriving patriarchal system that governed her homeland in the first decades of the twentieth century (a system that arguably continues to rule one hundred years later).

Venezuela’s modernizing project was in reality a face-lift that involved much architecture but very little structural substance. Public morality continued to be funneled through male discourse that kept women in their place, so to speak.

De la Parra’s inspiration in rendering oppressed women visible and “audible” notwithstanding, she was also very much aware of the strictures involved in getting her story published. Although not much information can be found surrounding the circumstances under which she managed to get her novel in print, the fact that Ifigenia was first published in a modern, progressive France (certainly when compared to Venezuela at that time) probably helped to bypass some of them. Ifigenia was, all the same, received with mixed reviews, to be sure. The same letter cited above describes how “certain circles” of the Caracas society did not at all welcome her novel when it crossed the Atlantic into Venezuela, in particular the “ultra-Catholic” crowd that found it to be menacing for young impressionable women who may see themselves in the heroine, carrying the same “aspirations and chains” (OC 902). Many other reviewers critiqued the novel as though it were an authentic autobiography, devoid entirely of its fictional form.

Other more contemporary critics of de la Parra convincingly challenge the supposition that the author carried out a feminist scheme at all in this novel. Ileana Rodríguez, who writes that “[l]etters and diaries are the noncanonical genres consecrated
in the novel, pre-texts that serve as conduit for expressing women’s ideas on nation, gender, and ethnicity” (60), also proposes that Ifigenia indeed bears a conservative agenda hidden in the vicissitudes of its heroine. Much of this assessment, attaching a conservative objective to de la Parra’s novel, stems from the author’s own comments in public conferences and personal correspondence. She states, for instance, that her feminism is “moderate” and that she does not understand women’s suffrage movements enough to either support or denounce them (QC 686), that the women she admires most were those of the colonial period who were abnegated and self-sacrificing (687), that María Eugenia’s diary is not a text of revolutionary propaganda (684), and many other observations that both support and contradict her fictional work. What many critics have failed to note, however, is the keen talent the novelist had, and admitted having, for the use of irony.21 Her most hostile critics, de la Parra writes in another letter, simply failed to sense “the true intention of irony” in Ifigenia (851). They failed to see beyond the mask and did not allow themselves to benefit from the “kind smile” of ironic discourse (852).

It is that tension between what is said and what is not said what María Eugenia attaches to her “special” conflict, the contradictions that define her, that she herself creates between her convictions and her refusal to follow them and that she terms cynicism. This in-between space allows for a distinct narrative to emerge, which she fills, both as narrator and protagonist, with a sort of comedic irony that is also in contrast with

21 A close narratological analysis might reveal the multiple voices hiding behind María Eugenia Alonso-narrator, María Eugenia Alonso-protagonist, and the many other levels of narration contained in the text that may prove useful in shedding some light on the author’s contrasting worldviews. This, of course, is not a focus in this dissertation, but it is certainly an interest for future research, publishing, and teaching.
her resigned, sacrificial ending. The Venezuelan society that María Eugenia describes in her diary and that de la Parra also illustrates in her own letters and lectures, as much as in accordance to extratextual historical accounts, echoes the values held by nineteenth-century American “arbiters of literary taste” (Harris 266). In evaluating these novels, it becomes especially important to explore the bearing that public ideologies held on market tactics precisely because these have a direct influence on the novels’ structures. For instance, even though Ifigenia was not published in Venezuela, de la Parra recognized that her novel needed to abide by certain Venezuelan (conservative) demands – what Harris calls “public pronouncements” (266) – if she wanted to promote herself, and be accepted, as writer. In Novels, Readers, and Reviewers, for instance, Nina Baym considers that

> [a]part from the question whether novelists were or were not radical in the particularities of their social, sexual, or personal world views … lies the possibility that the form of the novel assumes discontent as the psychological ground from which it springs. The essence of the plot … is that something is wrong; there is a disturbance that needs correcting. Because women and youths mostly read novels, it was thought, their discontents in particular would be ministered to and hence exacerbated…. If, as many feminist critics have argued, the “better novel” appears regularly to be instinct with misogyny, this may not be an accident. Novels putting women in their place may well have been selected by reviewers as better than – more true to nature than – novels that legitimated their discontents. (172)
Keenly aware of what “women’s place” meant in the elite Caracas social circles to which her own family belonged, de la Parra manages to covertly challenge this public definition while, at the same time, preserving the socially expected outcome in her heroine’s life: marriage and resigned submission.22

1.5 Process Analysis

A few years ago, Susan K. Harris wrote an exceptional article in which she evaluates nineteenth-century American women’s fiction and suggests that we read it as “process”: “that is, to see it within the shifting currents of nineteenth-century American ideologies… we can imagine the ways that it springs from, reacts against, or responds to the plots, themes, languages…” (263). Historical contextualization is essential in process analysis. How the writers wrote was perhaps largely influenced by the expected thematic structure in women’s writings, by their desire to publish and receive favorable reviews, and of course by their own conception of their audience. Thus, how their novels end is crucially important because oftentimes the “happy endings,” where the heroine marries and abandons all hope for autonomy, in fact are subverted by what came before in the narrative.23

22 Broadly speaking, the implications raised by this recognition are not in essence dissimilar to what we find in nineteenth-century American women’s fiction, and in fact we could benefit from a comparative study across national borders, particularly when we apply the “process analysis” method proposed by Harris (see below).

23 Helen Waite Papashvily (1956), among others, notes that the majority of American women’s fiction of the nineteenth-century culminate in this type of “happy ending,” where the anticipated denouement is complete surrender by the heroine to the deep-seated social norms imposed upon her. However, more recent critics have observed that, upon closer readings, many of those texts in fact question that inscription even though their structure appears to comply. See, as a good example, Joanne Dobson’s article on the subversion of cultural ideology in three American women’s novels.
It is, then, the “ideologically based reading strategies” (266) that come to determine how the two sexes are constituted in the novels.²⁴ Harris writes,

Despite following a fairly consistent pattern culminating in the protagonist’s marriage to a dominating man, most sentimental novels also challenge the idea of female subordination, either through their plots, their narrators’ addresses to the reader, or their patterns of rhetoric. In other words, their themes and structures tend to work at cross-purposes. Once dismissed as confused, such texts are now described as dialogic. (265)

I further argue that it is within the dialogic space, located between structure and theme (Harris 267), discourse and story, where the novels in effect construct their own space between public pronouncements and private values – it is a site that we can associate with the liminal space Anzaldúa calls nepantla and which she links to “states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews…” (1), thus also creating a new way of reading women’s novels through her “theory of liminality.”

The contradictions between structure and theme provide the writer with room (understood as another metaphor for home) to “question old ideas” but they also present readers with alternative modes of understanding the texts.

Readers, then, can read the novel as conforming to social values given that the heroine indeed ends in the publicly acceptable end. Or they could choose the other

²⁴ Since we are studying turn-of-the-century “sentimental romances” it is already presupposed that the romance that occurs is of a heterosexual nature. On this note, it should be mentioned that Teresa de la Parra’s own sexual inclinations have been questioned by critics with fascinating insights. See Sylvia Molloy’s “Disappearing Acts: Reading Lesbian in Teresa de la Parra” (1995) for an excellent analysis that employs queer theory to explore de la Parra’s fictional and nonfictional writings.
approach that privileges “independence through structural open-endedness” (267). Whichever mode readers choose to process the texts will depend on whether or not they are “predisposed” to discern the challenges to public definitions of “women’s place” embedded within. Harris provides an example of this double-reading mode through a letter written in 1848 – at the same time the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was deciding the fates of thousands of Mexican citizens, an event that would be stamped as the backdrop for both of Ruiz de Burton’s novels – by author Lydia Maria Child. As we read through her commentary on Jane Eyre, it brings to mind Maria Eugenia’s own choices in Ifigenia: “I am glad the book represents Jane as refusing to trust [Rochester]; for in the present disorderly state of the world, it would not be well for public morality to represent it otherwise. But my private opinion is, that a real living Jane Eyre, placed in similar circumstances, would have obeyed an inward law, higher and better than outward conventional scruples” (qtd. in Harris 267-68). Child shows approval of social restraints or, in Harris’ words, “the sense that public morality was fragmenting and that literature’s function was to teach readers moral conduct” (268). In order to be a heroine, Jane flees to satisfy expectations of her virtuous nature.

On the other hand, Child also reveals a “private” reading mode that concedes that a woman as independent as Jane would have forsaken social norms to pursue her own longings. María Eugenia, too, shows a forceful freedom of thought from the beginning, and even throughout her assumed acquiesce we can read that powerful independent nature behind the kind smile of her ironic style. In keeping with prescribed tenets of women’s social conduct, Maria Eugenia Alonso finally opts for “sacrifice,” for yielding her intellectual autonomy en route for attaining social approval. She refuses to elope.
with the man she supposedly loves because for this unhappily married man, Gabriel Olmedo, divorce is not an option. She is also intensely discerning of her alternatives: marriage to the tedious César Leal, a dominating but socially and financially established senator, or spinstership as embodied by her dear aunt Clara, lonely, dependent upon her not-so-generous brother’s generosity, and with only the shadow of her bygone beauty to remind her what could have been.

Ifigenia’s cheerless ending notwithstanding, the heroine as both narrator and protagonist – in control of language and action, of the thematic and structural outcomes – has by now dedicated several hundred pages to creating an autonomous self which she succeeds in impressing upon her readers, as evident by much of the criticism that ensued the publication of “María Eugenia’s diary.” The fact that she resigns to her self-sacrificial end in the last few pages should have less of an impact on her readers than the convincing evidence constructed throughout the narrative illustrating her own power in creating a self fashioned around independence of ideas. Indeed, I agree with Susan K. Harris when she states her own theory regarding the impression left upon readers from the creation of an autonomous self despite the less-than-hopeful ending:

My personal theory is that the renunciation of autonomy in the face of the marriage proposal has its strongest impact when these books are first read – probably because it involves sex – but that over time readers tend to remember protagonists’ extended quests for autonomy rather than their sudden, and fairly formulaic, renunciations… The standardized conclusions may even have annoyed nineteenth-century readers as much as they do twentieth [and twenty-first], thus undermining their “message.” (268).
Reading *Ifigenia* as process would evidently require a comparative study with other novels that came before and after to be able to, perhaps, see how novels evolve from their predecessors, and where *Ifigenia* fits in relation to them. De la Parra has been studied next to contemporary Latin American women writers, many of them poets, like Cuban Lydia Cabrera and Chilean – and first Latin American writer to earn the Nobel prize – Gabriela Mistral. I believe that a transnational and transcontinental approach similar to the effort intended in this dissertation would only further enlighten us, as scholars and educators, to the many ways in which language becomes the women writers’ instrument to restructure gender perceptions and create autonomous selfhood.

This has been a primary interest in the development of this thesis, that both María Amparo Ruiz de Burton and Teresa de la Parra knew how to manipulate fictional discourse to reconstruct characters that have been historically silenced (Mexican Americans and women, to mention only the primary two “others” concerned in their respective writings) who will themselves into existence in an effort to create their own society, their own creative space, their own home. A method like Harris’ “process analysis” opens up even more alternatives for creating methodologies that help us evaluate the textual structures and linguistic strategies that constitute the texts. In other words, reading these novels as process allows us to view how the discursive modes of these particular novels “both reflect and engage their society’s ideological diversity” (Harris 271). Through them we witness the conflicting relationships of the self opposite society as well as the self against self, the internal conflicts within and between characters who contend each other much more often than they openly engage a corrupt society. Ruiz de Burton’s second novel represents the latter rather than the former
conflict, however, and that makes it all the more useful and significant when remapping a transnational literary history of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century women writers.

1.6 Chapter Summaries

While the second and third chapters address important questions of difference based on perceived race, class, and language, the last chapter engages in a conversation about women’s roles in the first decades of the twentieth century in Venezuela. Using “sentimental discourse,” as it were, these two women writers re-envisioned women and Mexican-American citizens, situating them within ideological, geographic, and historical contexts of both oppression and endeavor. Their narratives are filled with tensions such as this, from the thematic to the structural, created within the entrails of discourse, separating and uniting, differentiating and deferring, irrespective of their own personal interests that each writer defends or critiques.

All chapters involve a combination of methods that helps to grasp the historical moment in which they were written. As such, I employ crucial theoretical guidance contingent upon the thematic framework built around each chapter, critical reviews I deem essential for comprehending the literary relevance of each novel, sociohistorical sources that help locate each novel within dominant ideologies and legal systems, and a healthy measure of textual analysis guided by important elements necessary in any process analysis, including contextual, rhetorical, and retrospective levels of study.

Chapter 2, again, focuses on Californian María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s first novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872), and brings in Benigno Trigo’s theoretical
approach to the racialized other as represented in what he calls a “subject of crisis.” I argue that Lola embodies a subject of crisis, a crisis defined by the dominant ideology by means of exclusionary practices embedded in public discourse. This chapter views home as the site that surrounds the Norval household, which materializes as a homogeneous sphere that becomes trespassed by the transgressing racialized body of a young girl of ambiguous racial origins. Through various discursive elements, the novel in effect challenges the very idea of the stable home, as presented in many nineteenth-century romances, and in particular as it pertains to New England’s antebellum abolitionist society.

In Chapter 3, I examine the strategic alliances created between Californios and Anglos (which in turn separate them from the lower classes) that constructed a “collective victimization” (Alemán “Amnesia” 71) of the elite Californios and Anglos alike in Ruiz de Burton’s second novel, The Squatter and the Don (1885). Grounded in a discourse of “sameness” erected throughout the novel, by the end these morally upright characters all enter into the “white slave” enclave thanks to monopoly capitalism and corrupt legislation. Though the Alamars eventually lose their land, a new home is created that also includes elite white Americans in search for justice in the legal and political systems that betrayed them. Through narrative strategies that link the Californio protagonists with privileged Anglo characters, the novel in effect creates a society, an imagined community sharing similar moral values that render them worthy of citizenship rights.
Chapter 4, centered on the first novel published by Venezuelan author Teresa de la Parra, *Ifigenia: Diario de una señorita que escribió porque se fastidiaba* (1924), follows the creation of discursive spaces where the heroine, María Eugenia Alonso, *wills herself*, as it were, into an independent woman for the majority of the narrative. As she accepts her final sacrifice in the form of marriage, submission, and renunciation of autonomous ideas, the protagonist has by then formed a solid creation of her self as an independent, vibrant, modern woman who would gladly transgress the boundaries designed by colonial powers and reinforced by the authoritative discourse, embodied not only by some male characters but especially by her own grandmother, that guardian of traditional, public morality. The author once wrote that her only objective in writing this novel was to render visibility and voice to so many young women who, like María Eugenia, found themselves in a constant crossing of the border, continuously negotiating between who they *wanted* to be and who they were told they *should* be. Although the end of the novel is on par with the socially acceptable behavior, it contrasts with the subversive nature of the mere act of writing and with the dominant (ironic) discourse apparent throughout the narrative. This conflictive space, created by the heroine-narrator and protagonist (and, by extension, by the author) serves the essential function that is at the heart of this dissertation: her own creative/created space renders it a discursive home.

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25 Translated as *Iphigenia: Diary of a Young Lady who Wrote because She was Bored* in Bertie Acker’s 1993 rendition of Teresa de la Parra’s first novel.
CHAPTER 2:

RACE AND SPACE:

THE RACIALIZATION OF HOME IN WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT?

Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Nepantla es tierra desconocida, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement – an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in nepantla so much of the time it’s become a sort of ‘home.’

- Gloria Anzaldúa, This Bridge We Call Home (2002)

2.1 Introduction

In a 2006 New York Times editorial, best-selling author Tony Horwitz looked at recent immigration policy and connected history to current events, aptly observing that the history of the United States is generally taught, by educators as well as politicians, as originating in Plymouth Rock, blatantly ignoring the native civilizations that existed prior to the Mayflower landing of 1620:

This national amnesia isn’t new, but it’s glaring and supremely paradoxical at a moment when politicians warn of the threat posed to our culture and identity by an invasion of immigrants from across the Mexican border. If Americans hit the books, they’d find what Al Gore would call an inconvenient truth. The early history of what is now the United States was Spanish, not English, and our denial
of this heritage is rooted in age-old stereotypes that still entangle today’s immigration debate. (13)

Most Americans, Horwitz adds, link the Spanish settlers with Cortés in Mexico and Pizarro in Peru. But there is a vast historical record placing Spanish pioneers in half of the lower forty-eight states before the English colonization. Among many iconic historical anecdotes, he reminds the readers that a man by the name of Juan Ortiz wrote about his remarkable rescue from execution by an Indian girl eighty years before John Smith was allegedly saved by Pocahontas. “So why do Americans cling to a creation myth centered on one band of late-arriving English…?,” Horwitz asks in a somewhat rhetorical mode as he expands on the “easy answer” on the paragraphs that follow his introduction: because “winners write the history and the Spanish… were ultimately losers in the contest for this continent” (13). In addition, many American historians and writers of early nineteenth-century were New Englanders who in effect promoted the Pilgrims as ahistorical, mythical figures.

There is another explanation, a “less-known legacy” that may clarify why the early Spanish settlers have been in effect written out of the standard histories, school texts, and, in essence, out of the American national narrative: the black legend. Born out of manuscripts and gruesome etchings circulated by rival Northern Europeans depicting Spanish colonization as exceptionally vicious, the legend contained exaggerated as well as truthful aspects of the conquista.26 Although the Spanish violence was not unique

26 New Mexico colonizer Juan de Oñate, for instance, practiced cruel punishment techniques on the Pueblo Indians, like cutting off their hands and feet before enslaving them. Natives were bound in neck collars and chains while being forced to pull colonizers’ army gear. (Horwitz 13).
given that the English also engaged in similar atrocious practices, the black legend endured in Europe and in the newly formed United States. “Anglo Americans,” historian David J. Weber explains, “had inherited the view that Spaniards were unusually cruel, avaricious, treacherous, fanatical, superstitious, cowardly, corrupt, decadent, indolent and authoritarian” (The Spanish Frontier 244) The black legend was used as propaganda, along with Manifest Destiny, to justify the eventual seizure of half of Mexico’s territory. In fact, Weber maintains that “[u]ntil recently, Mexican Americans who looked into United States historical literature to understand the causes of the Mexican war have found it depicted as a struggle between a righteous vigorous democracy and a series of backward, corrupt, and petty regimes in Mexico” (Foreigners 96). Such is the heritage of Manifest Destiny.

Once the southwest territories became part of the national political geography, “the diverse histories of pre-United States settlements, if acknowledged at all, became reduced to romanticized images of quaint New Mexican villages or crumbling California missions” (Ruiz 656). 27 The manipulation of discourse to in effect erase entire cultures or render specific groups of people as national threats is by no means unique to the United States, of course. In his groundbreaking study about the “construction of crisis” in Latin American narrative, Benigno Trigo traces the different ways in which intellectual elites

27 Even today, history is not only forgotten but often disfigured through national discourse. Lamar Alexander, Senator of Tennessee, claims that English “is part of our blood” while Representative J. D. Hayworth avers that opponents of making English the official national language “reject the very notion that there is a uniquely American identity, or that, if there is one, that it is superior to any other.” At the same time, we hear Representative Tom Tancredo of Colorado denounces the “death grip” that “a cult of multiculturalism” has on the nation: “[w]e are committing cultural suicide… The barbarians at the gate will only need to give us a slight push, and the emaciated body of Western civilization will collapse in a heap” (qtd. in Horwitz 13). The barbarian Mexican immigrants, illegal or not, thus become virtual vampires who drain the life out of the “Western civilization” (read: the United States). Their Spanish language is in effect consuming the blood of the American ethos (its English language), rendering its emaciated body a subject of crisis.
convince their readers and themselves that Latin America is in a constant state of crisis. To be a subject of crisis, Trigo explains, is for the text, the state, or the body to be temporarily ruled by the uncertainty and tension of the critical state. Trigo’s thesis further claims that a definition of a subject of crisis can also signify “to be made of crisis,” to have crisis as the essential substance that constitutes the subject (body, text, state). Furthermore, the body originating crisis is generally defined as of another race or gender, as illustrated in the discursive examples listed above on current immigration debates, and it is at the same time “marked as a natural and physical body” (125). Trigo argues that the body of the other is in reality a discursive artifact that is specific to a time and place, whose physicality is constructed in order to render the crisis visible.

The process that produces the body, however, is heterogeneous, changing and shifting over time, thus rendering a product made up of different debates and knowledges. Despite its heterogeneity, the body emerges as a physical object of knowledge:

To make the body physical is not just to lay the groundwork necessary to govern the body. It is to govern the body. It is to turn it into a visible network of lines and depths. It is to turn it into a landscape, or into a map, where conflict, tension, and disorder have coordinates. Thus, to govern the body is not just to control, subdue, discipline, and normalize it. To govern the body is to know the body; it is to have a perspective on the body that makes it visible. (125)
Controlling the body also implies the neutralization of the perceived threat originated by
difference, which in turn leads to the restriction of the ability to question or criticize the
process of perception.

What ensues is the result of the relationship between the perceived threat and the
metaphor produced – their identity – since one mirrors the other. The metaphor confirms
the futility of escaping the perceived threat; that is, “[t]he threat of difference can be
managed, but it is unquestionable” (125). Furthermore, Trigo argues that the
“indisputable and factual nature of crisis is the result of a network of histories,
knowledges, and self-configurations; in other words, it is the effect of discourse” (4).

Basing his argument on Michel Foucault’s definition of discourse, Trigo suggests that
discourse is in no way limited to linguistic disciplines. Indeed,

… discourse is a network of interrelated, systematic, repeated, co-opting
operations and performances of exclusion, which gives particular forms to
perception and self-perception within disciplines, knowledges, and subjectivities.
Thus, while the indisputable materiality of facts is the effect of discourse,
discourse itself is not a matter of fact (in the traditional sense of “something that
cannot be questioned” or the result of “plain common sense”). (4)

Discourse can be paradoxical, and its operations and events are contradictory. It is not
the result of conspiracy or bias to mold a specific understanding of a discipline or
knowledge. Many of the operations of discourse are indeed unconscious.

In the sense that discursive exclusionary practices can signify material, spatial
borders that exclude an identified other as much as they envelop and shape self-
formation, we could certainly then approach home, understood here as an enclosed domestic space where subjectivity and subjecthood are formed, as a product of discourse. Home, thus, is also understood as a discursive space. In other words, insofar as our self-perception and perception of the other are formed through repetition of exclusionary performances and operations within the space we may call home, then the principal domestic sphere in María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) lends at least the foundation for discourse and facilitates the “material facts” that eventually come to be indisputable and unquestionable.

Discourse is the result of layered historical episodes. One of the layered histories from which crisis and discourse emerge includes the history of colonization and its processes of self-configuration and other-formation. When this history intersects periods of modernization and transition (political, economic, scientific, etc.), the inherently unstable nature of discourse becomes transparent. *Who Would Have Thought It?*, accordingly, exposes many contradictions surrounding a postcolonial era of territorial expansion, localized struggle, and a civil war about to both divide and unite a growing nation.

The central space of self- and other-formation in the novel is represented by the Norvals’ material home. It is here that the reader encounters the fundamental crisis exposed: the threat of the other. Fear of contamination by the other, shame of association with the other, distrust, dislike, envy of the other’s possessions or attributes – all of these experiences are part of the exclusionary practices of discourse employed by Ruiz de Burton to expose and critique certain realities of the Northeast. These operations of
exclusion also delineate borders of difference that exclude the other despite her physical presence in the discursive space – in the Norvals’ home.

Lola, the young Spanish girl who is rescued from Apache Indians by Dr. Norval himself, represents the colonial subject as defined by Rosemary Marangoly George: “Under colonialism, the „native‟ exists as another kind of „subject‟: one who is a subject of the colonial race. This is, in itself, a condition that excludes subject status as those in control of colonial discourses know it” (24-25). The Spanish are no longer in control of colonial discourse in the southwestern territories. These have shifted to a new power, an Anglo-American power, where those who once were the conquerors have become the conquered, the other. It is when this other enters the space of the “colonizer” that she becomes the subject of crisis, the body carrying the threat of contamination and the fear of reversed colonialism. The narrative plot, again, is situated primarily within the walls of the Norval family’s domestic realm.

The domestic space often serves as the sentinel of national values and beliefs as well as the projection of national transitions. The novel traces the period from the 1850s to the year of its publication, 1872. Besides the story of Dr. Norval’s travels, Lola’s ordeals and rescue out of the southwest, and some battle scenes in the south, the principal narrative is set in the Northeast – New England, New York, Washington, D.C. Time and

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28 Although Apache Indians would certainly fit this definition (under both Spanish and Anglo colonialisms) I refer specifically to Lola as the colonial subject for a couple of reasons. First, being the protagonist and the embodiment of crisis grounded in her perceived racial difference within the New English home (the colonizer’s home), she is denied autonomous subjecthood; that is, her very status as subject is contingent upon how the Norval family defines her. Second, although the Spanish empire no longer has political control of the southwestern territories, I want to underscore the continuity of colonial discourse by a new power, the Anglo-Americans. This shift in hegemonic discourse is represented in two parallel spaces: the Southwest through Lola’s story and New England as the site of the empire, as it were, as the “center” that has been transgressed by Lola, the other in this case, the colonial subject.
space are marked by Civil War concerns, and within this chronotope the Norvals and their acquaintances represent Christian abolitionist “subjectivities” filled with contradictions that expose abolitionist principles and deep-seated racist sentiments: “Mrs. Norval is a good abolitionist in talk, … but she ain’t so in practice… Mrs. Norval had never been known to give a poor nigger a penny… [whereas] the doctor was the one to give to the poor darkies…” (46-47).

2.2 Who Would Have Thought It?

María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s *Who Would Have Thought It?*, published in Philadelphia in 1872, is written in the midst of dramatic modern socioeconomic changes caused in part by the industrialization surge that followed the American Civil War and by the rapid development of capitalism. Although, as we have mentioned, the central stage is located in the Norvals’ physical home, the question of home in the novel is not limited to a closed, “private” space in which women play the roles of domestic administrators as in many other nineteenth-century romances. Indeed, as Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita have argued, *Who Would Have Thought It?* should not be considered a “typical romance of domesticity” for several reasons, the most significant being that it situates women – and readers – in the domain of politics (ix-x). Even though women in the nineteenth century participated to a certain degree in public spaces, the construct of domesticity in nineteenth-century fiction is the primary concern in this type of romance. Sánchez and Pita maintain that as a parody of, and in contrast to, nineteenth-century domestic romances, this novel satirizes the nineteenth-century figure of the familial woman in charge of her home, embodied in Mrs. Norval.
Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita are responsible for the rediscovery of Ruiz de Burton’s life and works in 1992. Along with the re-publications of Ruiz de Burton’s fictional works and personal letters, Sánchez and Pita have produced systematic studies on how the state of the nation at the time of Ruiz de Burton’s writing influenced her work. Since then, scholars have recognized Ruiz de Burton’s texts as a rich contribution to the history of the United States after the Mexican-American war, particularly because it involves the “other” historiography, the history of the conquered people. In this sense, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton not only critiques an ever-growing monopoly capitalism, but, perhaps more importantly, as José David Saldivar notes, she functions as “a radical critic of an Anglocentric historiography” only a few decades after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed (170).

The first ten chapters of this novel focus on the attack on Fort Sumter (1857-1861), with recollections that detail Lola’s imprisonment and the acquisition of her wealth. The last fifty chapters take place during the Civil War. The novel also locates the United States as an expanding, modernizing nation that provokes changes in the domestic space as much as in the public (nondomestic) spaces. Whereas this chapter does not quite analyze any potential parallels between the representations of home (as the familial space) and nation, this relationship is ubiquitously present in Ruiz de Burton’s production and will be dealt with accordingly. In this chapter, we take a look at a particular domestic site as it is affected by economic and social politics taking place at a much larger scale. Nonetheless, it is essential to remember that even though home in this chapter, for the most part, will be referenced as the private space where domestic politics take form and which is separated from the public sphere by physical as well as symbolic
borders, for the overall purposes and thematic framework of this dissertation, home is also equivalent to that “space from which to speak” that is constructed in the narrative.

In particular, and centered on modern tensions of race, class, and gender, we approach the budding bourgeois home as a site of confusion and instability during this period of political and socioeconomic transition in an ever-expanding nation, as sketched in Ruiz de Burton’s *Who Would Have Thought It?* through strategic narrative discourse. The materialization of the other in a racialized, gendered, and potentially diseased body leads to the internalization by the other as an undesirable subject – what Trigo calls the “self-violence of self-configuration” (12-13). These relationships contribute to the unstable, uncertain, and contradictory nature of the primary domestic space, created by the perceived crisis via discourse. The threat of the other in the domestic space, then, mirrors the threat posed by difference on a national scale during that particular period. Indeed, as Jesse Alemán compellingly observes, whiteness itself “comes into crisis in Ruiz de Burton’s narratives as they imagine Hispano racial whiteness but also emphasize the cultural difference between Hispanos and Anglos, especially in the context of Spanish and Anglo American colonialism” (“Citizenship” 5). *Who Would Have Thought It?* imagines a more refined whiteness through the contrast between Lola, depicted as a girl beyond reproach, and “the vulgar materialism of Anglo expansion, backed by racist Northerners” (5) represented in the novel by Mrs. Norval and the surrounding Christian, abolitionist community.

29 The “public sphere,” again, is understood here simply as the space outside the domestic borders unless otherwise noted.
2.3 Home and Nation

To imagine a space as home using only a nationalist framework, however, can lead to dangerous pitfalls. In her careful study of “home” within narratives written in global twentieth-century English, George asserts,

Western studies of nationalism, more often than not, begin with a study of the origins of nationalism. Having located the origins of nationalism in late eighteenth-century Europe, these narratives go on to read all subsequent nationalisms as so many variations of the same model based on the same principles. When nationalism arises in the non-European parts of the globe it is read as a “borrowed” event. (12)

Whether read as “borrowed” or autochthonous, the literature that comes out of non-European nations is still for the most part studied through the lens of a center/margins model; this approach, according to Françoise Lionnet and others, does not allow this body of literature to ever leave the margins. Although “globalization increasingly favors lateral and nonhierarchical network structures” (Lionnet 2) as represented by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their rhizome theory, what they call “minor literature” nonetheless still functions in a vertical and binary relationship to the “major literature.” It is in this sense, I believe, that Ruiz de Burton’s novel enters the historiography of the Unites States, not only in its social, economic, and political implications, but in its literary history as well. By writing in English instead of her native Spanish language, she enters the realm of a major space: “[a] minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language [but] it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language”
Ruiz de Burton, in effect, uses the “imperial language” to critique social, economic, and political “progress” that accompanied the entrance of late nineteenth-century modernizing events in the United States. Saldívar, in fact, argues that her novels were Ruiz de Burton’s “strategy for bringing the hegemonic historiography of the United States to a crisis” (170); a crisis not unlike the conflict represented in her first novel by the body of an other.

In her analysis, George proposes that reading home through nationalism can be constructive only “if the terms of nationalism are radically rethought” (12). A fundamental process in rethinking terms of nationalism is located in the redefinition of cultural boundaries with respect to home as the building block of every society. When is “home,” for instance, articulated to mean a private, domestic space and when does this meaning change to embrace an entire nation? In the midst of drastic transformations in socioeconomic and political sectors at the national level, the novel’s domestic sphere reveals itself to be at times a mere projection of these national transitions and, on other occasions, it emerges as the guardian of established values and beliefs that legitimate forceful transformations. Ruiz de Burton’s *Who Would Have Thought It?* presents “home” precisely as that space of domesticity where national values are reinforced and where male and female identities are defined in hierarchical relations. Although reading home as nation is but a derivative ingredient in this study and by no means our main concern, these questions are of great relevance precisely because they are located at the core of Ruiz de Burton’s work and, in consequence, they affect our approach to the novel’s representation of displacement, race, and belonging.
2.4 Hierarchical Subjectivities: Entering the Norvals’ Home

The novel opens when ten-year-old Maria Dolores Medina (Lola) is brought to a New England home from the contested lands of the southwest in 1857, only nine years following the acquisition of these territories by the United States, after being rescued by Dr. Norval. Her mother, pregnant with Lola, had been kidnapped by Apache Indians some years back, corollary of the Gold Rush, the new lands acquired by the United States, and confrontation with various Indian tribes. The reaction of shock and rejection by most members of the family whose space she enters is far from extraordinary at that moment of American history, even if that family were a Christian abolitionist group. Through Lola’s presence in the home, as an outsider with no place to call her own, we begin to discover a “home” that was in a chaotic state even before her arrival. From the beginning, home appears as a divided space where subject identity and cultural boundaries are shifting in a cosmos of chaos and uncertainty, rather than as a stable, homogeneous building block of late nineteenth-century New English society.

Lola’s presence immediately brings up questions of belonging and of being ‘out of place.’ The Norval family, mistrusting the girl’s physical appearance, embarks on a speculative quest to define her origins and identity. Ruth, one of the two Norval daughters, begins the task of identifying Lola: “I suppose her name is Rabbit, or Hare, or Squirrel. That is, if she is an Indian…” (20). When Lola refuses to mention her given name, Lavinia, Mrs. Norval’s sister, assumes that indeed she must be Indian, for “Indians are as proud and surly as they are treacherous,” but because the girl’s skin is so very dark, she supposes Lola to be “a mixture of Indian and negro” (20). Dr. Norval, oftentimes the voice of irony in the narrative, replies: “Your supposition, being very sagacious and kind,
does honor to your head and heart, but it happens that this child has no more Indian or negro blood than you or I have” (20). Dr. Norval, as Lola’s guardian, indeed defends her against the odious supposition that she may be black or Indian.

Until this moment, the family’s behavior toward Lola had been limited, admittedly not in the most welcoming overtone, on questioning her identity based on color and provenance. Nevertheless, Dr. Norval’s indignation stems from the suggested association between Lola’s “pure Spanish blood” and that of Indians and blacks. Through the family’s perception of Lola as a subject of difference and Dr. Norval’s contention and insistence that her difference is not undesirable because she shares their „true colors,’ Lola becomes what Trigo terms a “subject of crisis” in the Norval’s domestic sphere. Her body originates crisis when perceived and defined as of a different race, and in Ruiz de Burton’s novel it plays a discursive role specific to a time and place. Lola’s body in effect is rendered visible through these early descriptions by the Norval family.

The family trope, we should recall, is often present in narratives of nationalism from various parts of the world. Heterosexual romance, marriage in particular, promised a resolution for national differences and a desire for union, as demonstrated by Doris Sommer in her thorough study of what she called Latin American “foundational fictions.” According to Anne McClintock in Dangerous Liaisons, the family trope is important for two major reasons: “First, it offers a ‘natural’ figure for sanctioning national hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interests. Second, it offers a national trope for figuring national times” (91, emphasis in original). In the nineteenth century, she continues, “[b]ecause the subordination of woman to man and child to adult was deemed a natural
fact, hierarchies within the nation could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature” (91). This process of “naturalizing” the subordination of women within the domestic sphere, in turn, allowed for the metaphoric depiction of social hierarchies in terms of gender.

In Who Would Have Thought It?, the hierarchy within the household is not merely gendered. Race is depicted as a biological and thus “natural” attribute as well. Lola, as subject of crisis, complicates the familial hierarchy the moment she enters the ‘white space’ as a dark spot. Before her place in the Norvals’ family is established, for instance, Lola is sent to sleep in the maids’ chambers and thus immediately occupies the lowest rung in the household chain of command. The two Irish maids are depicted here as uneducated, racist, and unintelligent women; their status as Irish Catholics serves as the discursive border that further differentiates them from the privileged middle-class Protestant Norval family. Both women, although repulsed by Lola’s presence, are offended when the girl refuses to share either of their beds: “I am shure I don’t want to slape with any of the likes of ye, naither. Niggers ain’t my most particliest admirashun, I can tell ye, no more nor toads nor cateypillars. Haith! I think, on the whole, I prefer the cateypillars as a more dacent sort of baste” (30). The same maid, by the name of Cook, is described with a type of verbal irony commonly used to describe Mrs. Norval’s Christian values: “Cook, being a good Catholic and a lady of spirit, crossed herself earnestly but hurriedly, shook her fist threateningly at Lola, and bolted into bed” (31). Lola, eventually, slept on the mat at Mrs. Norval’s door that night, next to Jack, the family dog. The discrepancy between different levels of knowledge – in this case, the narrator’s
description of Cook as a “good Catholic” against her behavior toward Lola – is a preferred rhetorical device throughout this novel.

It is Dr. Norval, the “man of the house,” who defines Lola’s place in this hierarchical ladder, while criticizing his wife for the treatment given to the young girl:

I beg you to remember, Mr. Hackwell - said the doctor, following his wife and holding the poor little girl by the hand - and to draw from that fact a moral for a sermon, that my wife is a lady of the strictest Garrisonian school, a devout follower of Wendell Phillip’s teachings, and a most enthusiastic admirer of Mr. Sumner. Compare these facts with the reception she gives this poor little orphan because her skin is dark… (18)

The references to Garrison, Phillips, and Sumner – all anti-slavery activists – highlight with irony the hypocrisy of Mrs. Norval’s Christian morals. When Mr. Hackwell, Mrs. Norval’s spiritual advisor at the time, declares his admiration to Dr. Norval for having abjured his old prejudices against the “African race,” Dr. Norval replies with more criticism toward his wife:

Yes, but the evil spirit has not left my house, for it has only jumped out of me to take possession of my better half - said the doctor, laughing. Since when have you changed, wife, that a dark skin has become so objectionable to you?

As for that, you are mistaken [replies Mrs. Norval]. I do not object to her dark skin, only I wish to know what position she is to occupy in my family. Which
wish I consider quite reasonable, since I am the one to regulate my household…

(19, emphasis in original)

In making the argument about the household structure and organization instead of the girl’s “race,” Mrs. Norval places herself in the position of domestic administrator, but she also makes apparent her subordinate status to her husband. *Who Would Have Thought It?* critiques particular social types through irony. In ridiculing and mocking Mrs. Norval, the novel reveals the perceptible hypocrisy to which Dr. Norval has pointed.

The Norvals’ marriage could indeed be described following Nancy Armstrong’s depiction of post-1848 domestic fiction. Their marriage changed Mrs. Norval’s social status and placed her in a middle-class home that also conferred her administrative power over the household, but the marriage did not bring her happiness. This becomes more evident as the story develops and Mrs. Norval becomes Mrs. Hackwell when, believing Dr. Norval has died abroad, she marries her former pastor.

In the meantime, Dr. Norval confirms his wife’s suspicions in relation to Lola’s position in “her” family. When the doctor announces that she is to eat by his side given that her position in their family will be, in fact, that of an adopted child, Mrs. Norval, visibly distraught while spilling the tea “all over the tray,” curtly replies, “[i]n that case your daughters and myself will have to wait upon your adopted child, for I am sure we will not find in all New England a white girl willing to do it” (19). The crisis transcends

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30 See Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), pages 176-186, for detailed information on key changes that domestic fiction underwent in mid-nineteenth century. In particular, she observes that marriages which changed people’s social status never led to personal happiness in post-1848 domestic fictional narratives. Mrs. Norval’s social status ascended with her marriage to Dr. Norval, but it is clear in the novel that their marriage was not a blissful one from her own perspective.
mere jealousy of Lola as an intruder holding the doctor’s affection. It is Lola’s otherness, defined primarily by her skin color, that causes this home to shake at its foundation. During that same period, national troubles were on the verge of boiling over and threatened to fracture the very foundation of the nation as a union.

2.5 White by Design: A Few Words on Race and Conquest in the United States

Although the Civil War is ever-present in the novel’s backdrop, *Who Would Have Thought It?* does not directly address the issue of slavery. Indeed, as Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita have revealed in their introduction to Ruiz de Burton’s novel, this subject is “glaringly absent” in the story, where ethnocultural and ideological conflicts are presented in the context of a rising capitalist world power (xvii). Amid rapid geographical expansion paired with accelerated socioeconomic modernization and changing notions of individual rights, the novel exposes existing class and racial contradictions in the periods surrounding the war. Jesse Alemán insists that the absence of slavery in the narrative reveals an attempt to valorize the South: “The novel may in fact eschew slavery to take on issues of national racism, but in the process, it re-circulates its own racist paradigms of blackness by aligning Hispano whiteness with the displaced white Southern identity” (“Citizenship” 15-16). In doing so, Ruiz de Burton’s narrative participates in what Alemán calls “the Reconstructionist myth,” that the old ways of the South were better, especially for blacks, before the Civil War.  

31 Alemán considers several examples from the novel. One of them refers to Caesar, “Sar” for short, the novel’s version of the “happy darky” who whistles happily while cleaning “his master’s pistols” (*Who Would Have Thought It?* 190). Isaac Sprig, Mrs. Norval’s brother, in effect gains a personal servant in Sar as he befriends him during captivity: “Sprig did not find it necessary to tell Sar to go for the clothes. Sar had been an attentive listener to the officer’s recital, and started off after him at a trot. ‘Here, massa,
Thought It?, for instance, exhibits an ingrained racism embodied by many Northern abolitionists while, at the same time, it helps perpetuate the very notions of racism it critiques: the young dark-skinned ten-year-old María Dolores Medina (Lola), for instance, grows into a beautiful (white) woman once the Indian paint that darkened her skin is finally bleached. Her beauty is contingent upon the whitening of her skin.

The novel’s ambivalent position on race – the abolitionists’ racism and the author’s own problematic stance on the beauty of whiteness, for example – are no doubt influenced by the historical emphasis on Whiteness to make sense of racial oppression. Ideologically white by design, the United States has participated in racial formation by defining and constructing the social and legal aspects of race. In his revised edition of White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race, Ian Haney-López maintains, “Race and racism are centrally about seeking, or contesting, power. They have their origins in efforts to rationalize the expropriation and exploitation of land and labor, and they remain vibrant today because racial hierarchy remains in the material interest of very many in our society” (xvi). After the Mexican-American war, it became imperative that the new citizens – the Mexican American citizens – be racialized or made visible in the racial hierarchy for purposes of social control.

Issues related to race, class, gender roles, public versus private spaces, etc., can be qualified and neatly analyzed as long as clear boundaries can be located. We can understand dichotomies and classify, for instance, women/men, rich/poor, black/white, insider/outsider. Yet once these seemingly fixed boundaries either become intermixed or

put 'em on, for de Lo’s sake, an’ look like a gin’leman ag’in” (190). Alemán claims that Sar effectively “re-makes Issac into a Southern gentleman” (16).
are perceived as unstable and, for all intents and purposes, “breakable,” they produce the threat of the unclassifiable, or the “mixable,” in societies whose shared boundary comfort has allowed them to outline legal tenets based on racial difference. The Mexican American, a transracial being, became materialized in a mestizo body, literally “mixed” – not black, not white, not fully European nor American Indian. Their new ethnicity status, in consequence, created the need to “racialize” them, to place these American citizens of Mexican or Spanish heritage in a racial category that could be defined under the law and, in turn, could bind them to existing or newly formed edicts affecting, among other crucial matters, their citizenship rights or lack thereof.

This is the challenge Lola faces: while insisting on her “pure-blood” Spanish roots and, thus, “white nature,” the others define her as non-white based on her physical appearance when she first emerges. Whether she is black, Indian, or Mexican does not matter because she will ultimately be defined, identified, as a visible and tangible non-white. Part of the crisis she embodies is born precisely within that space of “racial uncertainty” or the inability to classify her within a specific non-white group. Even when her skin emerges as white, after literally shedding the dark color forced upon her by the Indians in an effort to make her “one of their own,” the novel perpetuates the crisis by transposing it to one of white/mestizo struggle: being European Spanish is associated with being white which, in turn, is privileged by Anglo Americans in a sort of bonding through whiteness. Being white, in other words, meant having access to a national identity as citizen of the nation.

Many of the earliest colonists in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas were, in fact, Spaniards by birth (peninsulares) as Lola’s parents, or, as Lola herself, by
direct descent (*criollos* or Creoles). But many more were *mestizos*, the product of Spanish and Indian miscegenation in what would become the United States southwest or the “Borderlands” (Nostrand 3); some were Indians, and a few were mulattos. Probably due to the remote locations between those four colony clusters and Mexico’s central plateau, distinct subcultures developed, among them Californios, Hispanos (New Mexico), and Tejanos. When the newly independent Mexico opened its northern borders to non-Mexicans in 1821, Anglos quickly moved into these colonial subcultures. Soon, California began trading animal hides for New England’s clothing, household, and building materials, developing not only strong economic ties but also curiosity about the new “savage” territories (Almaguer 16). When gold was discovered in California the same year it became a U.S. territory, 1848, a large Anglo population encroached upon Californios in Northern California; about three decades later, they had overtaken the greater part of Southern California as well (Nostrand 3-7). *Who Would Have Thought It?* suggests that Lola’s mother, although in captivity by Apache Indians, collected the gold and precious gems for Lola during this period. The novel, then, addresses these historical realities only indirectly through Lola’s presence – a constant reminder of Anglo conquest of the Borderlands.

By way of annexation, conquest, and purchase, more than eighty-thousand Spanish-speaking people became Mexican Americans. Already by mid-nineteenth century, these new citizens were becoming bilingual and bicultural as a result of their contact with Anglos (Nostrand 3-7). This was certainly the case of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, who became a U.S. citizen in 1850 when California officially entered the Union. She came to this country in 1848, after her home town of La Paz in Baja
California had been all but destroyed by the U. S. invasion of 1847, commanded by the
author’s would-be husband, lieutenant-colonel Henry S. Burton. When it was decided
that Lower California would remain part of Mexico, young María Amparo Maytorena
Ruiz, along with almost four hundred residents of La Paz, were offered political asylum
in Alta California to compensate for their ruined properties, as well as to protect them
from almost certain reprisal by Mexican forces for their support of U. S. troops during the
invasion. She married Burton – by now a captain – a year later in Monterey, California.

Historically, in Mexico marriage could only take place between two baptized
Catholics before a Catholic priest. Given that U. S. military policy after the invasion was
to comply with Mexican laws and customs, military governor Richard B. Mason agreed
with concerned Mexican bishops to forbid mixed marriages of Catholics and Protestants
performed by civil magistrates. It is no surprise, then, that Ruiz’s and Burton’s interfaith
marriage caused the author to be banished by her Catholic community. Eventually, their
“heretical” marriage was accepted by the Church under several conditions, among them
that their children be educated as Catholics and that Ruiz de Burton “should pray God to
convert the captain to the church” (Bancroft, qtd. in Sánchez and Pita 12). Limitations
established by a legal system on marriage were not uncommon, especially in this period
of migration, border-shifting, and the predictable result – intermixing. Even without
these legal limitations, prejudices against interreligious relationships existed in the
northern United States as well, as we learn from Mrs. Norval’s aversion for anything, and
anyone, Catholic. In relation to the history of their origins, locals at the time deemed the

32 For more detailed accounts by H. H. Bancroft regarding the Burtons’ scandalous marriage, see
Burtons’ union as one of “natural enemies”: Californio and Anglo-American (Davidson, qtd. in Saldívar 169).

This “exchange” of cultural traits between the incoming Anglos and the people of the southwest, including Californios, involved the creation and enforcement of state regulations not only on religious matters, but on questions of race as well. Laws already existed that prohibited interracial marriage. As the United States expanded, its legal system was also incorporated into the new territories. Haney-López argues that laws indeed have contributed to the architecture of race in this nation by direct participation. To start with, laws have shaped the physical appearance of the nation through exclusionary immigration acts, by interfering with marital choices, and by establishing anti-miscegenation decrees – decrees that were still official in the state books until only four decades ago (81-86). By making the intermixture between people of different racial heritage illegal, these laws “sought to maintain social dominance along specifically racial lines, and at the same time, sought to maintain racial lines through social domination” (82). Interracial procreation threatened this racial hierarchy based on the idea of the “pure” physical types that provide the foundation to the notions of race in the United States.

Discriminatory legislation established definitions of race as early as 1705 with the Virginia act, the first legal ban on cross-racial marriage and the first legal effort to define Black. States varied in their definition of who was Black, but it seems the rule most followed was based on how much “African blood” a person had:

The very practice of legally defining Black identity demonstrates the social, rather than natural, basis of race. Moreover, these competing definitions demonstrate
that the many laws that discriminated on the basis of race more often than not defined, and thus helped to create, the categories they claimed only to elucidate.

In defining Black and White, statutory and case law assisted in fashioning the racial significance that by themselves drops of blood, ascertifiable amounts, and fractions never could have. In the name of racially regulating behaviors, laws created racial identities. (Haney-López 83, emphasis in original)

Indeed, “[n]o one was white before he/she came to America,” author and essayist James Baldwin maintains, “[i]t took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country” (qtd. in Delgado 285). Before the need arose to define Black or any other race as different from White, the people to whom Baldwin refers were Irish, English, Spaniard, Mexican – nationality, place of origin, defined who the other was from anyone else’s perspective. Andrea Tinnemeyer argues that the Norval family’s speculations and efforts to place Lola into a specific racial category reflect this type of “national race-based preoccupations – the savagery of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans and African Americans” (175). Indeed, the “farcical interrogation” by the Norvals and surrounding community of Lola’s ethnic identity mimics “the racist, pseudo-scientific discourse prominent in the nineteenth century as ‘scientists’ sought to quantify racial distinctions and classes through an arithmetic of blood and a taxonomy of races” (175), as Haney-López’s study demonstrates.

But what happens to nationalities, or identities rooted in physical space, when borders shift to define a new nation while the people remain in situ? The Mexican American people, born in 1848, were not immigrants in the sense that they did not, for the most part, migrate. They were trapped in the political migration process of the
borders surrounding them. Unlike many of the newly arrived Gold Rush immigrants, the Californios, Tejanos, and Hispanos had been citizens of three different nations without moving outside of their own lands. At one point, they belonged in a nation of limbo, so to speak – no longer citizens of Mexico and at the same time rejected by the new system of power. As it happened, the growing xenophobia during the first few years after 1848 prevented the acceptance of the Spanish-speaking citizens as “real Americans.” All were considered foreigners in the land of their ancestors. Even poor European immigrants had the light-skin color advantage that enabled many to pass as American, as stated in Haney-López’s study. This metonymical relationship between “white” and “American” in fact entered the twentieth century and remained in the legal books for years.

Though many Californios described themselves as white, their racial classification was difficult to achieve given their eclectic heritage. The Constitutional Convention held in California in 1849, nonetheless, placed the Mexican Californios in the “white” category. Tomás Almaguer has argued that the Californios were legally incorporated into the new society because they shared European physical traits and cultural attributes like the Catholic religion and Spanish language. Sánchez and Pita, on the other hand, present a different argument based on the 1849 state convention proceedings. According to their study, “linking citizenship to whiteness guaranteed the exclusion of Indians and blacks from U. S. citizenship” (Conflicts 66). Sánchez and Pita observe that, though white by law under the 1849 Convention, Californios continued to be segregated and marginalized. (64-67)

33 The link between race, place, and color developed in great part in the United States through immigration and naturalization laws during the nineteenth- and early-twentieth century. If an Irish immigrant, for instance, was granted citizenship, in that very instant he or she was conferred a White
This seemingly arbitrary social construct of race is an inherently volatile conception precisely because it depends on one’s opinions. The perception of crisis as described by Trigo is rooted in questions of difference created to exclude the undesirable, the other, the subject that can threaten this established exclusionary system. To paraphrase Sartre, “A Jew is one whom others consider a Jew.”\textsuperscript{34} In our case, “others” stand for white-dictated laws, thus in an effort to apply “fixed” boundaries to unstable racial definitions, the legal system created segregation laws that physically separated whites and non-whites. Such geographic boundaries today have become a type of “stable referent” to an “unstable identity” with connection to racial lines.\textsuperscript{35}

As we discover in Ruiz de Burton’s novel, difference did not need to be present in order to be feared. The recently acquired southwestern lands were mysterious to the Northeasterers – these were lands still filled with “foreigners” and “savages.” In \textit{Who Would Have Thought It?}, much of this fearful prejudice is embodied in the pious Mrs. Cackle who, disgusted with Dr. Norval’s “most unnatural liking of foreigners,” cries out, identity as well, given that this country’s laws dictated a “white person” prerequisite to becoming naturalized (Haney-López 1; Sánchez and Pita, \textit{Conflicts} 66).

\textsuperscript{34} This is taken from Walter Benn Michaels’ \textit{The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality} (2006, 30-36). In his book, Michaels posits an essential question that not only points to the crisis of difference perceived through Lola’s body in \textit{Who Would Have Thought It?}, but it also underscores today’s discourse on race: what joins blacks to other blacks, or Jews to other Jews, or any member of a minority group to other members, is not a shared set of physical characteristics as there is none that they all share; rather, it is “the shared experience of being visually or cognitively \textit{identified}” as black, or Jewish, or an Other. The construction of an identity, of the self and the other, occurs simultaneously in “public” spaces (e.g., legal construction) as much as it does in the “private” realm (i.e., a closed familial space where difference is created, once again, not only through the inclusion of the established members but by means of exclusionary practices that keep the “identified as different” out).

\textsuperscript{35} For more information about racial demarcations in modern cities, see Richard Ford’s \textit{Urban Space and the Color Line: Demarcation and Disorientation in the Postmodern Metropolis} (1992), as cited in Haney-López 186.
To me they are all alike – Indians, Mexicans, or Californians – they are all horrid. But my son Beau says that our just laws and smart lawyers will soon “freeze them out.” That as soon as we take their lands from them they will never be heard of anymore, and then the Americans, with God’s help, will have all the land that was so righteously acquired through a just war and a most liberal payment in money. (11, emphasis in original)

While the “real Americans” could count on God’s endorsement, a group of second-class citizens was being created. The period between 1835 and 1848 marked the emergence of the U.S. empire – from the Texas Wars of Independence until the end of the Mexican War – and inherent with it came a new colonization not unlike that suggested by Thomas Jefferson at the turn of the previous century.36

Mrs. Cackle’s desire to “freeze out” the horrid non-Americans – Indians, Mexicans, Californians – is but an echo of the popular sentiment in New England at the time. This complete displacement of unwanted populations is a desire entrenched in the nation’s history.37 It is significant to note that Mrs. Cackle’s words, expressed four years before the break of the Civil War and nine after the end of the Mexican War, came

36 For a detailed study on Jefferson’s ideas for a “black colonization,” see Ronald Takaki’s Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America (1990), 42-55.

37 Only half a century earlier, Thomas Jefferson had sought to expatriate all American blacks once they ceased to be slaves. Santo Domingo, Africa, and the West Indies were all considered as potential “receptacles” for colonized blacks. Although this endeavor proved to be “impracticable,” Jefferson persistently worried that whites and blacks could never coexist in America. Nature, he believed, had made these two races with “real distinctions” in an attempt to avoid intermixture (Takaki 42-50). Jefferson’s conflictive feelings – as an abolitionist profiting from slavery while claiming liberty was a natural right – partially mirror those of many New Englanders in the second half of the nineteenth century.
moments before the Christian and abolitionist characters were introduced to “the little black girl.”

2.6 “A little girl very black indeed”

And so it is that Mrs. Cackle’s horrid nightmare becomes materialized in the body of a dark-skinned young child, perceived as the bearer of Indian, Mexican, and Californian blood who, to boot, could also be a “negro child.” After four years exploring the geology of the southwest, Dr. Norval finally returns to New England, bringing with him a series of rock collections and a very dark ten-year-old girl whose history “is already more romantic than that of the heroines of [Mrs. Norval’s] trashy novels” (17). Once his wife and daughters recognize a little black girl under a large, red shawl, they all gaze at little Lola as one might stare at a frightening yet fascinating caged creature:

“Goodness! What a specimen! A nigger girl!” – exclaimed Mattie…. “The doctor is not content with bringing four boxes more, full of stones, but now he, I fear, having exhausted the mineral kingdom, is about to begin with the animal, and this is our first specimen” – said Mrs. Norval… “The next specimen will be a baboon” – added Ruth – “for papa’s samples don’t improve” (16).

The blackness of the little girl was startling to all at first sight. On a second look, however, she in fact begins to “improve”: “I have been looking at this one, and I think it is rather pretty, only very black,” observes Presbyterian Reverend Hackwell. Dr. Norval’s daughters as well begin to comment on the unexpected features found on the black girl: “Look what magnificent eyes she has, and what red and prettily-cut lips!” But
how could this black-skinned child own such colorful lips? After all, they all knew that “negroes’ lips are not like those” (16). Beauty, it turns out, is indeed very much in the eye of the beholder as they scrutinize the features of the “object of crisis” – features that disconnect, differentiate, and define the “races,” historically favoring “the one” over “the other.”

That she is a “foreigner” – whether Indian, Californian, Spanish, or Mexican – initially takes second stage to the shocking black veil that covers her entire body. Her blackness facilitates the conversation of race in the novel, given how difficult it is to enter a dialogue on race outside of a black and white dichotomy. Ruiz de Burton certainly uses it as a clever discursive strategy with double effect: while the novel uses Lola’s apparent blackness to critique the racism so ingrained in that population, it also privileges Mexican origins over those of African descent. The overriding measure of value here is, of course, skin color. As long as Lola is seen as black, her future certainly stands little chance of being anything but grim despite the pretty gold nuggets her mother so carefully collected for her. But once her blackness is almost literally “bleached” and her body appears as white as that of a Norval girl, her “Mexicanness” is welcomed as something beautiful, and her future no longer depends solely on her treasure chest.

2.7 Materializing Disease: From Ambiguous Race to Certain Gender

Just as Jefferson once described the black African slaves as “this blot [that] in our country increases as fast, or faster, than the whites”; who are “in reason much inferior,” and whose imagination is “dull, tasteless, and anomalous” when compared intellectually
to whites,\textsuperscript{38} so is Lola, in effect, the dark “blot” in what had been a seemingly stainless homogeneous space. It must also be remembered, however, that her body threatens not only because of its racial otherness, but also because it is inscribed as female. Her presence in that space represents a double crisis, an anomaly, a disease.

Women, indeed, have been associated with disease since at least the Middle Ages. It is not uncommon, for instance, to find this connection in the Medieval (misogynist) discourse. Michael Solomon, in The Literature of Misogyny in Medieval Spain, indicates that misogynist texts of this era in fact embraced medical and religious functions. Misogynist discourse was bound up in medical strategies for preserving men’s sexual wellbeing as much as it was critical for the salvation of their souls. Solomon shows how the construction of women as sinful and malicious beings transcended cultural grounds. In an effort to prevent or cure the “lovesickness” disease, the cause must be annihilated. Women turned out to be the source of this very serious disease, one that “was as much a disease in the fifteenth century as AIDS, leukemia, and cholera are today” (11). Women, as both disease and diseased, had to be destroyed if only in these treatises that deformed the female image with the sole purpose of saving men’s bodies and souls. Because women had the “power to disease,” they also represented a threat to the social order. Hence, social authorities have taken the power to label disease in order to “control women’s desires by casting their discontents into pathological molds” (161). In so doing, “socially empowered healers reinforce and defend the dominating social structures, and thereby act as agents of social control.” (19)

\textsuperscript{38} These comments by Thomas Jefferson are taken from Ronald Takaki’s Iron Cages (1990): 48-49.
The power, then, lies in the objectification of disease; that is, in seeing disease as something tangible and concrete. Solomon’s study is important because it demonstrates how the long-standing medical tradition of blaming an “imbalance of humors” for causing disease – an internal source – was being replaced with women “as an infectious disease and as a contagious source of corporeal destruction” (75). In other words, the infection was now caused by an outside agent, one that could be seen and touched. As such, disease is controlled from the outside, where its cause is identified and mythified for the “common good.” Gender and race become intersecting vectors of visual difference that threatens the wellbeing of the dominant powers.

In line with Solomon’s historical and theoretical approach to disease, Ruiz de Burton’s novel makes clear that the aversion felt by the Norval family toward Lola’s skin in fact does have a cure. In Lola’s case, it is not so much her gender as her skin color (“her race”) that causes crisis and panic in the Norval household. Her dark skin color was the first observable feature that everyone noticed with great astonishment before the red shawl that covered her was dropped to discover “a little girl very black indeed” (16).

“The first difference which strikes us is that of color,” wrote Thomas Jefferson about the physical distinctions between blacks and whites,

And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of color in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black which covers the emotions of the other race? (qtd. in Takaki 127)
White is beautiful and exciting; black is suspicious in its concealment. Lola’s skin, that daunting “immovable veil of black,” threatens to taint the Norvals’ home, where “the fine mixtures of red and white” had thus far defined their sheltered space in Church and hearth – such as the fine mixture in Mrs. Norval’s “colored vexation” when she realized Lola spoke perfect English and had understood every word uttered about her, for instance. Mrs. Norval’s words function, in effect, as the medieval antidote found in negative discourse, especially as Lola grows older and prettier (“whiter”), becoming her own son’s object of affection. In the beginning, Mrs. Norval speaks about Lola’s skin with “shiver” and “disgust”: “How black she is! … How old is she? Her face is so dark that truly, it baffles all my efforts to guess her age” (17). Even as time progresses and the “little black girl” begins to grow into a “beautiful white woman,” her suspicions of a diseased child do anything but disappear.

Early in the novel, the reader is exposed to a foreshadowing effect with respect to Lola’s “true colors.” This scene, in which Mattie and her mother focus on the newly-arrived ten-year-old girl’s features, reveals much of what is to happen in the following chapters:

‘I don’t think she is so black,’ said Mattie … ‘See, the palm of her hand is as white as mine – and a prettier white; for it has such a pretty pink shade to it.’

‘Drop her hand, Mattie! You don’t know what disease she might have,’ said Mrs. Norval imperiously.
‘Nonsense! As if papa would bring anyone with a contagious disease to his house! … How pretty her little hand is, and all her features are certainly lovely! See how well cut her nose and lips are. And as for her eyes, I wish I had them: they are perfectly superb!’ (17)

Nose, lips, and eyes reveal a beautiful girl “in the making.” The palm of her hand indeed does predict her future as white – and being white, in turn, reassures that she will have a future as the wife of “a decent man.” After Mrs. Norval discovers Lola’s wealth and the pretty “yellow nuggets” (33) inherited from her mother, she begins to indulge her husband’s contentions about the girl: “I am glad she is not [Indian or negro], because – because – if she be of decent people, then – why – then, of course, a decent man would marry her” (27). The decent man she had in mind was her own son, Julian. Her plan to take possession of Lola’s wealth thus begins with this fleeting thought.

Dr. Norval’s prognosis of Lola’s temporary skin color also brings up questions of “purity of blood” as he privileges Lola’s “pure Spanish blood” as a sign that she is neither Indian nor black, and to prove that she certainly carries no disease in her blood: “let me tell you that the blood of that child is as good as, or better than, yours or mine; that she is neither an Indian nor a negro child…” (25).39 When Dr. Norval says Lola’s blood is “as

39 It is significant to note that the valorization of blood according to heritage was not only enforced during the Middle Ages, but that it is still in effect today, perhaps even more pervasive. Currently in the United States, for instance, being mistaken as Arab builds up so many defensive walls that it becomes necessary to deny it loudly and clearly. During the 2008 presidential campaign, for example, when a woman at a rally for John McCain claimed Barack Obama was “an Arab,” McCain immediately came to clarify that, in fact, Obama was no Arab, that he was “a decent man.” The syllogism thus follows that “Arabs are not decent people.” The point here is simply to underscore how deep-seated age-old prejudices merge with current history and events to perpetuate perceived threats through the formation of “subjects of crisis.”
good as” or “better than” their own, he not only privileges their “blood” as Anglo Americans and Lola’s blood as “pure Spanish,” but his contrast also shows the perceived inferiority of being Indian or black: “Lolita’s blood is pure Spanish blood, her mother being of pure Spanish descent and her father the same [which makes] the fate of so highly-born a lady so sadly unfortunate” (28). While these hierarchical castes were still very much accepted in the nineteenth-century, it is significant to note that Dr. Norval is meant to represent the opposition in the household, the “good-for-nothing Democrat, who doesn’t believe in Sambo but believe[s] in Christian charity and human mercy” (18). In this sense, he represents Ruiz de Burton’s values: as he tries to show the hypocrisy in the Christian abolitionists about their treatment of nonwhites, he inadvertently demonstrates how inherent racism really is by enforcing a hierarchy of social worth according to ancestry. Ancestry that is, ultimately, established by the perception of physical traits, particularly, and in our case, especially, by materializing skin color.40

When Lola’s pathologized body enters the Norvals’ White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant sphere, it turns into what Trigo has termed “a body of crisis” because it destabilizes what that space, and everything therein, had thus far represented. As a Catholic child of Spanish heritage and ambiguous physical appearance, Lola’s body becomes identified with the (pathologized) social body insofar as it brings with it the threat of the non-desirable – the non-white, non-Anglo, non-Protestant “foreigner” – the body of the conquered enters the space of the conqueror, as it were, producing a sort of reversed colonial anxiety. From the moment Lola’s dark body comes into view and

40 In accordance to caste hierarchy, for instance, being criollo (a direct descendant of Spaniards) retained a much more elevated status and social worth than being mixed progeny, whether mestizo (Indian and Spanish), sambo (Indian and African), or mulatto (Spanish and African).
throughout the dramatic changes her body undergoes, her presence serves to show hidden “truths” about the Norvals’ home in particular and, in turn, about the Northeast in general. According to Sánchez and Pita in their introduction, Lola’s temporary blackness highlights “the New Englanders’ preference for concealment and masking” (xx), even though, they further claim, Ruiz de Burton sidesteps the issues of miscegenation and racism by making Lola’s blackness only “artificial,” and in the process allowing for a “decent” marriage within the parameters of the romance. The Norvals’ home, at least from Mrs. Norval’s perspective, is also presented as a delicate, fragile body that must be protected in the same manner that the United States must be protected from everything and everyone foreign, then and now.

Portrayed from the beginning as beautiful, virtuous, and intelligent, Lola grows into an honorable young woman beyond moral reproach who “is also presented as having her own class/cultural identity, even as a child, seen ostensibly in her notions of cleanliness, her repugnance at the thought of sleeping with the Irish maids, and her unshakable religious faith” (Sánchez and Pita xx). It is significant to note, then, that Lola also becomes alarmed with the color of her skin once she falls in love with Julian Norval. Worried that Julian may think her an Indian or black, Lola in fact internalizes the prejudice she has faced and begins to see her apparent racial difference – her dark skin color – as a disease that must be cured.

Lola’s body does not whiten overnight. The “cure” takes years to complete and, in the meantime, her skin acquires a spotty look that alarms some characters as much as, if not more than, the very dark skin she exhibited in the beginning. As it happened when Lola first came into view, speculation over her dark spots took over the household: “[t]he
doctor says that those spots are not contagious and will all pass off in time. Lola began to have them soon after she went to school, nearly three years ago, and as yet no one has been infected by them. So they can’t be very contagious” (78). But what could they indicate, if not disease? The conversation among some of the female characters continues,

“Emma Hackwell told me that her brother thinks Lola must belong to a tribe of Mexican Indians called ‘Pintos,’ who are spotted,” said Artemisia.

“No, that ain’t so! Mr. Hackwell said that if Lola was an Indian, the spots might indicate that she belonged to the Pintos,” Miss Lucretia observed.

“But as the doctor says she is not an Indian, then those ugly spots can’t be accounted for, except on the theory that they are some disease,” said Mrs. Norval…

“With all due respect to the doctor, it seems to me clear, as you say, that the girl is either of the Pinto tribe, or her spots are a disease,” Mrs. Cackle averred… (78)

This syllogistic altercation again illustrates the prejudice that saturates the novel, but the humorous remark of a Pinto tribe also serves to ridicule and highlight the unmitigated ignorance upon which many of these prejudices are based. Finally, Mrs. Norval ends the exchange with her hope that Lola’s spots have already disappeared, “and Lola might be by now all black or all white, no matter which, only not with those ugly white spots” (78). But alas, when Lola returns with those loathed spots, she is not allowed to be near
anybody but the doctor. Mrs. Norval warns her son, “Take care, Julian. Don’t touch Lola’s hand; we don’t know whether those spots might not be contagious” (79). When Julian protests to his mother for her treatment of Lola, she quickly replies, “Lola has no right to feel hurt if we are afraid of being infected” (79). This is the beginning of Lola’s “self-violence,” or the rejection of herself as undesirable and the longing to free her true (white) Self from the dark and blotchy body that incarcerates her. Once her skin is uniformly white, her marriage to Julian will substantiate her whiteness and establish her worth of citizenship.

Lola, thus, becomes an other to herself. This process, which Trigo calls “a self-violence,” involves the desire to control her difference and to “normalize” it. Her own body becomes her prison; it represents the border that separates white Anglo Julian from herself, a potential impediment for their marriage: “I wanted to tell you this many times,” she tells Julian Norval, “for though I didn’t care whether I was thought black or white by others, I hated to think that you might suppose me an Indian or black” (100). It is the emergence of what Friedrich Nietzsche described as “bad conscience”: “[t]his instinct for freedom forcibly made latent … this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the bad conscience is in its beginnings” (87). Lola’s dark skin certainly exposes the North’s racism, but it also reveals “a peculiar Mexican anxiety for being categorized as Indian or black” (Alemán “Citizenship” 14). This contradictory cultural logic becomes resolved to some extent when Lola’s “blackface” fades: Fortunately for Lola, her body eventually normalizes – as it also maintains the norm of whiteness – and this allows her admissibility within dominant upper-class Northeastern
society and, by extension, within the realm of American citizenship. She escapes her racial otherness and, in the end, is allowed to marry Julian and to claim “her place” in the domestic sphere as upper-class (white) wife. This process of racialization, then, allows Mexicans to be positioned within the nation’s white imagined community.

But Lola’s wealth had also helped establish her place in the social ranking despite her stained skin. Dr. Norval repeatedly insists on Lola’s whiteness, but he also affirms that by the time the young girl is twenty years old, “she will be very rich, and people wouldn’t call her Indian or nigger even if she were, which she is not… and she will be very beautiful, as that black skin will certainly wear off” (27). The problem raised here is not that Lola will be unable to possess wealth if she were “colored,” but that “a decent man would [not] marry her” (27). Also of significance in this passage is, of course, the definition of beauty by absence of blackness: she will be beautiful because she will no longer have dark skin. Even so, Mrs. Norval is against the idea of a black girl possessing so much capital and jewelry, so much so that “it made her heart ache to think that the black child would have these things… And would that little nigger be so rich, and her girls so poor?” (49). As Lola begins her whitening process, Mrs. Norval refuses to believe that it is in fact occurring. As Sánchez and Pita have observed in their introduction to the novel, Mrs. Norval comes to believe that Lola’s fortune is rightfully her own, “as part of manifest destiny, she being of a superior race” (xxi). The whitening process of Lola’s skin thus threatens the Norvals’ control over her possessions.

Some critics have argued that Who Would Have Thought It? constructs an allegory of the modernization of the United States by means of “plunder” and other
corrupt practices. \[41\] Indeed, in an effort to transcode that historical narrative, the text presents a romantic plot and fills it with a series of complex episodes in which devious characters, including self-righteous Mrs. Norval, engage in deception and intrigue to effectively disinherit Lola of the possessions bequeathed by her mother. The people in control of the colonial discourse on the domestic level include Mrs. Norval and her pastor, but on a national stage it is the government itself that is being criticized for its increasing allegiance to capital. Lola, symbolizing the Mexican American aristocracy and, arguably by association, the author herself, is the dispossessed (and displaced) victim, first stripped of her true (white) identity by an Apache tribe, then robbed by a corrupt regime.

Indeed, while Mrs. Norval and her daughters enjoyed wearing the jewels made with Lola’s gems, Lola herself was not allowed to sport any jewelry for an important reception at the Norvals’ New York mansion. Nevertheless, it is at this event that Lola’s whiteness and beauty is highlighted and unveiled. As Mattie Norval fetches a pearl necklace for Lola after noticing the absence of jewelry, the former exclaims, “Talk about Spanish women being dark! Can anything be whiter than Lola’s neck and shoulders?” To this, her sister Ruth rejoins, “Lola is not Spanish; she is Mexican” (232). Spanish or Mexican, what was of significance at this moment was the vision of her whiteness, which also translated into beauty as Mattie continues, “This is the prettiest girl in these United States” (232). As it was in the beginning of the narrative, the way Lola looks surpasses in importance her status as “foreigner” or as Catholic. Her “subjectivity of crisis” is based

\[41\] See the novel’s introduction by Sánchez and Pita (Iviii).
upon the perception of her body – a natural and physical body that is in reality a discursive artifact whose physicality is constructed in order to render the crisis visible.

Such crisis, as we have discussed in this chapter, parallels the perceived crisis the nation was experiencing during that same era, including racial anxieties surrounding the Civil War and the appropriation of the southwest territories along with their people and resources. Lola came to embody the fears and prejudices of middle-upper-class Northeastern families: a “foreigner” brought over from the still mysterious lands of the “savage” southwest, a Catholic who confronts Irish Catholics and Northeastern Protestants with similar aversion, a dark child of ambiguous pedigree whose very dark skin is at odds with the wealth that accompanies her into their closed domestic space. The body that emerged from the narrative’s discourse, particularly the debates and dialogue in which many of the anti-heroic characters engaged in order to define Lola, is not a fixed artifact. This body, nevertheless, is claimed by these discourses as a physical body of knowledge that points to the perceived threat of difference; hence the imperative to make the crisis physical in order to control it, to normalize it. Lola’s black and possibly diseased body must be normalized, integrated, assimilated into the dominant social system in order to eradicate difference, much like Jefferson’s desire to remove all blacks once they were emancipated. Consequently, whitening becomes the ideal means for normalizing the perceived crisis.

Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita argue that Lola’s whitening functions as a socially symbolic act through which the “performance of blackface will serve to make transparent the deceptions and hypocrisy of the New England community. The narrative thus uses the issue of Lola’s changing skin color and even the possibility of
miscegenation as a way of censuring abolitionist racism” (xxi). Yet, the mere necessity
to whiten Lola also speaks to the inherent and probably unconscious prejudice within
Ruiz de Burton’s community. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the discursive
processes that produce the bodies of crisis are indeed not “the result of a conscious
attempt or conspiracy to bias understanding or self-perception of a discipline, knowledge,
or subjectivity” (Trigo 4). Therefore, though the attempt to critique the sociopolitical
realities of her time is very likely a purposeful and conscious endeavor on the author’s
part, the end in this case may not only not justify the means, but in fact contradicts them.
Benigno Trigo’s introspective conclusion befits our own closing of this section:

The price of this way of neutralizing the perceived threat posed by difference, of
this way of governing, is a reduction in human potential, hope, and promise. It
restricts the ability to question or criticize the process of perception; it limits the
understanding of knowledge; it confines the creative act; it leads to repetitions and
clichés. Most important, perhaps, this reduction, and the resulting practices of
government, lead to suffering. (125)

In whitening Lola’s body so that she may have a happy ending in accordance to the
standard of romance, the novel indeed supports the white upper-class norm of the very
society it seeks to criticize. Thus, the social suffering caused by perpetuating this norm –
which the novel itself presents as unjust – will never cease, and the discursive practices of
exclusion of difference will continue, and in fact have continued, well into our twenty-
first century. These contradictions, nevertheless, paradoxically also define modernity and
the processes involved in modernizing communities, including the one surrounding the Norvals’ home.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, Mexican Americans continue to pose a threat to the “emaciated body of Western civilizations,” as voiced by Representative Tom Tancredo and publicly shared by other members of Congress. Depicted as barbarous vampires, these subjects of crisis continue to push “at the gate,” threatening to contaminate and to drain an entire culture through the “death grip” of multiculturalism. In Who Would Have Thought It?, Lola’s blackness demoralizes Anglo American racism only to replace it with a Spanish/Mexican racial caste system that continues to locate whiteness as “the highest identity marker” (Alemán “Citizenship” 14).

The discourse of difference and the exclusionary practices involved in protecting the established hegemony, again, are the result of layered histories, from the Dark Ages to colonization to modernization to today’s state of play. The construction of discursive networks as physical spaces allows us to see and to know a crisis. Discourse (knowledge, self-knowledge, subjectivity), like home, is historical in that sense. As such, we reiterate, its intrinsic nature is to be unstable and contradictory, as made manifest in the 2008 presidential elections. Sometimes, it turns out, the dominant discourse can shift course to render the nation, as well as “home,” an extraordinary complex space.
CHAPTER 3:
CROOKED LINES:
OUTLINING RACE AND RE-DRAWING SPACE IN
THE SQUATTER AND THE DON

I’d like to [remind] you of the importance not of
synthesis and the transcendence of opposites but of
the role of geographic knowledge in keeping one
grounded, literally, in the often tragic structure of
social, historical, and epistemological contests over
territory – this includes nationalism, identity,
narrative, and ethnicity – so much of which informs
the literature, thought, and culture of our time.


3.1 Introduction

In an effort to reclaim the literary heritage of U.S. Hispanics and to remedy the
exclusion of their literature from American literary history, Arte Público Press founded
the Recovering the U.S. Literary Heritage Project, an ongoing undertaking that compiles,
locates, and conserves the literary contributions of U.S. Hispanics to the canon of that
broadly-described discipline known as American Literature. This extensive effort seeks
to reclaim historical accounts about the United States by U.S. Hispanics. The two novels
written by María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832-1895) in the late nineteenth century have
become accessible thanks to such a project, and are now part of a recovered literature that
is making its way into interdisciplinary curricula. *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), Ruiz de Burton’s second and best-known novel, was republished first in 1992, followed by *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) in 1995. The purpose of any recovery effort involves the reclaiming of something that was either forgotten, lost, or appropriated by another. Fittingly, the rhetorical strategies in *The Squatter and the Don* also center on the redress of expropriated land and the desire to restore a past economic order that is irremediably lost. In short, what the novel’s characters fight to protect is their idea of home, and what this concept means for either side of the new frontier: the Dons and the squatters.

This chapter reviews the historical moment within which the novel was created to show how the modernizing processes also involve rendering the subaltern invisible, particularly when a subaltern community stands in the way of “progress” as defined from the hegemony’s perspective. Questions of race, class, and gender inevitably surface in this discussion as they are intrinsic to all colonizing processes, such as the 1848 acquisition of the Mexican territories by the United States in general, and of California in particular, which is precisely the center of the novel, where home becomes a symbol of invasion and loss as it embodies that space containing the history of a people ultimately rendered nonexistent. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton encapsulates an era of progress and expansion for some, loss and disenfranchisement for others, in a historical romance that at once follows generic principles while breaking some deep-seated stereotypes of the Mexican people of California. Focused primarily on the experiences of the Californio elites, Ruiz de Burton offers an insider’s focalization on the plight of a people whose land and property were seized by the Anglo-Saxon newcomers who, backed and encouraged
by the U.S. government, were granted legal privileges on the back of the others. This historical romance provided the author with a vehicle for protest and critique otherwise inexistent for women, especially women of the conquered race.

3.1.1 The Squatter and the Don

As noted in the preceding chapter, Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita are responsible for recovering Ruiz de Burton’s novels along with other personal and literary material. Since their publication of the new edition of The Squatter and the Don in 1992, fortunately, a growing interest in and body of work on María Amparo Ruiz de Burton has surfaced. This research production, which includes analyses from historical, political, social, and literary perspectives, is significant when we consider the relatively recent recovery of her novels. The critical work on Ruiz de Burton, however, is still rather small compared to the impact she has had on the history of Chicano/a literature and her chronicles about her own moment in the history of California during the second half of the nineteenth century. The Squatter and the Don, for instance, was the first novel projecting the reality of the native Californios written in English by a Mexican American, and the first to be written also from the perspective of the conquered citizens. This “novel with a purpose” (Conflicts 564, 568) attempts to destroy and complicate stereotypes of the Mexican American culture that saw itself suddenly surrounded by the conquering Anglos. The narrator’s voice, as observed by Sánchez and Pita in their introduction to the novel, is “at once cynical, sarcastic, ironic and bitter, set on

42 For a comprehensive study by Sánchez and Pita on the author’s personal correspondence, see Conflicts of Interest: The Letters of Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton (2001).
denouncing injustice and arguing the novel’s ideological perspective throughout the romance directed at an intended reader that is obviously Anglo and taken to be ill-informed” (47). In closing the racial gap between her Mexican characters and her intended audience, Ruiz de Burton attempts both to educate them about the troubles of the Californios and to persuade them to act, perhaps, against the discrimination and injustices that many land-owning Californios, including herself, were experiencing at the time.

The first half of the novel reveals the oppositional relationship depicted in the title. With only one exception, Anglo squatters are portrayed as shameless invaders who take the Don’s land and kill his cattle. Although the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed that the Mexican landowners who suddenly found themselves in U.S. territory would retain the titles to their land, the Land Act of 1851 laid the burden of proof on the landowners to demonstrate the validity of their titles (Alemán “Citizenship” 64). Litigation costs forced many, as illustrated by Don Mariano Alamar in the novel, to mortgage their ranchos and even sell their lands in order to cover such costs and pay taxes on the lands occupied by the squatters, who were allowed by law to farm and settle on those lands even while ownership was in dispute. The settlers, or squatters, take advantage of such laws and drive Don Mariano to sell his cattle in order to cover legal expenses. But the entire herd dies on the way to the Colorado river in a snowstorm that almost kills Don Mariano, leaves him with pneumonia, and cripples his accompanying son, Victoriano. Ruiz de Burton’s legal battles were analogous to Don Mariano’s. The title of her Jamul ranch was held up in litigation for many years, and her letters are
evidence of her frustration and desires to come up with business plans that would allow her to regain the comfortable lifestyle she had previously enjoyed.

The second half of the novel covers the economic downfall of the Alamar family due to the failure to expand the Texas Pacific Railroad to San Diego. Don Mariano Alamar and friends invest as much as they have in the promise of a San Diego railroad, but government corruption together with monopolistic practices impede this project in order to build in San Francisco instead. Like Don Mariano, Ruiz de Burton’s husband, lieutenant-colonel Henry S. Burton, had invested in railroad stocks that proved worthless once the project was thwarted by business and political forces. Eventually, Don Mariano dies hopeless and poor on a land doomed to be lost to squatters backed by the legal system. His family is saved by Clarence Darrell, the son of the squatter on the title of the novel, William Darrell, and the future husband to don Mariano’s daughter, Mercedes, who has become rich on Wall Street and by investing in mining stocks. Together, Clarence and Mercedes symbolize the romantic stratum in this narrative, and their marriage would seem to represent the resolution expected to be found in nationalist narratives. In the end, nevertheless, although the Alamars are “rescued” financially by Clarence, little hope is found for the rest of the Californios in the narrative voice as it critiques the actions of Congress and State Legislature against “the will of the people” (343). If they do not legislate according to what the Californians want, the narrator calls out, “then we shall – as Channing said – ‘kiss the foot that tramples us!’ and ‘in anguish of spirit’ must wait and pray for a Redeemer who will emancipate the white slaves of California” (344). The emphasis on whiteness is transparent in the novel as much as the importance placed on class: being a native Spaniard (white) in itself enjoyed much more
privilege than being a *mestizo* (mixed Spaniard and Indian), but the narrator also points out that “no one will willingly tolerate a poor native Californian” (324). Ruiz de Burton was much aware of this marginalized position: wealth could cover up the prejudice that came with being Spanish. She died in Chicago ten years after this novel was published while still fighting for title rights to a land grant in Mexico.

To be sure, Ruiz de Burton’s writings are not free of contradictions with regard to gender, race, and class, not to mention nationalist allegiances at a time when shifting borders made one’s national identity precarious at best. At the same time, The Squatter and the Don echoes political, social, and economic oppositions at play; and the tension throughout this transition results in the dispossession and disempowerment of “all Californians alike” instigated by the “invader” mentioned in the last chapter – the railroad monopoly by most critics’ consent (Sánchez and Pita, The Squatter 48). Nevertheless, what “most Chicano/a critics have been reluctant to acknowledge,” according to José F. Aranda (11), is that Ruiz de Burton’s allegiance also includes the Anglo American citizenry.\(^{43}\) It is also true that the novel fails to include “all Californians alike” in its overall objective, which according to Aranda, hoped to “rescue elite native Californios from economic and political ruin and cultural anonymity” (12). The lower-class Californian population, particularly those of non-European descent, were already trapped in a timeless anonymity, hence they failed to find the way into the novel’s imagined community; their presence is merely limited as background figures who at times are indistinguishable from the land on which they work. The novel’s resolve to minimize

\(^{43}\) Aranda suggests that the textual reference to the struggle of Anglo farmers against the Southern Pacific Railroad in the San Joaquin Valley is a working example of Ruiz de Burton’s literary strategies to ally herself with Anglo American communities for a common cause.
racial and class differences between its characters and its audience may be explained by a desire to not only critique, but to persuade readers that they, too, can be victimized by “the effects of bad legislation, fraud and corruption” (Sánchez and Pita, The Squatter 48).

As mentioned earlier, the majority of the literary criticism involving The Squatter and the Don has primarily engaged the notions of contradictions as consequence of a shifting national and cultural identity during the last decades of the nineteenth century. It is also a consensus among scholars of Ruiz de Burton’s works that these reflect her critique of the politics of land entitlement in the Southwest in light of expansionism and corrupt economic and political institutions. This novel, nonetheless, “actively participates in the belief of Californio elite that they could profit from Anglo expansion into California, just as they profited from Spanish and Mexican colonization of Indian lands” (Alemán “Citizenship” 17). Indeed, the final marriage between Clarence Darrell and Mercedes Alamar may point to a call for racial assimilation as “the easiest way for the Californios to retain land and privileges in a changed social order” (Martín Rodríguez 44). As a historical romance, the novel contributes an invaluable source of knowledge to the history of nineteenth-century U.S. in terms of political economy, cultural and social politics, American literature and, more significant to our purposes in this study, the Chicana and Chicano literary canon.

Perhaps due to its significant contribution to those and other disciplines, much has been debated about the formal classification of this novel – Is it a realist novel? Modernist? Historical romance?44 While not a key focus in this chapter, it is worth

44 See the upcoming book by Marcial González, Chicano Novels and the Politics of Form: Race, Class, and Reification (2009), for a formal reading of Ruiz de Burton’s novel.
mentioning that whereas Sánchez and Pita suggest a “double reading” of the novel due to its “dual” construction as history and romance, I tend to agree with David Luis-Brown that politics and romance are not necessarily opposed, but in fact both history and romance are fused through melodrama, where the central approach is to “resolve social conflict imaginatively through the allegorical union of differing national constituencies in marriage” (813-15). These unions, in turn, subvert the definition of a socio-economic order based on racial politics of exclusion, reconfigure the boundaries of whiteness, and in so doing they also destabilize the social authority of male Anglo-Saxons and denounce their materialism as immoral.

Ruiz de Burton has also been studied in light of the tensions between gender, class, race, and nationality always present in her writings. She certainly shattered cultural boundaries as a woman political critic and as a Hispanic writer in nineteenth-century California, especially being the first Mexican American novelist to write in English. As such, she provided the groundwork to help understand the trajectory from the nineteenth century to today’s Chicana and Chicano literature. More specifically, this chapter is concerned with a topic that has been studied only obliquely in discussions of women’s roles in the nineteenth-century Californian society – the evolution of the meaning of home as chronicled by the novel’s discursive strategies. The discourses surrounding nationality, gender, class, and race conflicts serve as a foundation for understanding the meaning of home in the midst of critical changes in the decades that followed the annexation of California in 1848.

The displacement of the older economic order by a corrupted and abused capitalist system is at the heart of this story. The new economic system is part of the
political web responsible for entangling the Californian constituencies and expropriating their lands after the Mexican-American war. Ruiz de Burton was in a privileged position as a writer because, given her social background, she was especially qualified to grasp and convey the reality of the elite Californios of her time. As a Mexican and a U.S. citizen, she led a life of privilege and exclusion that placed her in a unique position to critique the American expansionist rule toward the west. It is this type of binary existence that is stamped in the novel. The Squatter and the Don presents challenging contradictory positions on many levels – race, class, gender, cultural politics, etc. – but those contradictions echo the muddled nature of the impending transitions within which the novel emerged. The era of the native Californio land-owner was coming to a forceful halt; with it, an uncertainty of self identity began to redefine the meaning of home as a site of belonging.

3.2 Literary and Historical Home

In relation to the role of home in literature, postcolonial scholar Rosemary Marangoly George writes,

The word ‘home’ immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection. Realist novels in the last hundred years have situated themselves in the gap between the realities and the idealizations that have made ‘home’ such an auratic term. As imagined in fiction, ‘home’ is a desire that is fulfilled or denied in varying measure to the subjects (both the fictional characters and the readers) constructed by the narrative. (1-2)
George emphasizes the very idea to be challenged in this chapter – „home’ can no longer be conceived as a stable, permanent space, even when that space is physical and not only metaphorical. As we see in *The Squatter and the Don*, the shifting of national borders along with the Californios’ loss of land, of their home, at the hands of the relatively new conquerors of their space complicate the notion of home as a static place where belonging, or the feeling of belonging, defines it. The novel, indeed, not only denies the desire of home to the landed Californios, but it strips them of everything that had thus far been associated with their idea of home: land, house, cattle, and the history that had defined and outlined home for the Alamars.

This notion of home in literature is complicated here precisely because, although fiction, the novel mirrors real, historical, and contemporary events. As a historical romance, the novel does in fact depict home as “the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection.” This portrayal makes it more “melodramatic” as it is ripped apart by the “invaders” – invaders who, by the end of the narrative, include not only Anglo squatters, but transportation monopolies (the Big Four), corrupted politicians and, in all, the processes by which modern progress is achieved at the sacrifice of the Spanish citizens of California. Ruiz de Burton’s novel narrates stories of constant uphill battles. Indeed, the problem of land ownership becomes even more obscured when it is dependent upon one’s nationality, and when one’s nationality is dependent upon one’s race. This was certainly the case for the former citizens of Mexico who remained in their lands – now part of the United States – and who could provide evidence neither of land titles nor of “purity of blood” to establish
caste and, in turn, whiteness – the basis for all rights and privileges under nineteenth-century U.S. law.

The eighth chapter of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, for instance, states that if the former Mexican citizens remained in their homes and did not elect to retain their Mexican citizenship, they would formally be classified as U.S. citizens after one year and would then enjoy the same protection and rights afforded by U.S. citizenship under the law (Menchaca 233, Gñímez 43). Within a year of the treaty’s ratification, nonetheless, the United States violated these stipulated citizenship equalities of the conquered population who chose to remain in their lands and become nationalized. Instead, the U.S. government “began a process of racialization that categorized most Mexicans as inferiors in all domains of life” (Menchaca 215). Backed by the “white person” requirement to become a United States citizen, the legal system bestowed privilege upon whites while it discriminated against most mestizos, Indians, and afromestizos (Haney-López 12, 31).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Constitutional Convention held in California a year after the treaty was signed nevertheless classified the Mexican Californios as “white” so that they could exclude, according to Sánchez and Pita, all “Indians and blacks from U.S. citizenship” (Conflicts 66). Once again, these groups were rendered invisible in the eyes of United States law. The now “white” Californios, although in far better shape than the Indians or blacks, nevertheless continued to be marginalized through politics and law.

The significance of making a perceived threat visible or invisible was discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation with relation to a racialized body that also represented the outsider within (Lola) in Ruiz de Burton’s Who Would Have Thought It?
(1872). *The Squatter and the Don* presents a more intricate question about who the outsider really is. The reader witnesses a flood of Anglo-American squatters, mostly out of the Northeast, who literally invade – although legally protected – privately-owned lands. The owners in this case, established upper-class Mexican American families, have the burden to prove ownership. Judging from the present state, one does not need a history lesson to realize which side won that legal battle. The Mexican subject thus is rendered invisible while many Anglo-Saxon settlers take possession not only of the natural landscape, but the political and economic scenes as well.

The question of the “invisible Mexican” was materialized in a 2004 film by Sergio Arau with the provocative title “A Day without a Mexican.” According to Arau (and the movie poster that advertised it), the film aimed to explore a fundamental question about being Mexican in the United States: “How do you make the invisible, visible?” John-Michael Rivera describes Arau’s efforts and film as “a self-reflexive meditation on the colonial logic that has historically constituted Mexicans as political nonentities, personae non gratae, which has led to a modern ambivalence surrounding Mexican collectivity in the United States” (2). Indeed, the film brings awareness to the historical amnesia that places Mexicans as invaders rather than inscribing them in the history of this nation, of which they have been a part since its inception. It could be argued that María Amparo Ruiz de Burton attempted to fight this historical and political invisibility through her own voice: as a published novelist, she wrote herself as agent in a literary history that would have to wait close to another century to emerge as a distinct area of study and to attain visibility itself. In writing about the legal and social plight of Mexican Californians like herself, she in turn materialized them as tangible, real beings.
while critiquing the United States’ expansionist policy based on divine right, or her much detested Manifest Destiny. To the “Mexican Question” posed by Rivera, “what are the rights and status of Mexican people in U.S. democratic culture?” (11), then, one could append, “and where is their home?” From what place do they speak? The answer to these questions is entirely contingent upon our definition of home for people who belong neither here nor there. Or do they? What does belonging really mean and who defines it?

3.3 No soy de Aquí, Ni soy de Allá: The Politics of Spatial and National Identity

Anthony Giddens has suggested that “[i]dentity and belonging plainly are potentially divisive [because] nationalism can be belligerent” (qtd. in Hedetoft and Hjort viii). Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort argue that, to be sure, it is nationalism which has reconfigured most people’s sense of belonging and identity. “At first blush,” they write, “the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ are as innocuous as they are semantically interdependent” (vii). Departing from the relationship between belonging (or “longing to be”) and identity, Hedetoft and Hjort explore the conventional concepts that have often been accepted as definitions of home:

Our home is where we belong, territorially, existentially, and culturally, where our own community is, where our family and loved ones reside, where we can identify our roots, and where we long to return to when we are elsewhere in the world. In this sense, belonging is a notion replete with organicist meanings and romantic images. It is a foundational, existential, “thick” notion. In the sense that it circumscribes feelings of “homeness” (as well as homesickness), it is also a
The imagined (homogeneous) cultural community created in the novel, likewise, is clearly that of the aristocratic ("pure-blooded" Spanish) Californios who are suffering under a surfacing corrupt American monopoly that threatens to ruin them financially. Here the interconnection between global and national interests is made manifest in the shape of railroads. The Central Pacific Railroad augured to become the connection...
between the United States and Pacific nations as it promised to expand economic relationships through trade. Manifest Destiny, it turns out, is no longer limited to the North American west during the postbellum or “Reconstruction Era” – as the post-1848-treaty period is defined by many American historians (Rivera 86). The promise of bringing social and economic prosperity to Southern California, nonetheless, was broken even before the railroads came to completion. Instead, political corruption and transportation monopoly eventually compounded to ruin many Californio former elites, like Don Mariano Alamar, once the dream for the San Diego railroad was shattered when the Big Four (Collis Huntington, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins) absorbed all competing rail and water rivals in Southern California to take control of the Southern Pacific Railroad and consolidating their massive holdings into the Southern Pacific Company by 1884 (Orsi 235, Conflicts 384).46

Ruiz de Burton recorded these events in The Squatter and the Don and in her personal letters. Although the dream to bring the railroad to San Diego ended due in large part to railroad monopoly and political corruption, the southern route that would connect San Diego with Texas had already lost support in Congress with the loss of power of the South in the aftermath of the Civil War. After the war ended, nevertheless, speculation began once again in 1871, when the Texas and Pacific Railway was leased by Colonel Thomas A. Scott of the Pennsylvania Railroad and others. The city of San Diego experienced an instant explosion in the sale and development of land along what would

46 Huntington, Stanford, Crocker, and Hopkins, known to history as the “Big Four,” were instrumental in developing California's railroad system in the years between 1861 and 1900. Don Mariano Alamar blames their monopoly and corrupted relations with Californian and Washington politicians for the financial demise of the Californios and his foreseen and imminent death.
have been the railroad route. A year later, Col. Scott arrived in San Diego to begin negotiations with a large number of senators, governors, and businessmen. This historic visit, noted in *The Squatter and the Don*, promised to increase the wealth of the city and of the citizens who invested in this railroad project. Ruiz de Burton’s narrative exhibits samples of utmost enthusiasm on the part of such investing citizens. At the news that Tom Scott would soon be in San Diego, for instance, Victoriano Alamar, Don Mariano Alamar’s son, shouts excitedly, “Hurrah, … now we’ll all be rich” (113), and though he refuses to “go into particulars” when questioned by one of his sisters, it becomes clear that the Alamars and their neighbors are “[a]mong the heaviest investors” given that they “bought block after block of building lots, and only stopped when their money was all invested…. Many other people followed this (which proved to be disastrous) example, and then all sat down to wait for the railroad to bring population and prosperity” (115). The parenthetical commentary indeed foreshadows what history had already witnessed only a few years before the novel was published. The “disastrous example” put forth by the Don and his land-owning friends would help carve their fate – a fate that would not include the arrival of “population and prosperity” in San Diego.

The entire county of San Diego, the narrator tells us, was floating upon “hopes of prosperity” (114). As for the city itself, “the dwarfed and stunted little city,” it was “crazy with joy” given that “[s]he had every reason and every right to expect that the Texas Pacific would be built” (114). The Texas Pacific was not built, at least not in San Diego. Huntington and associates defeated the Texas Pacific funding along with Col. Scott’s petition to Congress for federal subsidy. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton was well
informed about these outcomes, as she tells George Davidson, the founder of the University of California, in 1875:

And what do you think are the chances of the Texas Pacific? Is Tom Scott to succeed? Gov. Stanford will do all he can to prevent it. What a terribly strong willed man is the governor. His will is a perfect juggernaut car. He has formed a plan in his brain for a certain R. Road system on his own and he will crush San Diego and all of us if he fancies we are in his way. […] I wish the Governor would take a fancy to make a pet of San Diego, but he won’t and so we must suffer if the pitying angels don’t help us. (Conflicts 385)

Written ten years before her novel was published, Ruiz de Burton’s letter illustrates a clear and present sentiment common among San Diego property owners whose financial prospects depended largely on the building of the railroad.

It is not so much the capitalist system that Ruiz de Burton critically assesses in her novel and in her personal statements, but the monopolistic corruption that was allowed to flourish under that economic structure. The novel both critiques and documents the insatiability of the railroad corporation. When it becomes known that Tom Scott’s efforts to build the San Diego railroad station have been thwarted by the company, for instance, the readers witness Don Mariano Alamar embark on a journey to San Francisco accompanied by two of his neighbors and friends. They intend to speak with Governor Stanford in person, to persuade him that building the railroad through San Diego would benefit the entire state of California. At the same time, the railroad company tries to acquire “all the carrying business of this coast” including “steamboats,
ocean steamers; street railroads and street cars; coal mines and farms” (286). But as one of don Mariano’s friends, Mr. Perin, states, “[i]t takes millions and millions to kill and freeze out so many people” (286) – thus the San Diego visitors find a very frustrated and angry governor who is “at that very moment” trying to raise the funds necessary to absorb all competing businesses because, as repeated by Mr. Perin, “to go into such a variety of businesses besides railroading and killing Tom Scott, it costs money” (286).

As water and land rivals were in the process of being absorbed by the Big Four, all that Don Mariano and his friends could do was to pray, as Mr. Mechlin illustrates while waiting to be seen by Governor Stanford: “Heaven help us poor people who have invested our all, believing that San Diego would have a railroad” (286). Their prayer would not be heard during their lifetime: Mr. Mechlin commits suicide shortly after this meeting, the same night Don Mariano dies practically penniless, blaming “[t]he sins of our legislators” for his ruin and death (304).

Even as they wait to see the governor, the narrator tells us that their time is indeed being wasted because “about that time” Mr. Huntington is informing his associates about his efforts to convince Congress to defeat the Texas Pacific. Ruiz de Burton incorporates actual quotes taken from Huntington’s letters, as the novel narrates his plans to send “an ex-Senator to ‘switch off the South,’ and there pretend to be an anti-subsidy Democrat, and to state falsely that the Texas Pacific would injure the South” (287, emphasis in original). Although Don Mariano is unaware of these exploits, he has heard that the “railroad people” intend to fight the payment of taxes in court. And while he has been driven to refinance his ranch in order to pay taxes not only on his “too highly appraised property” (287) but also on the land occupied by the squatters, he begins to ponder on his
misfortune as a land owner whose cattle has been killed off by the squatters themselves, thereby killing his major source of income and forcing him to mortgage the only resource he and many others have left: his land. Ruiz de Burton attempts to demonstrate time and again how people like Don Mariano and their families were being dispossessed of their own home based on laws that protected the corrupt on the backs of the Californios.

Despite so much loss experienced by the rancheros, not everyone blamed the Big Four monopoly for the demise of the railroad project, as Sánchez and Pita point out in their edition of Ruiz de Burton’s letters. E. W. Morse, a local businessman and at times Ruiz de Burton’s lawyer, recalls the visit to San Diego by Huntington and Crocker in 1875:

I don’t believe Huntington ever showed a spirit of vindictiveness toward San Diego, as has been reported. In all the correspondence which I have seen, he was very friendly. Mrs. Burton, widow of General H. S. Burton, was once dining with him and said to him she did wish he would build a railroad into San Diego, that she had some property there which would increase in value and it would make her a rich woman. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘it is not to our interests to build in there at present.’ He talked very pleasantly about it and gave as one of their reasons for not building that if they should touch the coast of San Diego, they would come in competition with water transportation. I think they were influenced largely by the consideration of getting the long haul clear into San Francisco, which they get now, while if they had built here, they would have had to divide with a steamship company at this point. This party was entertained at the Horton House and was treated well. (Conflicts 385-86)
The novel stages the meeting between Don Mariano Alamar, his friends, and Governor Stanford in a manner reminiscent of, yet quite contrary to, Morse’s above depiction of Huntington’s “pleasant” demeanor. When the rancheros are finally ushered into the governor’s office, for instance, Stanford greets them in a friendly voice, one that the narrator’s comments elucidate upon, for it was a voice belonging to “which anyone might suppose a benevolent, kind heart” (289). At the sound of the governor’s voice asking them how he could help the men, Don Mariano

laughed outright. The situation struck him as being eminently ridiculous. Here was this man, who held pitiless their destiny in his hands – held it with a grip of iron – and not once thought of the distress he caused; he, through his associate, Huntington, was lavishing money in Washington to kill the Texas Pacific, and thus snatch away from them … the means of support, absolutely deprive them of the necessaries of life, and he asked them what he could do? And asked it with that deep-toned, rich melody of voice which vibrated softly, as if full of sympathy, that overflowed from a heart filled with philanthropy, generosity and good will. This was a sad and cruel irony, which to Don Mariano made their position absurd, to the point of being laughable. (289)

Hopelessness did not stop the three men from arguing for the San Diego railroad. The governor’s counterargument was simple: “it won’t pay” (290). Building the Texas Pacific to San Diego would not yield nearly as much profit as building in San Francisco, according to the governor and associates. Their interest lies in building railroads that transport freight and passengers; given that they are not connected to the fruit-growing
business, it is of no significance to them that San Diego county has the best lands for
growing “grapes, olives, figs, and in fact all semitropical fruits,” thus producing better
crops than the northern counties (290). The meeting ends with what the men – and the
narrator – call the irrevocable San Diego’s death sentence: Tom Scott’s Texas Pacific
was to be stopped from building the San Diego railroad because it would simply be in the
way of the Big Four’s Southern Pacific railroad building projects. “In other words,” as
Mr. Holman concludes, “San Diego must be strangled” (291).

Knowing that this meeting comprises the only opportunity they will have to make
their case and attempt to persuade Stanford to either build the railroad himself or to allow
Tom Scott or anyone else to build it, Holman, Mechlin, and Don Mariano Alamar
continue to argue in favor of San Diego. The landowners’ efforts notwithstanding, it is
the Governor who has the last word, and their attempt to convince Stanford that it would
be in his best business interest to build in San Diego falls on deaf ears, so to speak.
Where business sense fails, a philosophical dialectic ensues. Citing Carlyle, Herbert
Spencer, and Emerson, Don Mariano and friends call on “fundamental morality” to no
avail – Governor Stanford stands strong on his decision neither to build nor to allow
anybody else to erect the railroad station in San Diego. As John M. González accurately
observes, classifying Californios and settlers alike as “white victims” of the railroad
companies, the novel attributes the enslavement of whites “to a peculiar lack of affect on
the part of the corporation and its agents” (“Whiteness” 161), as related by Mr. Mechlin:
“That soulless, heartless, shameless monster has no soul to feel responsibility, no heart
for human pity, no face for manly blush” (The Squatter 320). “Corporations have no
souls, gentlemen,” Stanford concludes, “and I am no Carlylean hero-philanthropist. I am

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only a most humble ‘public carrier.’ I do not aspire to anything more than taking care of my business” (295, italics in original). This is merely another instance in which the novel rails against the decadent monopolistic capitalism practiced by the new rich, the railroad moguls in this case.

3.3.1 Public or Private?

When California Governor Leland Stanford presents himself as a public servant, he places himself in a position of power, one that overrides the rights or needs of the people whose state of living is decided within, precisely, the public realm. Stanford embodies this “public” power both as a governor and as an influential businessman, one that history recognizes as one of the famous – and infamous at times – Big Four.

Following a western philosophical and political tradition, we can broadly define the “public” realm as the site in a community where laws that overlook personal and social behavior are created and contested. While historically this site has been the domain of the western male subject, women have been the administrators of the “private” realm, in charge of child rearing, upholding and embodying morality, and passing down traditions to generations of future wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters.\(^47\) If men embody rationality, thought, and objectivity, women epitomize feeling, virtue, and capriciousness.

Women, then, are naturally unsuited for public life: whereas men represent rational unity, 

\(^{47}\) It is neither the intent nor the focus of this chapter to either subscribe to or deconstruct these traditionally maintained binary opposites (public/private). As Rosemary Marangoly George aptly establishes, the divides between dichotomies such as public/private and colonizer/colonized are sometimes subverted and at times enforced by our ways of reading the trope of “home” in literature (3). The use of such terms at this point simply serves to introduce the complications that arise when trying to classify one side versus the other on the basis of gender or racial difference, as seen in the case of Don Mariano and his (white) neighbors.
women are fickle and fragmented. This approach to gender difference was certainly embedded in the dominant discourse of the nineteenth-century United States, particularly during this nation-expanding moment.

While it is true that prejudiced notions of inherent characteristics in gender difference have traditionally decided the relegation of women to the private, domestic realm while men make history in the public space, the disjunction of public and private also moves along class and racial edges, as seen in the struggle between San Diego landowners and monopolistic interests. It is here that the private may change course in meaning to incorporate all beings whose livelihoods depend on the “public carriers” deciding their fate. Although the public site includes those who are sufficiently privileged to challenge ruling powers, such as Don Mariano Alamar and fellow landowners do before the state governor, what happens to those (male) subjects when they lose their dispute and, along with that, their entire property? This question begs for a continuance to include the issue of home: if this property, this physical land, represents the people’s home and they lose it in a battle with the law makers, they become in effect homeless. The difficulty in viewing the private and public as clearly binary opposites becomes apparent in cases such as this, when one does not necessarily exclude the other.

Recalling Rosemary Maragonly George’s summation of home, we could suggest that losing their lands was merely another juncture in the Californios’ historic struggle for rights not only to their inherited properties, but to equal rights as residents and citizens of the nation. George writes that “the (re)writing of home reveals the ideological struggles

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48 A number of Medieval studies certainly point to this set of beliefs as the foundation for Western gender divisions. See, in addition, The Politics of Aristotle and other texts by St. Thomas Aquinas, among many others.
that are staged every day in the construction of subjects and their understanding of home-countries” (3). The location of home, then, is a crucial ingredient in the definition of self and search for one’s identity. What makes Ruiz de Burton’s nineteenth-century novel akin to projects of twentieth-century fiction in English studied by George is the powerful ideological agenda presented in relation with the denial of home to the powerless by the powerful. The construction of a subject’s identity by the other is also in conflict here with self-identity as well as with personal, cultural, and ethnic history.

At issue in the novel, we must stress, is not only the land itself, but who gets the rights to be a citizen, who is worthy of a U.S. national identity. The characters’ inclusion as national subjects is counterpart to their argument for land ownership. These two issues – land ownership and national citizenship – have proven impossible to disconnect, as demonstrated by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and other laws passed to explicitly exclude specific groups from becoming U.S. citizens and owning land, often additionally founded on a social class base. Ruiz de Burton’s text takes on the task to present her characters as being like other Anglos physically, as appearing “American” and, therefore, having the right to property. Paradoxically, owning land was another prerequisite of attaining citizenship.49

3.4 “White like You”: Inclusionary Tactics and Exclusionary Trouble

In order to be included in the accepted imagined community, to become a national citizen, other subjects had to be excluded. As Rosemary Marangoly George states,

the basic organizing principle around which the notion of the ‘home’ is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions. Home is a way of establishing difference. Homes and home-countries are exclusive. Home … along with gender/sexuality, race, and class, acts as an ideological determinant of the subject…. Homes and nations are defined in the instances of confrontation with what is considered ‘not-home,’ with the foreign, with distance. Ultimately then, distance in itself becomes difference. (2, 3)

It is crucial to note that the distance represented in this novel is not simply geographic, but could be seen in the bodies of the characters and potentially heard in their own language (Spanish) as well. Given that subjecthood is first molded in the home (whether a private domestic setting or in the broader home-country sense), who forms part of that home is as important as who does not. In a similar manner, the subjects represented in Ruiz de Burton’s novel can bond with the readers to make up a sort of imagined community of her own wherein interests are shared through perceived commonalities, particularly with respect to ‘race’ (whiteness) and language (English). By persuading the readers that her characters (and herself) are just like them, the author in effect eradicates difference by removing the distance that would make them ‘foreign.’
The importance of creating a nexus between apparent worthiness of fictional characters and the audience is crucial to Ruiz de Burton’s project. In her dissertation, Elisa Leigh Warford applies Kenneth Burke’s theories of rhetoric to four California social protest novels. In it, she explains the need for the rhetorician to proclaim unity between groups of people who have conflicts of interest. Rearticulating Burke’s ideas, Warford writes,

We are “consubstantial” – of the same body, metaphorically – with others when we share or appear to share common properties or interests. When bodies are consubstantial the differences between them are erased, whether in actuality or in perception. The more the rhetor can make the audience believe their bodies and interest are similar to or the same as the rhetor’s, the more likely they will be persuaded. (12)

In order to persuade someone, Kenneth Burke insists, it becomes necessary to “talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (Rhetoric 55). To persuade her audience to act on behalf of the Californios and understand their struggle, Ruiz de Burton constructs the bodies of the Californios, literally, as very similar to those of her audience: white, blue-eyed as in Mercedes’s case, of European descent. This is how the home in the novel is erected, using metaphorical bricks of whiteness and articulating them in well-educated English.

Racial representation in Ruiz de Burton’s novels is, without a doubt, a major topic of study, criticism, and controversy. “Whiteness,” we shall see, is represented not only in the physicality of the characters’ bodies, but in the very language they and the narrator
speak throughout the narrative. Both crucial issues have to do with the intended, or
desired, audience – if Ruiz de Burton wanted to bring attention to the injustices being
committed against the Californios, she had to break the two major barriers of difference
between her characters and her readers: skin color and language. She therefore presents
her characters as white, emphasizing her characters’ European origins rather than their
Mexican mestizo roots. Together with race and language, class enters as an important
link as well, one that Ruiz de Burton defends as her own. In fact, her own social status
has been criticized by some as not representing Chicano working-class literature
precisely because her own upper-class interests are represented in her work as the target
being attacked by the nouveau riche railroad moguls.

Nevertheless, as Marcial González points out, her novels are important, in part,
because they provide a starting point, a theoretical foundation, to the understanding of the
trajectory from the nineteenth century to today’s Chicano literature. According to
González, the Chicano novel is a way Chicano literature responds to the racialization and
proletarianization of Mexican Americans. The Squatter and the Don opens up access to
social and ideological conflicts as it inscribes itself in Chicano history, a history of class-
based racialization. As a privileged Mexican landowner, Ruiz de Burton was in a better
position to grasp classist realities and contradictions than the subaltern of the time.
González also underscores the risk in dismissing the author based on her class position,
as if this somehow weakens the meaning and contribution of her writing, which he
describes as audacious, politically contradictory, and resistant.50

50 This comes from a lecture given by Marcial González at the University of Notre Dame in March
of 2008. For a deeper analysis, see his upcoming publication, Chicano Novels and the Politics of Form -
3.4.1 A White Disposition

There is no point in denying that *The Squatter and the Don* does have its share of contradictions when it comes to racial stereotypes. The image of the native Indians, for instance, is either nonexistent or it appears merely as servants who blend into the background. When not invisible beings, they are represented as “stupid Indians” (in Don Mariano’s words, 240) or as delinquent subjects. Indeed, during his meeting with Don Mariano Alamar in San Francisco, Leland Stanford refers to them as “great thieves” when Don Mariano explains that his cattle is being killed off, to which the latter responds, “[the Indians are] not so bad to me as the squatters. The Indians kill to eat [the cows], whereas the squatters did so to ruin me. Thus, having now lost all my cattle, I have only my land to rely upon for a living – nothing else” (292). Although Don Mariano seems to somewhat stand up for the Indians in this instance, stating that they kill his cattle for food whereas the Anglo squatters do it out of malice, the emphasis always remains on who is deserving of owning the land. Both Indians and squatters are represented as trespassers of the Alamar rancho. We must remember that owning property was directly tied in with being “American”: a person must be a citizen in order to own land – yet owning property is also a prerequisite to being allowed to vote – but that person must first be deemed white in order to *be* citizen of the nation, as explained in the previous chapter.

Ruiz de Burton’s desire to present her Spanish/Mexican characters to an American audience in a light of ‘likeness’ can also be understood as we read the following 1872 review of the author’s first novel:
A Native Californian, Authoress – A Literary Incognito Lost in an Interview – A new Sensation for the Public…. Mrs. Burton is a native Californian. Her beauty is of pure Castilian type, graceful, non-chalant and easy. Judging from her present appearance, her form and features, and the bright glance of her eyes, so well preserved, what she must have been at sweet sixteen – is a thought too bewildering for a youthful and susceptible bachelor to contemplate…. A perusal of the book is sufficient to satisfy the reader that Mrs. Burton has talent, descriptive and narrative power, and a critical though perhaps too cynical habit of observation. (Conflicts 569, 572)

Besides revealing much about the representations of Mexican women in the nineteenth-century American public sphere, this review points to the ‘pure Europeanness’ of Ruiz de Burton. The author’s body is described as that of a sexually attractive European woman. Perceived whiteness, once again, was essential in qualifying not only for citizenship, but for national acceptance in a public realm like the literary world. It is also worth noting that this review has both sexualized and racialized Ruiz de Burton without much review of her novel at all. John-Michael Rivera points out that there is a desire here to highlight the importance of Ruiz de Burton’s body in the creation of her novel. “In effect,” Rivera shows, “the reviewer is trying to come to terms with her book and its content through her Mexican body, and in merging them, he is attempting to conquer the sardonic wit of the novel and its critique of U.S. political culture” (87). With her second novel, Ruiz de Burton attempts to remove this perceived physical difference between the opposites in the title by drawing the Don both physically and morally with the same lines that outline the confused but virtuous Squatter (Mr. William Darrell).
In *The Latino Body*, Lázaro Lima observes that both families – the Darrells and the Alamars – are reunited in the novel through the marriage of Clarence and Mercedes, “thus preventing the Alamars’ decline from landed aristocracy to working-class mestizo status in the class- and pigmentocracy-based Reconstruction imaginary” (48). He also claims that this “happy ending” was Ruiz de Burton’s way of providing a resolution in terms of the proletarianization of the Californios, a fictional resolution that Lima calls “naively optimistic” because it did not mirror the reality being documented in her novel. The so-called “happy ending,” however, is limited in fact to that marriage which in turn, as Lima claims, saved the Alamar family – excluding the Don – from entering the realm of the working class.

*The Squatter and the Don* nevertheless ends with a desperate call for a Redeemer “who will emancipate the white slaves of California” (344) just as Clarence Darrell rescued the Alamars. The narrator’s direct comments to the “dear reader” describe a bleak social reality at the time of publication, explaining how the monopoly got away with paying “[n]ot one penny” for the lands which were offered by “the great power” as a subsidy to the Southern Pacific Railroad. This narrator is also very careful to highlight Mr. Huntington’s letters, by this time already made public, as part of the “historical facts” that buttress her narrative (343). In brief, the romantic resolution found in many nineteenth-century texts as part of nation-building projects does not truly resolve the central conflict posited by Ruiz de Burton: the railroad monopoly, the squatters, biased land laws, and ultimately the government win over the lands in her narrative. Although not sent to the poorhouses thanks to Clarence Darrell, the Alamars are dispossessed of all of their land and property. Lima, then, is not entirely correct in stating that the novel’s
“naively optimistic assimilationist fiction” is somehow dishonest in representing “the social reality it sought to document” (48).

Lima further argues that “some of the most important critical analysis [sic] of The Squatter and the Don … has obviated Ruiz de Burton’s recourse to racial accommodation” (48). Whereas some studies on Ruiz de Burton do indeed cover other facets of her work, other important work has in fact focused on this very issue even if points of view are varied. Among them, John M. González follows Doris Sommer’s “erotics of politics” to show how this dispossession of land enters in the “practices of racial terror” that tend to be part of a nation-building project. In particular, González notes that for Ruiz de Burton, “[t]he historical romance of Latin America provided a narrative strategy for articulating Californio citizenship within the post-Reconstruction reformation of national interests around race; where Ruiz de Burton’s romance of nation and the Latin American one differ is in the relative power of the author(iz)ing class factions” (35). Californios did not have authority to arbitrate all competing interests after this era in the same way the Latin American criollo elites did after independence struggles and civil wars.

What The Squatter and the Don could do, nevertheless, was to create a space for articulating the Californios’ interests in terms of citizenship. González concludes that “the liberal expansive vision of Latin American nationalist romances provided a strategy to negotiate citizenship, or, in other words, ‘whiteness,’ for an otherwise economically and politically defeated Californio class” (35). Being well aware of the importance placed on whiteness in definitions of citizenship and national belonging, Ruiz de Burton created her characters to allow for a connection with the readers. In other words, it is a
strategy that articulates “sameness” or, as Lima calls it, “accommodation through assimilation” (54) for a specific end: entering the national symbolic.

In a similar manner, ‘home’ also enters as a narrative strategy that allows for the enunciation of other discontinuities within a space traditionally perceived as homogeneous and stable. Ruiz de Burton’s novel carves out a discursive space for home in the site where the Alamar tangible home and lands used to be. Politics of race and land reclamation, both associated with citizenship rights, play a role in the novel’s project of the Californio elite defense by including the Californios in the same “rank” or legal classification as Anglo-Americans while excluding others such as the Indians, the never-mentioned blacks (except for the Darrells’ servant, Tisha), and the mestizos and working-class citizens out of the national symbolic created to fuse the white Californio-Anglo connection. In Jesse Alemán’s words, “[t]he novel’s own social critique comes back on itself as its argument for Californio whiteness stretches the nation’s geopolitical terrain of whiteness to include Californios but simultaneously consolidates whiteness by excluding Native Americans and blacks from the same suffrage Ruiz de Burton seeks for Californios” (“Amnesia” 74). The Squatter and the Don accomplishes this through the creation of various strategic alliances.

One such alliance is formed around the various marriages that take place between Anglos and members of the Alamar family. The marriage between the central romantic characters Clarence Darrell and Mercedes Alamar, whose blushes, blue eyes, “golden threads,” and “white throat” (The Squatter 140) serve to emphasize the “natural” whiteness of the Californios at the same time that it makes her “an object of socio-sexual desire” (Alemán, “Amnesia” 67), functions as a way for the Californios to hold on to land
and privileges in what Alemán calls a period of shifting colonial consciousness (66). Part of this process involves a sort of historical amnesia, as Benedict Anderson explains that “[a]ll profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them their characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives” (204). Ruiz de Burton’s narrative, in turn, displays evidence of such historical amnesia by glossing over the historical fact that the Californios themselves had purloined Indian-owned land, which became missions and ranchos like the one the Alamar family is now trying to preserve in the novel.

The alliance formed by other marriages – George Mechlin and Elvira Alamar, Lizzie Mechlin and Gabriel Alamar – and by the romantic relationship between Victoriano Alamar and Clarence’s sister, Alice, works as another way to affirm whiteness of Californio identity. But beyond this, their union also performs a socially symbolic act that consolidates Northeastern banks – where George Mechlin and Clarence Darrell have invested interests – with Southwestern landowners, thus imagining “a community of Californians whose cultural capital and material wealth happily combine Yankee industriousness with Californio gentility to signal the emergence of a new social class of white American citizens” (Alemán, “Amnesia” 70) that substantiate the novel’s argument for Californio rights to citizenship founded on their white cultural capital. Drawing from George’s concept of home in fiction, we could assert that Ruiz de Burton is actively attempting to offset the denial and dispossession of the Californio home by the existing legal racial system.

The novel’s strategic alliances serve to include the Californio elite in the new social system as well as to exclude the coarse, unintelligent others – racist squatters,
“lazy” Indians, and uneducated blacks. The story presents a sort of neocolonial plan on the Don’s part, one that, as mentioned earlier, would require the squatters to raise cattle for profit but which would also require the Indians’ labor.\(^1\) The Don offers the squatters a homestead on his land as long as they fence it, despite the “no fence law,” grow fruit, or raise cattle. When the squatters refuse to join this venture to exploit California’s natural resources for raising cattle, the novel shows how the Anglo colonization is wasteful and “unnatural” given the resolve by Anglos to grow wheat, a grain not being native to California (Alemán “Amnesia” 68). Ultimately, at least symbolically, the marriage between Clarence Darrell and Mercedes Alamar bridges the gap between the two colonial outlooks, at the same cementing the whiteness and, thus, worthiness of the Californio citizenship rights. Through marriage and family – the nucleus of all modern societies – the novel creates a home that affirms “sameness” between upper-class Californios and Anglos while, simultaneously, establishing difference from the lower classes, regardless of ethnicity.

\(^1\) When Don Mariano proposes this venture, Matthews, one of the squatters, exclaims that he is no “vaquero” to go after cattle. The Don responds that he does not do that either unless he wants to: “you can hire an Indian boy to do that part” (89). This plan, as John M. González states, demonstrates that “Californios traded upon their status as an elite class in post 1848 California to construct a peace structure that at some fundamental political level granted them rights and privileges as white citizens, and that these political concessions resulted in real material advantages from the resultant control of indigenous and mestizo labor” (“Hegemony” 36).
3.4.2 “You speak very good English, Señor”: The Importance of Who Speaks What

Home, then, is used as a strategic recourse here that seeks to establish a bond, or a notion of “sameness,” between the Californio Dons and the admirable Anglos (the Darrells) as it excludes and creates difference with other subaltern figures, including uneducated (“narrow-minded”) Americans as well, as articulated here by Don Mariano:

The majority of my friends are Americans. Instead of hate, I feel great attraction toward the American people. Their sentiments, their ways of thinking suit me, with but few exceptions. I am fond of the Americans. I know that, as a matter of fact, only the very mean and narrow-minded have harsh feelings against my race. The trouble, the misfortune has been that the American people felt perfect indifference towards the conquered few. We were not in sufficient numbers to command attention. We were left to the tender mercies of Congress, and the American nation never gave us a thought after the treaty of peace with Mexico was signed. Probably any other nation would have done the same. (165, emphasis added)

Congressional laws notwithstanding, Clarence Darrell assures Don Mariano that “not one American in a million knows of this outrage. If they did, they would denounce it in the bitterest language; they would not tolerate it” (164). It is the novel’s mission to document “historical facts” (343) and inform those Americans in hopes that they would,

52 The quote reflects the words Clarence utters when he meets Don Mariano for the first time and the latter excuses himself for “not speaking English more fluently” (86). This, of course, is a sign of false modesty as the reader can clearly observe that the Don commands the English language in a manner which, when compared to the Anglo squatters, could be described as much more sophisticated.
indeed, “denounce it in the bitterest language” or, at any rate, perhaps even intercede on their “equals’ behalf.”  Don Mariano, conversely, projects the frustration we find at the conclusion of the narrative when he states that Americans “would denounce it, perhaps, but they would tolerate it” (164) simply because, he continues, “the American people” do not really have a direct influence on the nation’s legislation.

Nevertheless, Clarence Darrell rescues the Alamars from “fading away” as Don Mariano feared, even if their elite position has indeed dwindled.  The target audience, it is clear, does not include the “very mean and narrow-minded” squatters who do not cooperate with Don Mariano’s offer to help them convert their land into orchards and grazing pastures and, in turn, make their land more profitable.  They refuse because the no-fence law already protects them by granting them the right to kill any cattle that enter their lot.  This seems irrational to the Don and to Clarence given that the squatters would benefit financially from their proposal.  As in a theatrical scene, the three narrow-minded squatters are portrayed as fools who do not understand the offer.  A frustrated Clarence points out the no-fence law is “stupid.  Now it kills the cattle, afterwards it will kill the county” (91).  When Mathews, a squatter, sardonically asks Clarence if he should “plant no wheat because the Spaniards want to raise cattle,” the latter replies: “Plant wheat, if you can do so without killing cattle.  But do not destroy the larger industry with the smaller.  If, as the Don very properly says, this is a grazing county, no legislation can change it.  So it would be wiser to make laws to suit the county, and not expect that the county will change its character to suit absurd laws” (91).  It is clear that the audience sought by this narrative would be one to consider itself more like wise Clarence than the unintelligent squatters.
In order to reach a primarily English-speaking readership, then, Ruiz de Burton had to use her audience’s language while maintaining a Spanish identity in her main characters. As María Irene Moyna points out, Ruiz de Burton’s success as an author was contingent upon social reception of her writing as “authoritative” (236). The manner in which language and speech are represented in the novel, then, is informed in great part by the power structure that dominated late nineteenth-century California, where the Spanish language came to occupy a subordinate position. Some strategies used in the novel to represent Spanish, for instance, clearly privilege not only the use of this language, but they show bilingualism as the preferred mode of communication: protagonists tend to be dexterous in both English and Spanish, while antagonists are monolingual. The novel also includes a number of nouns and lexemes, according to Moyna, that were well known in California in an effort not to alienate monolingual readers (236-239).

In a time when the rise in numbers of English speakers was parallel to the loss of power of the Californios, the prestige of the Spanish language was also being eroded by laws that stipulated the use of English only in legal documents as well as in public education (Pitt 226), and by the Catholic Church through its policy of assimilation (Pitt 216). Spanish became a “subaltern language” (Moyna 239) as it was spoken by a decreasing minority and the restriction of its usage was ever more restricted in social spheres after 1848. This year, furthermore, marked the discovery of gold in California and led to “a flood of mostly Anglo newcomers that would increase the population

53 As Leonard Pitt observes, the first California constitution was translated into Spanish, and the 1849 constitutional convention had also approved the translation of all laws into Spanish (49). This stipulation, however, was removed by the 1855 legislature, “creating the conditions for legal abuse in both civil and criminal courts” (Moyna 239).
twelvefold in four years” (239), a fact that significantly contributed to the inversely proportionate number of Anglo to Californio citizens, hence, as Don Mariano exclaims, the latter “were not in sufficient numbers to command attention” (The Squatter 165).

Don Mariano does master the English language throughout the novel, however, and his moral superiority is made clear in relation to the squatters. He represents a linguistic bridge between Anglo and Californio elites. As mentioned above, bilingualism is portrayed as a positive feature of the upper classes, as an appraisal of high culture not exclusive of the Californio privileged but also shared by “those Anglos who have become accepted members of the local ranchero elite through contact and acculturation” (Moyna 242), Anglos like Clarence Darrell and other neighbors and friends of the Alamars. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s linguistic theories, Moyna claims that Ruiz de Burton was well aware that the value of a language is conditional on the merit of its speakers: all traces of subordinate status must be diverted if Spanish is to be socially valued. It is in this respect that a palpable difference comes to light with contemporary Latina/o literature. María I. Moyna agrees with linguistics scholar Laura Callahan insofar as for modern-day Latino writers, “Spanish is generally part of the stigma of a working-class mestizo background, not an upper middle-class educational advantage” (Moyna 242). I would add, conversely, that Spanish has also become a symbol of pride in the Latino heritage, particularly since the Chicano movements of the 1960s.54

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54 Tey Diana Rebolledo asserts that today’s Chicano writers are in constant ambivalence about which language to use. If they are English speakers only, she contends, “they feel they have been denied … the language of their forbearers.” But if they are bilingual, the “most satisfying” scenario, she adds, the writers experience an uncertainty of language. “Thus,” Rebolledo writes, “the struggle for language for Chicano writers carries a very complex multiplicity, a sharpened awareness of it, within which is a sense of exile…” (157). In late nineteenth-century, however, when Spanish symbolized an inferior tongue (to those who controlled the colonial discourse), Ruiz de Burton, as a bilingual Californio writer, made a strategic decision to manipulate the hegemonic speech mode both to reach an English-speaking audience through its
In the novel, on the other hand, the Spanish speech mode used by the upper-class
characters is said to be “standard” (243), as referenced in the following example: “[w]hen
for months past [Clarence] had thought, time and again, of a probable interview with
Doña Josefa [Don Mariano’s wife], he had imagined himself talking to that queenly lady
in his most stately Spanish. But now he had taken hold of Cervantes’ language – I may
say, jumped into it…” (The Squatter 170). Spanish, moreover, is presented as a
cosmopolitan language on a par with French and Latin, languages that held high prestige
in that period: Mercedes speaks fluent French and it is demonstrated throughout the
novel, as in the following example, where she replies to a courting comment by her
fiancé, Clarence: “‘Pas si bête,’ she answered, stammering fearfully, and looking the
prettier for it” (202).

Monolingualism, in contrast, often presents itself in non-standard varieties of
Spanish and English, and it is used to stand out against the upper-class gentility. The
Darrells’ maid Tisha, for example, speaks what Moyna calls “Black English vernacular”
(243): “Lud a massa!” (60). Along with her “vernacular” language, Tisha is presented
as a “humble” servant (168) who is eager to wait on the main characters, including
Victoriano Alamar in the following illustration after the dinner guest, “Massa Tano,” has
complimented her cooking: “La Massa! And right welcome ye are, too, by everybody in
this „ere family, and I knows it exactly” (167). Likewise, native Californian Indians are
also portrayed as uneducated and ill-mannered monolingual Spanish speakers, oftentimes
using impolite language. One example comes when Victoriano is forced to lasso

own language and to re-insert, in her particular way, her native tongue into the dominant sociolinguistic
realm.
Clarence’s father, William Darrell, to stop him from harming Don Mariano. The Indian servants, always nameless, laugh and mock old Darrell after he is tied up on his horse by Victoriano. The Indians show further disrespect not only toward an older person but, perhaps more significant here, to a member of a higher class, by using the informal pronoun “tú” and by employing non-standard vocabulary and offensive suggestions.\(^{55}\) Victoriano, although he is responsible for lassoing William Darrell, reprimands the Indians’ exploit of Spanish insults, distancing himself from their social category:

“¡Apa! Viejo escuata o cabestreas o te orcas,” cried one.

“No le afloje patroncito Gabriel,” said the other….

“¡Apriétate, viejo! ¡apriétate, míralo! ¡ya se ladea!” cried again one vaquero.

“Creo que el viejo escuata va chispo,” said the other.

“¿Qué es eso? ¿A qué vienen acá? ¿Quién los convida? ¡Cállense la boca, no sean malcriados, váyanse!” said Victoriano, turning to them in great indignation. (231)

“Giddap! Old Squatter, either you give into the halter or you choke.”

“Don’t let go, boss Gabriel.”

\(^{55}\) The borrowing of “escuata” from “squatter,” for instance, or using “orcas” for “ahorcas” (*you choke*). Also, the suggestion that old Darrell is drunk by using the colloquial “chispo.”
“Hang on, old man, hang on! Look at him! He’s falling!”

“I think the old man is drunk.”

“What’s this? What are you doing here? Who invited you? Shut up, don’t be discourteous. Go away! (Translation by Sánchez and Pita 1997 [1885])

Likewise, the boorish squatters speak a non-standard variety of English. This illustration reinforces the social and moral distance between the squatters and the Don, who reverberates what the former have said while at the same time correcting their Spanish borrowings in a standard English:

“I don’t want any cattle. I ain’t no vaquero to go busquering around and lassoing cattle. I’ll lasso myself; what do I know about whirling a lariat?” said Mathews.

…

“You will not have to be a vaquero. I don’t go busquering around lassoing, unless I wish to do so,” said the Don. “You can hire an Indian boy to do that part. They know how to handle la reata and echar el lazo to perfection…” (89-90)

Thus, Don Mariano’s apologetic remark about his lack of fluency in the English language – which brings about the words quoted in the subtitle of this section – clearly points to his modesty and serves to reinforce a moral superiority to his Anglo rivals in this instance, the squatters. Through the particular uses of language – whether English or Spanish – the
novel attempts to break stereotypes of the “lazy” and “ignorant” Mexicans while reinforcing those of boorish lower-class Anglos, lazy and ignorant Indians, and uneducated – albeit “humble” – blacks. In this sense, language functions as another way of establishing difference of race, class, and even location.

3.5 Manifest Destiny, Manifest Home

In Politics of Home, Rosemary Marangoly George writes,

The politics of location come into play in the attempt to weave together a subject-status that is sustained by the experience of the place one knows as Home or by resistance to places that are patently ‘not home.’ ‘Location’ … suggests the variable nature of both ‘the home’ and ‘the self,’ for both are negotiated stances whose shapes are entirely ruled by the site from which they are defined. (2)

In Ruiz de Burton’s novel, one could argue that the entire southern part of California serves the function of Home in the larger discourse of location politics. It is this area, San Diego in particular, that the novel seeks to “save” for the Californios, where their lands are being contested and pilfered by squatters, railroad monopoly, and dishonest legislation. Those who can prove themselves worthy of possessing the land are also entitled to citizenship rights, as we have already established. It is in this instance that delineations of ‘the home’ and ‘the self’ blur to negotiate identity, stirring the question of ownership into one of belonging: who owns the California lands, and to whom should the land belong?
About four decades before Ruiz de Burton’s novel came to severely censure the Big Four’s role in the demise of the Californios, and six years before the beginning of the Mexican American war, Richard Henry Dana published a set of memoirs that would help romanticize California and its native people as well as promote, arguably not inadvertently, American economic interest in California.\textsuperscript{56} The popular images of Mexicans produced by many Anglo-American writers are present in Dana’s narrative,\textsuperscript{57} where there exists a stark contrast between the “lazy Mexicans” and the enchanting, primeval landscape that surrounds them. Indeed, Dana describes the Mexican inhabitant as a sharp contrast to the Yankee: “The men appeared to be the laziest of mortals; and indeed, as far as my observation goes, there are no people to whom the newly invented Yankee word of ‘loafer’ is more applicable than to the Spanish Americans [who have the] habitual occupation of doing nothing” (36, qtd. in Takaki 157). This stereotyping of the Spanish American also points significantly to the lack of industry in the land, given the “idle, thriftless people” who inhabited such a rich territory:

In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be! … Yet how long would a people remain so, in such a country? The Americans … who are fast filling up the principal towns, and getting trade into their hands, are indeed

\textsuperscript{56} A member of the New England aristocracy (or Brahmin class), Richard H. Dana decided to sail to California on a trading vessel after his poor eye health forced him to leave his studies at Harvard. A few years later, in 1840, Dana published his now well-known travel narrative, \textit{Two Years Before the Mast}, in which he describes the Mexican Californios as indolent and lazy while romanticizing the natural landscape as an idyllic and almost edenic world. See Ronald Takaki’s \textit{Iron Cages} (1990) and Tomás Almaguer’s \textit{Racial Fault Lines} (1994) for excellent analyses of Dana’s diary in relation to the formation of race perception in nineteenth-century California.

\textsuperscript{57} For Anglo-American portrayals of Mexicans which preceded Dana’s, see William Shaler, \textit{Journal of a Voyage between China and the North-Western Coast of America in 1804} (1935, originally published in 1808) and Joel Roberts Poinsett, \textit{Notes on Mexico Made in the Autumn of 1822} (1824).
more industrious and effective than the Mexicans; yet their children are brought up Mexican in most respects, and if the “California fever” [laziness] spares the first generation, it is likely to attach the second. (136-37, qtd. in Takaki 158)

As long as many Anglo-Saxons were marrying Mexican women and forced to convert to Catholicism, Dana feared that even “the Americans” may become infected with the “Californian fever,” the laziness as he describes it, that is so inherent in the natives.

Dana was also struck by the wide range of complexions among the Californians. But he was most interested in the symmetry presented in class divisions with respect to skin color and ancestry, noting that the Californio upper class was made up essentially of fair-complexioned citizens who claimed to be of “pure Spanish blood.” From this class, he observed, the people go down by regular shades, growing more and more dark and muddy, until you come to the pure Indian, who runs about with nothing upon him but a small piece of cloth, kept up by a wide leather strap drawn around his waist … Generally speaking, each person’s caste is decided by the quality of blood, which is itself, too plain to be concealed, at first sight. Yet the least drops of Spanish blood, if it be only a quatroon or octoon, is sufficient to raise them from the rank of slaves, and entitle them to a suit of clothes … and to call themselves Espanoles, and to hold property, if they can get any. (96-97, qtd. in Almaguer, Racial Faults 53-54)

Although he claims that the “quality of blood” is “too plain to be concealed,” after the annexation of California many light-complexioned Californios were denied citizenship
and rights to own land based precisely on their failure to provide evidence of ancestry despite their seemingly white attributes. It should also be noted that, despite Dana’s depiction of the “lazy fever” that corroded the Spanish American of California, he also displays some ambivalence about his own portrayals. Ronald Takaki argues that Dana’s observations onboard his ship of a Mexican “gentleman” and a Yankee trader “turned Dana toward a critical understanding of American civilization” (159). According to Dana’s account, a Mexican man, Don Juan Bandini, “had a slight and elegant figure, moved gracefully … spoke good Castilian … and had, throughout, the bearing of a man of birth and figure,” whereas the Yankee trader was a “fat, coarse, vulgar, pretentious fellow” who, after having made his money in San Diego, was profiting at the expense of the Mexicans, “eating out the vitals of the Bandinis, fattening upon their extravagance, grinding them in their poverty; having mortgages on their lands, forestalling their cattle, and already making an inroad upon their jewels, which were their last hope” (qtd. in Takaki 159). Despite the ugliness and repulsive illustration of the Yankee, Takaki concludes that Dana knew, too, that the trader symbolized the values of enterprise and progress that could allow California to develop its economic potential. Hence, “Dana could condemn the Yankee degradation and exploitation of Mexicans, and yet he could exclaim: „What a country this might be in the hands of an enterprising people!”’” (Takaki 159).

As mentioned earlier, Dana’s account precedes Ruiz de Burton’s novel by almost half a century, yet his narrative anticipates the economic interest that drove the United States to war with Mexico and to consequently seize California along with the rest of the Mexican territories. Already in December 1847, only two months prior to the signing of
the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, president Polk declared that seizing the harbors of San Francisco and San Diego “would afford shelter for our navy, for our numerous whale ships, and other merchant vessels employed in the Pacific ocean, and would in a short period become the marts of an extensive and profitable commerce with China, and other countries of the East” (qtd. in Graebner 48-50). Clearly, California played a special role in Polk’s expansionist plan for the United States. Manifest destiny, then, transcended mere geographical expansion for expansion’s sake. As Dana had already anticipated, Polk and his governmental policy also had a vision of progress through economic developments exploiting California’s natural terrain (namely the harbors heretofore) and its proximity to “countries of the East.” Besides, as Polk mentioned, whale and other fisheries had already proven a very successful enterprise in the Pacific waters.

California, now in “the hands of an enterprising people,” promised great potential for economic growth through American modern genius, as the editor of Scientific American exclaimed during the war – a conflict that he, as many others, viewed as a manifestation of an exceptional American destiny: “Every nation now distinguished for greatness and power has encouraged … Scientific and Mechanical attainments, and we can confidently say that just in proportion as a nation or people progress in true knowledge so do they become great and powerful.” America’s modern scientific genius vindicated and justified its expansion into Mexico. “We hold the keys of the Atlantic on the east and the Pacific on the far distant west,” he continued, “…[o]ur navies sweep the Gulf of Mexico and our armies occupy the land of the ancient Aztecs…. Every American must feel a glow of enthusiasm in his heart as he thinks of his country’s greatness, her might and power” (qtd. in Chomsky 88). It was a shared sentiment among the various
American powers (including the press) that the nation’s special destiny was directly tied to its genius in modern technology (Takaki 162).

It is no surprise, then, that the technological advances in rail transportation would bring similar, if contradicting, sentiments about the railroad projects outlined earlier in the chapter. According to Richard J. Orsi, California’s historians have generally sympathized with affected citizens’ negative judgment of the railroad company and, as a result, much of the historical works have carried an anti-railroad rhetoric based primarily on oral and written denunciations by railroad critics as well as anti-railroad novels. This “monolithic” account of the role played by the Southern Pacific followed a “Populist-Progressive” framework, Orsi claims, one that portrayed the company as “a diabolical force arrayed against the agricultural and commercial interests, the major sponsor of graft, and the primary obstacle to governmental adaptation and reform in California” (238). According to Orsi, this type of recital about the depredations of the Big Four, although accurate, has led to an oversimplification and even oversight of the complex role played by the railroad company in the economic revolutionary process that affected California between 1869 and 1915 (238-39).

Research of agricultural and land promotion during this era suggests that the railroad company linked its own interest with the welfare of the state. Indeed, “the company often used its power quite consciously to strengthen and diversify California’s economy, to organize and stabilize her chaotic society, and to further the welfare of her citizens, including farmers and businessmen” (239). The statement, while seeming to contradict Ruiz de Burton’s critique, would make sense if the outcomes had been quite

58 Among them, Frank Norris’s The Octopus (1901) is perhaps the most recognized by critics.
contrary to what they were: many Southern California farmers indeed lost everything when they invested all their capital in the railroad that never came to San Diego.

Nevertheless, California’s immature economy was heavily dependent on the market for land, grain, and mining stocks. In *The Squatter and the Don*, the readers witness Clarence Darrell’s financial success in the stock market as a result of his speculative investments in mining stocks and government bonds (101-02). At the same time, however, confusing and contradictory land and water laws helped to retard economic growth for many farmers and landowners, and consequently for the state (Orsi 241).

By 1875, ten years before Ruiz de Burton published her second novel, only fifteen hundred people remained in San Diego, as the city experienced deep signs of economic depression. Sánchez and Pita maintain that,

> Interspersed with romantic interludes between Mercedes and Clarence, it is this town’s desperate hope for the railroad – and the wheeling and dealing by corrupt railroad giants like Huntington, Stanford and Crocker, to ensure the demise of this project – that [Ruiz de Burton] reconstructs in her 1885 historical romance *The Squatter and the Don* (*Conflicts* 384).

In the novel, Ruiz de Burton blames not only the graft and bribery of the railroad company for the downfall of San Diego, however, but “foolish legislation” (89), “absurd laws” (91), and “barbarous” and “unjust” decrees (97) that, in the voice of Clarence Darrell, ought to be criticized severely.
3.6 Conclusion

The concepts and structures that make up ‘home’ in The Squatter and the Don are fluid, unstable and, to a certain degree, unpredictable. The primary outline of home parallels the imaginary fence around the Alamar family’s land, one that was breached before the narrative came into being. By whitening the Californio characters, the novel attempts to transgress the politics of difference as it likens them to morally outstanding Anglo settlers like Clarence Darrell and his family, as well as attempting to reach an intended audience of educated white Americans who may find injustice in the dispossession of the Californio people by both the government and the railroad monopoly. In a conversation between the Attorney General and the President of the United States, the former claims that “there is no denying that our laws are doing all that can be done to drive [the Californios] into squalid hovels, and thence into the penitentiaries or the poorhouses” (136), thus changing not only the notion of home for the Californios but the location as well. Driving the undesirable citizens into the marginal regions of a society is but part of the nation-building process.

In a nation that is still expanding and, consequently, in its “forming period,” generating an image of a homogeneous culture is indeed a complex task when newly acquired citizens – and many “wannabe-citizens” – cannot fit neatly in a category already established by the hegemony, especially in matters of legal categories of race. If being legally classified as white was a prerequisite for becoming a U.S. citizen, the formerly-known-as-Mexican people had simply to prove their whiteness. Unlike Lola’s black-dyed body in Who Would Have Thought It?, however, the mestizo body is physically incapable of “shedding” its dark color in exchange for national membership. The thorny
legal questions that came out of this turbulent period were focused on the Mexican body: blood defined race and, in turn, legal privileges.

The imagined community of white U.S. citizens had to be preserved above all. In order to safeguard this homogeneous national creation, the legal system would have to be tweaked. Hence, at a time when the slavery question was at its most delicate state, the antebellum period added pressure to the California constitution and, based on politics of exclusion rather than inclusion, landed Californio elites (“Spano-Americans,” as they are called in *The Squatter and the Don*) were legally rendered white.\(^59\) Decades later, laws designed to protect American interests in the recently acquired western territory of California allowed for the disintegration of the Californio elite as Anglo settlers legally invaded their lands, rendering the once privileged class a dispossessed, and in effect homeless, people.

By the end of the novel, the strategic alliances created between Californios and Anglos that in turn separated them from the lower classes, regardless of ethnic origin, also came to imagine a “collective victimization” (Alemán “Amnesia” 71) of the Californios, Southerners, and squatters. They all enter into the “white slave” enclave thanks to monopoly capitalism and corrupt legislation. Manifest Destiny sounded fairly profitable to the Californios, who were willing to engage in it through the Texas Pacific railroad that augured to bring San Diego – Californios and Anglos alike – into a new market economy. That is, until the promise of economic prosperity fell out of the

\(^{59}\) I have already mentioned that the politics of exclusion were intended to keep people of Indian and African descent from becoming U.S. citizens and thus tainting the U.S. white community as it began to define itself. “We, the people” remains yet an ambiguous term.
modernization wagon that carried all of their capital to ruin on the failed railroad project.

As George Mechlin explains in the novel,

Well, the poor South is in pretty much the same fix that we are. I am sure there are many homes in the Southern States whose peace and happiness depend upon the construction of the Texas Pacific. Look at our two families. All the future prosperity of the Alamares and Mechlins is entirely based upon the success of this road. If it is built, we will be well off, we will have comfortable homes and a sure income to live upon. But if the Texas Pacific fails, then we will be financially wrecked. (274-75)

The Texas Pacific failed, of course, but a member of a third family, Clarence Darrell, came to their rescue using the property and capital made through investments in Arizona mines and the stock market. By the end, the Mechlins and Alamares come to preside over Clarence’s bank in San Francisco, though the Alamares symbolically (and literally) disappear from their contested land. Fearing death was near, Don Mariano repeats George Mechlin’s remarks by describing their demise as such: “[i]f these railroad men will only let us have the Texas Pacific all will be right, but if not, then the work of ruining me begun by the squatters will be finished by the millionaires – if they kill our railroad … Our legislators then will complete their work. Our legislators began my ruin; our legislators will end it” (288). The dispossession of the Californios which had begun with the U.S. conquest and accelerated by the Land Act of 1851 was completed, in effect, by the enforced underdevelopment of Southern California’s economy.
Despite the failed railroad investment, *The Squatter and the Don* solves the racial problem of the Californio identity precisely because it places it in a larger discourse of a white collective whose rights have been violated equally. California, then, becomes the imagined home of all “white slaves” waiting to be rescued from monopoly capitalist practices and unjust laws that dispossess all white citizens alike. This problematical alliance has caused critics to challenge Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita’s remark that María Amparo Ruiz de Burton created “a narrative space for the counter-history of the subaltern, the conquered Californio population” (*The Squatter* 7). Among those critics, Jesse Alemán contends that the novel’s project was “to legitimate Californios’ claims to the same colonial privileges enjoyed by Anglo Americans” (“Amnesia” 73). Likewise, José F. Aranda questions José David Saldívar’s notion that Ruiz de Burton works as a subaltern mediating subject (Saldívar 170) by holding that her novels are subaltern “only if one discounts the rhetorical strategies in her novels that affirm a colonialism that would return both [the author] and her community to a position of material and social power over the people of color and the working class” (“Impulses” 573). David Luis-Brown also observes,

In Ruiz de Burton’s paradoxical logic, the expansion of whiteness via the Californio/white South alliance depends on an expansion and inversion of the meaning of slavery. Sánchez and Pita, in claiming that the “Redeemer” longed for by the “white slaves” of California is both Christ-like and Lincoln-like, miss the historical irony that the white slaves, if redeemed, would go on slaving Indians and blacks. (818)
Whether a subaltern mediator or a neocolonial elitist, the significance of *The Squatter and the Don* lies precisely in its contribution to public conversations over questions of race, class, gender, language, and how these relationships structure politics of power even in the twenty-first century. In brief, the novel complicates the conception of a homogeneous Home – be it home-country, the domestic space where subjecthood is formed, or the space carved out as the site of enunciation – by showing how difference can be created or erased, all by the power of discourse.
I am neither a defender nor a detractor of [women’s] suffrage for the simple reason that I do not know it...
[I believe] that we women must be thankful to men for having the abnegation of monopolizing the realm of politics all to themselves. I believe that, along with carbon mining, it is one of the most difficult and least hygienic jobs in existence. Why claim it?
- Teresa de la Parra, “Primera Conferencia” (OC)

4.1 Introduction

Born Ana Teresa del Rosario Parra Sanojo (Paris 1889-Madrid 1936), Teresa de la Parra enjoyed the benefits of belonging to one of the most prominent families in Caracas. She grew up in a sugar cane estate in the outskirts of the Venezuelan capital. Following the death of her father in 1897, de la Parra relocated with her mother and maternal grandmother to a small village in Spain, where she lived and was educated until her return to Venezuela at the age of twenty one. In a biographical letter written in 1931, she asserts that both mother and grandmother, owing to their “mentality and customs,” belonged to the old colonial society of Caracas. Hence, she continues, her childhood was
spent in “a severe and Catholic environment” (OC 901).  It was in Caracas that de la Parra first came into contact with “the world and society,” as she describes it. Here, she would observe the “continuous conflict” that existed between young women’s new mentality, acquired through books and travels, and the real life to which they were “chained” by means of traditions and prejudices from a different era (902).

It is precisely in that conflictive space, in 1924, that de la Parra publishes her first novel, Ifígenia: Diario de una señorita que escribió porque se fastidiaba. The 1920s in Venezuela covered a period of dramatic economic and political transitions thanks to the rising success in the petroleum industry, which in turn led to the transformation of a traditional, still colonial and aristocratic domesticity to an emerging bourgeois home. De la Parra’s work presents the domestic realm during this period as a place of conflict and resistance masked by the intimate and passive play of a woman’s fancies for reading and writing. From this double-space emerges a playful yet jagged critique of an oppressive system that embraces a national modernizing project while continuing to subjugate women in both the nation and the home through laws and tradition.

Conventionally described as a unit, as the heart of society, the domestic space as “home” renders a space of illusory coherence, safety, and belonging through the construction of arbitrary boundaries that serve to contain as well as exclude. Ifígenia locates this very idea – and ideal – in a space that stands for tradition – la casa de la abuela – and whose sole function involves protecting the governing social system, one based on deep-seated patriarchal norms. But de la Parra’s work presents different spaces

60 Unless otherwise noted, direct translations cited here will be my own. OC stands for Obras completas de Teresa de la Parra (1965).
that transcend her grandmother’s home. We see Paris, for instance, symbolizing freedom, progress, modernity, while Caracas is portrayed as a space that devours her independence, where strict colonial traditions continue to reign even with the emergence of a growing bourgeoisie society. These spaces seem to imprison the protagonist’s essence – her thoughts, her writing, her desire to free herself from her family’s traditions – in what could be described as a series of concentric enclosing spaces: Venezuela, Caracas, Abuelita’s house, her bedroom, and finally the bottom double-drawer in her half-moon mirrored wardrobe, where she eventually buries the several hundred pages she has written over a course of three years and that make up the book that we, the readers, have already scrutinized.

From within those spaces, Ifigenia's heroine, María Eugenia Alonso, finds herself displaced in this “illusion of inclusion,” as it were (the façade that, defined by its borders, denotes a coherent whole) by transgressing the very object she, as a member of ‘the unit,’ was called to uphold, and creates a dislocated space of her own through language and writing. In her bedroom – where writing occurs – she inscribes her ‘self’ as agent, protagonist, and author of her own life text, fracturing established public/private borders from within Abuelita’s home, and thus counteracting the very sphere prescribed to her by a traditional patriarchal system. This rupture comes into play as a conversation, a dialogue, between opposing languages that challenges conventional beliefs centered on gender difference. Therein lies the foundation of her subversion and the motives for her transgression: she converts the domestic, female space into a site of enunciation (and denunciation) where the reality of upper-middle class women like herself is not only exhibited, but sharply critiqued through the clever use of irony. By means of ironic
discourse, *Ifigenia* dramatizes gendered roles as in a Bakhtinian masquerade. Hiding behind an astute game of irony, that is, the novel renders home as a stage of resistance against the patriarchal ideology still very much alive in the Venezuela of mid-1920s, legacy and extension of colonial traditions.

María Eugenia Alonso, a young Venezuelan woman educated in Europe, returns to her home-country following the death of her father. Her family, of the declining creole aristocracy, depends financially on her mother’s brother, Eduardo, whose dishonest tactics have robbed her of her father’s land. She comes to live in her childhood Caracas home with her maternal grandmother and aunt, who represent, according to Karin Hopfe, “la sociedad venezolana durante el periodo del gomecismo, que, mientras experimenta una reestructuración en el sector económico, busca al mismo tiempo conservar determinadas relaciones sociales heredadas de la colonia, entre ellas las relaciones entre los sexos” (“the Venezuelan society during the gomecismo period, which, although it is experiencing an economic reform, at the same time seeks to preserve specific social relations inherited from the colonial period, among them the relationship between the sexes”; 228). The transition from an agricultural-based economy to a modern capitalist system is manifested in the novel in a negative light, particularly in María Eugenia’s case: her uncle, abusing capitalist practices, legally takes her father’s hacienda and land as his own, leaving her in virtual poverty and trapped by her financial dependence on his “generosity,” as her grandmother describes it.

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61 All subsequent translations, unless otherwise noted, will be my own. The term *gomecismo* refers to the Venezuelan military dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez (1857-1935), who was in power from 1908 until his death in 1935, a year before Teresa de la Parra died in Madrid from complications with tuberculosis.
4.2 Venezuelan Women of the Twentieth Century

Before we consider the novel itself, then, understanding the conditions surrounding its creation will be useful in appreciating de la Parra’s narrative. The beginning of the twentieth century in Venezuela did not offer women any changes in their social and legal status from the previous century. In fact, gender prescriptions, so to speak, were constantly being published in magazines by male writers, and it is very likely that de la Parra read some of them during her stay in Caracas. In any case, this type of discourse points to the general outlook on gender roles during that era, at least from a fundamentally male perspective. Weekly magazines, such as El Cojo Ilustrado (1892-1915) which was the most important journal of the time, published copious articles related to women’s conduct and place in society.

Emphasis on women’s “domestic nature” accounted for most of these articles’ central theme. In 1897, for instance, José Güell y Mercader wrote an article titled “Influencia política de la mujer” in which he maintained that women were entitled to their own rights. In order for women to participate in society, he adds, it was not necessary to make a patriot out of her, or even allow her equal citizen rights, “…basta educarla de manera que destinada á ser la compañera del hombre, pueda seguirle, animarle y consolarle en sus trabajos y en sus luchas en la multiplicidad de las relaciones sociales…” (“it is enough to educate her so that, destined as she is to be man’s companion, she may follow, encourage and comfort him in his undertakings and struggles in the multiplicity of social relations…”; ECI n.p.). Given that women are incapable of any abstract thought, he continues, they should never be allowed to vote or even speak publicly at any assembly; moreover, this type of activity is political in nature
and, therefore, “propio tan sólo de la viril actividad” (“suitable only to the virile activity”). In this article, Güell y Mercader represents the accepted wisdom of the turn of the century in Venezuela: that woman’s most significant role involved kindly reassuring her husband of his manly abilities in both domestic and public spaces.

*Ifigenia* began to circulate in this sociopolitical setting as a series titled *Diario de una señorita que se fastidia* in another Caracas magazine (*La lectura semanal*) in 1922. But it wasn't until its publication in book form two years later that de la Parra's first novel became the target of intense criticism by (primarily male) Latin American critics. For the most part, her novel was not at all well received. In a letter written to a Mr. García Prada in 1931, de la Parra revisits this critique: "[I]a crítica que *[Ifigenia]* encierra contra los hombres y ciertos prejuicios hizo que en mi país la recibieran con algún mal humor. Algunos círculos ultra-católicos de Venezuela y Colombia creyeron ver en ella un peligro para las niñas jóvenes que la celebraban al verse retratadas en la heroína con sus aspiraciones y sus cadenas" (“the criticism that *[Ifigenia]* holds against men and certain prejudices produced an unwelcoming reception [of the novel] in my country. Some ultra-Catholic circles in Venezuela and Colombia saw it as a threat to young girls who were delighted at seeing themselves in the heroine with her hopes and her chains”; OC 902).

The real danger, according to the "ultra-Catholic" elite, lay in the possibility that young female readers – of the upper-middle class, most likely – may recognize their own "hopes and chains" in the novel. The domestic space had served a function of containment for women since colonial times. Outside its walls, their voice became a dangerous sign, a sort of “female network” that threatened to disrupt the largely uncontested authority of
the male/public realm and, consequently, the stability of social roles that shaped gender difference.

The idea of the woman "behind closed doors" who suffered in silence was also the ideal woman of the 1920s’ Venezuelan society. Ifígenia's author was well aware of this reality when she fashioned her fictional text. In a letter written a few years after its publication, de la Parra contends that María Eugenia Alonso, Ifígenia's protagonist and narrator, “… era una síntesis, una copia viva de varios tipos de mujer que había visto muy de cerca sufrir en silencio, y cuyo verdadero fondo me interesaba descubrir, hacer hablar, como protesta contra la presión del medio ambiente” (“…was a synthesis, a living copy of various types of women whom I had seen suffer in silence, and whose unfeigned core I wanted to uncover, to make speak, as a protest against the pressures of their environment”; OC 930, emphasis in the original). The critics recognized this basic intention in 1924. It is no wonder, then, that Teresa de la Parra’s groundbreaking novel represented a menace not only to the literary world, but also, and particularly, to the established sociopolitical order, where public and private spheres had been sharply divided and, until then, overtly uncontested. Ifígenia, then, played a crucial avant-garde role for women not only because it gave voice to those who had been muted, but also because it provided a stage for dialogue between dominant and oppressed, which opened a door for knowledge to be “questioned and constructed” (Halasek 68).

4.3 The Voice of Irony

The most significant rhetorical tool exploited in the novel by which both opposing voices are “heard” is, without much doubt, irony itself. Literary theorists agree that as a
rhetorical tool, irony often works to subvert authority. As a feminist rhetorical strategy, irony can be used to challenge and destabilize patriarchal discourses. Drawing on Derrida’s theory, Linda Hutcheon reiterates that irony is used by women as a channel for critiquing or resisting “…patriarchal social restrictions or even ‘essential’ male claims to ‘truth’” (31). Such restrictions are transmitted ideologically through what Bakhtin calls authoritative language, which is “…located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers” (Dialogic 342). Kay Halasek studies Bakhtin’s theory in light of feminist thought, and she adds that patriarchal discourses, as authoritative language in the Bakhtinian sense, “are held in such high esteem that they become untouchable; they speak their male ‘truths’ with such power, readers (recipients) no longer question their assumption” (69). Irony thus becomes a powerful rhetorical weapon in Ifigenia, one that permeates the female speech to decenter the traditional, dominant discourse of its time.

The authoritative ideology questioned by Ifigenia is in complicity with the narratives created by and for men (Halasek 69), but it is also pervasive throughout the society in which it is produced. Traditions, the main conduit of social ideology, are conventionally safeguarded at home and reinforced by women; thus the discourse of tradition, based on patriarchic principles, seeps through the domestic walls as organically as rain water, without anyone – male or female – questioning its original source, its validity. The novel is the only genre, according to Bakhtin, that is unstable enough to incorporate a myriad of opposing ideologies capable of engaging in dialogue by means of
heteroglossia, a process that becomes “another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” (Dialogic 324); in other words, it is “the mingling of different language groups, cultures, and classes” (Clark 22). This dialogic relationship occurs between two conflicting consciousnesses: one that informs the dominant ideology and another that speaks through the subversive voice. This dialogic tension was by no means limited to male-female conversations in the 1920s. Venezuela, as other European and North American nations, was undergoing sociopolitical and economic transitions where tradition and modernity were the main operating axes.

Many women indeed found themselves following past traditions while their lives were consumed hoping and wishing “…por la independencia de vida y de ideas, hasta que llegaba el matrimonio que las hacía renunciar y las entregaba a la sumisión acabando por convertirlas a las viejas ideas gracias a la maternidad” (“…for independence of life and ideas, until marriage forced them to surrender and turned them to submission, eventually converting them to the old ideas thanks to maternity”; de la Parra OC 901).

The author’s own mother and grandmother were members of that deep-rooted “mentality and customs” still present in the “remains of the old colonial Caracas society” (902). This collision between the old and the new “mentalities and customs” of Venezuelan women, between tradition and modernity, is at the heart of Ifigenia's raison d'être, and it is through the “new” speech of the heroine and the “old” voices of the other characters that this dialogic tension becomes text.

62 The novel’s instability lies on its capacity for change: “The novel is the only developing genre, and therefore it reflects more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process” (Dialogic 7).
The process of creating female speech (*hacer hablar*) in *Ifigenia* involves the integration of various literary genres, where the personal letter, the diary, and ultimately, the resulting novel, become the repository of the female critique. Thomas C. Foster, referring to Oscar Wilde, has noted that the Irish author succeeded as master of comic irony in both verbal and dramatic forms because “he [paid] attention to expectations” (240). It is clear that Teresa de la Parra also paid attention to the social presuppositions shared in Caracas during the 1920s, and her knowledge of “tendentious language” – to use Bakhtin’s term – is brought into play through the manipulation of irony. According to Bakhtin, the various genres incorporated in the novel (in our case, the letter and diary) assimilate reality in distinct ways, and bring their own languages into the narrative to create a stratification of the linguistic unity in the novel (*Dialogic* 321). The inclusion of autobiographical forms like the letter and diary, then, helps to integrate new worldviews into the boundaries of the novel, namely those which Bakhtin has termed “centrifugal languages” (the social language that challenges fixed definitions). In *Ifigenia*, these stratified languages are filtered through the voice of María Eugenia; and given that her writings are produced within the confines of her bedroom, we can argue that subversive as well as authoritative discourses are enunciated – performed – from the private, domestic, female space.

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63 Tendentious language, as defined by Bakhtin, “is a type of social language heavily influenced by the norms of a given literary school or period” (*Dialogic* 433). It is period-bound, associated with a specific school or trend.
4.4 Writing Fancies

From the first encounter, the reader can perceive the dramatic stance embraced by Ifigenia’s protagonist and narrator with respect to her own life. Acting as both (main character and narrator), María Eugenia’s voice dominates most of the novel, and it is through her own writing – her very long letter and subsequent diary – that we experience the novel’s authoritative discourse. In the letter she writes to her former schoolmate, “[u]na carta muy larga donde las cosas se cuentan como en las novelas” (“a very long letter where things are told as in novels”; Ifigenia 1: 29), we learn that eighteen-year old Maria Eugenia has recently returned to Caracas following the death of her father, and that her inheritance has been embezzled by her maternal uncle, her dear Abuelita’s son. This personal letter functions as a structural introduction into the protagonist’s “emotional sensibilities”; and as we snoop through this very long and private account, we discover a young woman whose financial future looks dim and whose present days are also filled with a sort of ennui - a disgust for monotony which is, precisely, what compels her to write.

And write she does. Once the “interminable letter”64 is finished, María Eugenia experiences such an overwhelming sense of desolation that writing becomes her only system for survival: “…me quedé tristísima. Sentía que me faltaba algo muy grande y muy indispensable. Como no podía seguir escribiendo a Cristina por tiempo indefinido,

64 This qualification is written by a seeming extradiegetic narrator at the beginning of the second part of the novel. In keeping with the theatrical mode of the narrative, however, this role could very well be played my Maria Eugenia. That is, the same narrator probably is responsible for the prefaces to each chapter. These marginal notes are analogous to stage directions in a play. Nevertheless, Karin Hopfe (2000) makes a convincing case when she argues that this “second voice” proves there is an extratextual reader and, thus, it places Maria Eugenia’s text in the privileged realm of literature. More on this second voice is discussed near the end of this chapter.
hoy me dije de golpe: ‘¡pues ahora voy a escribir mi diario!’” (“I was intensely sad. I felt that something very big and very essential was missing. Since I could not continue to write to Cristina indefinitely, today I said to myself, ‘now I’m going to write my diary!’”; 1: 157). Her spirited character is in direct opposition to the life she leads in her grandmother’s “flat house,” and she fears the absence of “life material” will hinder her objective as the writer of her own life, rendering the blank pages in her diary – literally, her daily life – empty of meaning. But it is precisely through the contradictions she designs between her own convictions and her refusal to follow them that the dialogue is created – and, thus, the “life material” – that informs most of the novel: “Diré siempre: tal cosa es reprochable y ridícula, pero la hago porque sí; tal otra es admirable y santa, pero no la hago porque no. Creo que es esta especie de franqueza o confesión lo que suelen llamar cinismo, y como la palabra es un poco discordante, me parece mejor no insistir más sobre el particular y pasar a otro asunto” (“I always say: this or that thing is reprehensible and ridiculous, but I do it just because. And the other is admirable and saintly, but I do not do it just because. I believe this is that type of honesty or confession that people call cynicism, and since that word is somewhat discordant, I believe it is best not to insist on it and go on to other matters”; 1: 156, emphasis added). It is the word (cynicism) that seems harsh, María Eugenia suggests; she has already told us – or herself – that what they call cynicism is truly frankness or confession. Even so, the same critics

65 Translated from María Eugenia’s description of the old aristocratic houses in Caracas with their seemingly flat structural façades. Teresa de la Parra was much criticized for this depiction, and labeled by some critics as a “deficient patriot,” about which she wrote three years later: “Yo recibí una vez carta de un amigo rogándome que suprimiera para una segunda edición las impresiones de María Eugenia Alonso al entrar en Caracas. Sobre todo aquello de las ‘casas chatas’ le parecía la más espantosa falta de patriotismo” (“I once received a letter from a friend begging me to remove, in a second edition, María Eugenia Alonso’s impressions when she arrived in Caracas. Above all, that [comment] about the ‘flat houses’ seemed to him the most scandalous lack of patriotism”, OC 852).
who interpreted the novel as a real biography ignored María Eugenia’s self-defined “cynicism” and judged Teresa de la Parra’s book by the protagonist’s cover, overlooking the sweet irony that impregnates the text.

In a letter written to Eduardo Guzmán Esponda (June 1926), Teresa de la Parra contends that what she considers the best part of her book is that which is not written, what she sketched without words so that the reader may study it quietly, and the critic, aloud (OC 888). This letter, in response to a mordant critic, bares the author’s own frustration with the critics’ misinterpretations of the protagonist as a shallow woman who “does not know herself.” But the author also discloses the deeper meaning hidden behind Ifigenia’s ironic mask: the weight of tradition that continues to smother all hopes for women’s autonomy. De la Parra writes directly to the critic:

Usted no ha querido leer sino lo impreso, por eso necesita saber a todo trance, la razón lógica y concreta de cada uno de los actos de mi heroína. Pero no llegará a saberlo nunca, porque ella es ilógica, y es ilógica, porque a pesar de esa mentalidad ultramoderna, que la lleva a la exaltación revolucionaria, la mandan y mandarán siempre sus muertos. (OC 888)

You have not wished to read but what is printed, which is why you need to know, no matter what, the logical and concrete reason for each of my heroine’s actions. But you will never know, because she is illogical, and she is illogical because, despite that ultramodern mentality that drives her to a revolutionary exaltation, she is and always will be ruled by [the weight of] her dead [ancestors].
The author’s use of an unending future tense (*mandarán siempre*), besides illustrating a
dismal reality and a disheartening outlook for Venezuelan women, may also account for
the impossibility of a happy ending for María Eugenia, and the inexorable conclusion of
the novel. It also helps us to understand, perhaps, the reasons for the protagonist’s
conflicting behavior (what she wants to do) and “her principles” (inventions inherited
from “her dead”). Just behind María Eugenia’s self-styled cynicism, irony comes in as an
affable negotiator of difference in the novel.

4.5 María Eugenia Writes Again: “The True Intention of Irony”

Early critics came to link the fictional narrator, María Eugenia, with its real
author because the stories in the novel are written in autobiographical modes and because
obvious biographical similarities exist. Many readers believed it to be an "authentic
biography," wrote de la Parra, and "therein lies the secret of Ifígenia’s success" (OC 930).
According to the author, Ifígenia was treated with much hostility by many Venezuelan
critics, like the one to whom she replies above, because they simply failed to "feel the
true intention of irony" (OC 851). But what exactly is the true intention of irony? If the
author’s intention involved whispering her own words behind that of a seemingly flighty
and capricious character, then it apparently succeeded. Most of the negative criticism
aimed at the novel concerned María Eugenia’s behavior and thoughts, as though the
novel were a real diary, as if the fictional character were the co-author of her fictional

66 The author and her heroine were members of long-standing aristocratic families and both spent
their childhood in Spain and France, where they were educated under strict Catholic conventions before
returning to Venezuela at the respective ages of eighteen and twenty. For more information about
biographical coincidences between author and character, see Obras Completas (1965), particularly de la
Parra’s personal correspondence.
life. Using this “confusion” to her advantage, de la Parra in effect revived her heroine and one particular critic – Don Lisandro Alvarado – received a response letter written and signed by María Eugenia Alonso herself, in which she offers her gratitude for his enthusiastic interest in her thoughts. De la Parra further suggests that women’s literature should not be taken at face value; instead, she states, women’s texts are in fact characterized by their insinuating quality: “Ifigenia, novela esencialmente femenina, insinúa mucho más de lo que dice, y estos senderos de la insinuación, no se ven, se sienten y presienten como los diversos estados de ánimo a través de los versos de un poeta” (“Ifigenia, an essentially feminine novel, insinuates much more than what it says, and these paths of intimation cannot be seen, they are felt like sundry moods through a poet’s verses”; OC 499-500).

In that fictional letter, published by Alvarado himself in 1925 in the popular Caracas magazine Elite (republished in OC), the heroine defends her creator against the condemnation deriving from the critic’s own misconstruction of the text despite the author’s efforts to “fictionalize” the protagonist: “En medio de mi descontento le estoy agradecidísima [a Teresa de la Parra]. Indiscreta y piadosa, antes de lanzar mi diario a todos los juicios lo retocó con esmero. Exageró gentilmente mis defectos con una malevolencia impregnada de cariño y de bondad” (“Amid my discontent I am very grateful [to Teresa de la Parra]. Indiscreet and pious, before launching my diary to everyone’s judgment, she revised it with great care. She exaggerated my defects with a malevolence impregnated with affection and kindness”; OC 894). De la Parra’s protagonist further critiques the “male circles” that tend to destroy the audience’s interest from the first word they articulate caused by their impatient yearning to say too much in
as little time as possible. The words uttered by many men, she insists, are often revealing and drenched in monotony, vows María Eugenia, “como las de esas personas que para relatar un film o una novela empiezan por contar el desenlace” (“like the words of those people who, when relating a film or a novel, begin by recounting the ending [denouement]”; 897), as did so many male critics who reviewed her novel beginning with its ending, and who also viewed the novel as nonfiction, as a true autobiography, missing all the vicissitudes and sensibilities described above by the heroine herself. Once again, the author carves out a site of enunciation through the voice of her character, who, in turn, writes from her own invented space.

María Eugenia’s letter, an extension of Ifigenia’s playful discourse, presents a type of irony that very likely did not go unnoticed this time by critics and the reading public alike. Veiled once more by María Eugenia’s voice, de la Parra seizes this opportunity to display the naïveté of those who, despite their prominent reputation as intellectuals, “carelessly lost [their] footing and fell in the hidden trap” she had placed there for Abuelita and tía Clara (OC 893). The numerous comparisons between the critic and these female characters – i.e. “sus palabras son de nuevo las dos manos de la pobre tía Clara crispadas de espanto sobre la cabeza gris” (“your words are once again poor tía Clara’s hands contorted with terror on her grey head”; 892) – carry an ironic overtone that erases gender difference with respect to authoritative discourse. In the novel, Abuelita and tía Clara exemplify the dominant voice layered between María Eugenia’s and that of the other dissenting character, her tío Pancho. Through this double-voiced dialogized process, de la Parra both de-privileges this critic’s language and revalidates the authorial voice. In the foreground, María Eugenia’s affectionate words thank
Alvarado as she notes that his critique was very much focused on herself while it
“…prescinde casi por completo de Teresa de la Parra, pretendida autora de la novela
Ifigenia (“…almost completely disregards Teresa de la Parra, supposed author of the
t novel Ifigenia”; 892). The contents of this metafictional letter offer an incisive example
of what de la Parra termed “true irony”: one that winks at the reader through that which is
unwritten. The letter is yet another brilliant example of the tongue-in-cheek style with
which the author “trapped” so many readers of her time. As one of de la Parra’s
biographers put it, “if callous judges were sure to chew over [de la Parra’s] words, at least
she could distract them with crust – leaving the finer-tasting implications of her alibis to
be savored by people of corresponding sensibilities” (Lemaître 148). In other words,
ironic content becomes an enigma only for those who cannot distinguish the quiet subtext
behind the loud text.

4.6 Ironic Dialogues

In Spanish American literature, de la Parra explains, irony had become
deformed through a “torrent of boisterous words” that rendered it a mere medium for
“indirect insults” (“insultos atenuados”). Irony, however, is “something else”: “[I]a
verdadera ironía, la de buena ley … es aquella que, al igual que la caridad bien entendida,
empieza por sí mismo: la que debe tener siempre una sonrisa de bondad y un perfume de
indulgencia. Pero ni este perfume lo siente todo el mundo ni ven tampoco todos la
sonrisa” (“true irony, the genuine kind … is that which, like well understood charity,

For a more detailed study of María Eugenia’s letter, see Byron 372-74.
begins in itself: it must always carry a kind smile and a perfume of indulgence. But
neither is this perfume felt by everyone, nor do all see the smile”; OC 852) Many
Venezuelan readers, in particular, failed to sense the beauty of irony in her novel and
mistook it for “the cruel mockery of vulgar beings”: “Yo creo que en ciertos medios de
Caracas, por incomprensión, han calumniado mi libro, lo han hecho pasar de la clase
ironía indulgente a la clase ironía cruel, equivocados y heridos en un amor propio
patriotero” (“I believe that in certain Caracas circles, due to a lack of comprehension,
people have slandered my book, they have turned it from the indulgent irony class to the
cruel irony class, misled and wounded by chauvinistic pride”; 852). Irony’s indulgent
smile, nevertheless, swathes Ifígenia from beginning to end, at times a wide grin, other
times more cynical, but always leading the rhetorical game.

Based on Bakhtin’s theories of the novel, dialogism is the organized manner in
which contradictory ideologies interact – in the form of competing languages or
heteroglossia – where one represents the dominant creed and the other informs the
subversive position. The first is related to what Bakhtin calls authoritative discourse, one
that
demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own… we encounter it with
its authority already fused to it…. Its authority was already acknowledged in the
past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from
among other possible discourses that are its equal…. It can be profaned. It is akin
to taboo, i.e., a name that cannot be taken in vain. (Dialogic 342, emphasis in
original)
This type of discourse, buttressed by tradition (“her dead”), is represented in Ifigenia by María Eugenia’s maternal relatives (grandmother, uncle, aunts), and later – albeit representing the new bourgeoisie – by her fiancée, César Leal. The grandmother’s voice is of particular significance for our purposes because the other authoritative voices in the novel – her son, daughter, and daughter-in-law – are reproductions of her own. In the following passage, María Eugenia’s Abuelita endorses the dominant influences of the period with respect to gender difference and gender roles, remnants of a not-so-distant colonial past:

Allá [en Europa] se le dice a la mujer: “Tanto tienes, tanto vales”. Aquí no, aquí sólo cuenta el ser bonita y sobre todo: ¡virtuosa!... En nuestra sociedad muy decaída por otros conceptos existe todavía cierta delicadeza en los hombres. Nuestros hombres tienen un verdadero culto por la mujer virtuosa, y cuando van a casarse no buscan a la compañera rica, sino a la compañera irreprochable… … la virtud de una mujer intachable vale muchísimo más que su dinero. (1: 108)

Over there [in Europe] the woman is told: “You have so much, you are worth so much.” Not here, what counts here is to be beautiful and above all: virtuous!... In our otherwise dilapidated society, there still exists a certain delicacy in men. Our men have a genuine cult for the virtuous woman, and when they look to get married they do not seek the rich partner, but the partner who is beyond reproach… … an impeccable woman’s virtue is worth much more than her money.
Abuelita’s lecture on moral values of the period is reinforced through “seventy-year old love chronicles,” stories of an “idyllic, patriarchal happiness,” (1: 108) after which the young protagonist finds herself in a deep sea of melancholy and resignation. Abuelita’s words mirror the ideology and discourse that dominated the upper class in Venezuela from the previous century. María Eugenia’s grandmother uses this prevailing language in an attempt to silence the protagonist’s “modern” ideology – represented through her speech – and, in turn, deny its existence.

María Eugenia’s acquiescence is short-lived, however, and as Bakhtin’s observes with relation to Dostoevsky’s hero, she continues to struggle “to destroy that framework of other people’s words about [her] that might finalize and deaden [her]” (Dostoevsky 59, emphasis in original):

Pero aquella misma tarde, después del almuerzo, a eso de las tres, ya había huido enteramente de mí el espíritu santo de la conformidad. Encerrada con llave aquí, en mi cuarto, tendida sobre la cama, descalza, en kimono, con las manos cruzadas bajo la nuca, contemplaba sucesivamente: el techo, el flamante papel de las paredes, la muñeca lamparilla del escritorio, el postigo entreabierto de la ventana, y pensaba con desesperación en el porvenir horrible que me aguardaba. (1: 111)

But that same afternoon, after lunch, at around three o’clock, the holy spirit of conformity had fled from me completely. Locked in here, in my room, stretched out in bed, barefoot, in a kimono, with my hands crossed below my neck, I was staring, sequentially: at the ceiling, the dazzling wallpaper, the doll-lamp on the
desk, the half-open window shutters, and I was pondering with desperation upon the horrible prospect that awaited me.

Although the “holy spirit of conformity” finally relinquished its power, it is replaced by a revelation of an impending doom. This knowledge, this lack of control over her own future, informs the manner in which different ironies are constructed in the novel. Once desperation sets in, the narrator’s speech becomes more serious and irony takes on a sarcastic tone,

… Abuelita me había expuesto en la mañana: “Tratar de ser lo más intachable posible”, es decir, tratar de ser lo más cero del mundo, a fin de que un hombre, seducido por mi nulidad, viniera a hacerme el inmenso beneficio de colocarse a mi lado en calidad de guarismo, elevándome por obra y gracia de su presencia en suma redonda y respetable que adquiriría así cierto valor real ante la sociedad y el mundo. (1:111)

… Abuelita had told me that morning: “Try to be as impeccable as possible,” that is, try to be the world’s largest zero, so that a man, seduced by my nullity, could do me the enormous favor of setting himself by my side in a capacity of a whole number, thus raising my worth to a round and respectable sum that would acquire in this way real value before society and the world.

This type of irony reflects the cynicism defined earlier by the protagonist: its frankness exposes her situation as a legal nonbeing. Only through marriage will she ever achieve
any value by patriarchal social norms. Hutcheon classifies this self-deprecating use of irony as having a self-protective or defensive function, one that would allow the writer (whether María Eugenia or Teresa) to protect herself and argue that “she was just being ironic” (50). This use of irony is what Lemaître calls “the crust” that would distract de la Parra’s critics while chewing over her words (148).

As already stated by Hutcheon, irony also has a transideological nature, and this may help to explain why de la Parra’s critics did not sense (or did not want to sense) the crust that conceals her words. Ifigenia exhibits both authoritative and oppositional ideologies, and as Hutcheon suggests, the interpretation of an ironic comment is as valid as the intended meaning, depending upon what side the interpreter inhabits (15). Many readers critiqued de la Parra because they associated her with the heroine of the novel, despite the author’s efforts to create her as an antithesis of herself (OC 929). The readers’ interpretations notwithstanding, de la Parra continues to demonstrate that “irony engages the intellect rather than the emotions” (Walker, Feminist 24) when, in response to criticism, she writes pieces such as: “[p]ero con qué admirable candor masculino, fue usted creyendo palabra por palabra, todo cuanto en su charla le refería María Eugenia” (“but what admirable masculine candor allowed you to believe, word for word, everything that María Eugenia said”; OC 887), underscoring not only her own wit, but the naïveté of those who failed to distinguish the sly, fictional character from the sly, real author. A theorist of intentional irony once wrote, “‘irony amounts to deceiving plain folk who understand in a plain way’” (Kenner, qtd. in Hutcheon 51). Perhaps Teresa de la Parra knew this all along.
The insistence by María Eugenia on the nonfictional quality of her story misled even renowned critics at the time of publication, but their criticism was not met by silence. As described earlier, Teresa de la Parra kindly mocked some critiques by male writers who confused the fictional heroine with her author; these were critics who, fooled by the crust, judged her novel “con la inteligentísima incomprehensión de un buen comerciante o de un hábil mecánico” (“with the intelligent incomprensión of a good merchant or a capable mechanic”; OC 887). The failure by such critics to recognize the novel’s situational irony – the “trap” set by the narrator, as mentioned earlier – provoked de la Parra to respond with incisive textual irony, which may also have been unperceived by the intended readers given that they are the same critics who failed to appreciate the ironic setting to which de la Parra is referring.68 Despite so much “intelligent incomprehension” by the critics, Teresa de la Parra offers her own theoretical conception about writing a novel and creating its characters:

La habilidad del novelista consiste… en apartarse lo más posible de sus personajes. Hay que dejarlos solos, siempre solos, sobre todo cuando dialogan… Si el autor habla por la boca de sus personajes, todos estos se expresarán igual: entonces en lugar de crear tipos habría estampado nombres propios sobre el papel y nada más. El pensamiento del novelista, la tesis que sostiene, flota invisible por el mundo que ha creado. El lector debe llegar a ella por deducción o porque la

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68 Even critics who favored the novel tended to conflate the protagonist’s personality attributes to those of her author. Carlos García Prada and Max Grillo are among them (OC 12, 13). Francis de Miomandre, a friend of the author who wrote the prologue to Ifigenia, also described de la Parra with the convictions of her heroine (OC 27, 28). Pedro Díaz Seijas maintains that the author poured “her own experience in the written document” (33). Augusto Arias asserts that de la Parra writes and completes herself through María Eugenia (577). For a detailed study outlining the complex and conflicting criticism surrounding Ifigenia, see Elsa Krieger Gambarini (1990).
idea estalla y se revela en el momento culminante de la crisis. (OC 516)

The talent of the novelist involves… creating as much distance as possible from the characters. It is necessary to leave them alone, always alone, especially when they engage in dialogue… If the author speaks through the characters’ mouth[s], they will all express themselves in the same manner: so that instead of creating types, [the author] would have cast actual names on the paper and nothing else.

The novelist’s thinking, the thesis maintained, floats invisibly throughout the created world. The reader must reach [the thesis] through deduction or because the idea bursts out and reveals itself in the climactic moment of the crisis.

The tongue-in-cheek style that saturates the novel through “the characters’ mouths” becomes comical when it recognizes, and even appears to accept, the norms of the dominant social system, allowing the writer “… to participate in the humorous process without alienating the members of the majority” (Walker, Serious Thing 123).

Extratextual criticism aside, it is clear in the novel that María Eugenia indeed convinces those “members of the majority” of her “conversion” or retraction of her previous, radical ideas. One of the most memorable scenes in the novel illustrates María Eugenia’s urgency in hiding behind that conservative veil. In this incident, her fiancée and her favorite uncle are both in the sitting room while she diligently works on her sawing project. When “someone” mentions Dante and his Divine Comedy, tío Pancho alludes

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69 The narrator uses the passive voice to indicate that Dante was mentioned, thus rendering the origin of the debate even more vague while María Eugenia attempts to distance herself altogether: “En un momento dado, dentro del movimiento general de la conversación se habló del Dante y de su obra. Como
to how María Eugenia used to recite this work from memory, to which she replies, seemingly offended, that she hardly recalls any of the lines and that it is as if she had never read it at all. The more she desperately tries to silence her uncle in front of her fiancée, the more agitated they both become. The narrator, for instance, writes that tío Pancho,

... en lugar de comprender y callarse, siguió así, machacando el mismo tema.

- Ah, pues me parece rarísimo que te halles tan alejada de la literatura, cuando tú misma eres literata, o sea “escritora”. ¡Y no lo niegues, no lo niegues, porque me consta! El otro día entré a tu cuarto a buscar un libro y vi sobre tu escritorio una gran cantidad de cuartillas numeradas y escritas …

Al oír tan inicua indiscreción, salté al instante sin dejarle concluir:

- ¿Escritora?... ¿Escritora yo?... ¿Yo?... ¡Vamos, qué disparate!... ¡Ah!... por más que sí… ahora recuerdo… tú te refieres sin duda a unas recetas de cocina que estaba yo copiando el otro día…

- ¡Sí!... ¡sí!... ¡recetas de cocina, con interrogaciones, exclamaciones, diálogos y puntos suspensivos!... Bueno, a no ser entonces que en tus recetas de cocina los

es natural, y de acuerdo con mi programa, en lugar de emitir opiniones sobre el particular, callaba discretamente dando a entender así que aquellas dos palabras: ‘el Dante’, carecían en absoluto de sentido” (“At a given moment, following the general movement of the conversation, Dante and his work were mentioned. Naturally, and in accordance with my program, instead of offering any opinion on the topic, I was discreetly silent, thus indicating that those words had no meaning at all”; 2: 122-23).
elementos dialoguen entre sí, como los personajes de una fábula, de modo que mientras se bate una torta, pongamos por caso, el azúcar interroga a los huevos, la leche le replica a la mantequilla y la harina exclama dentro del molde o el horno… (2: 123-24)

… instead of understanding [that I needed him to be quiet], he kept going on about the same subject.

- Ah well, I think it very strange that you have kept so far away from literature, given that you are a woman of letters yourself, I mean “a writer.” And don’t deny it, don’t deny it, because I am certain of it! The other day I went into your room searching for a book and on your desk I saw a copious amount of numbered and written sheets of paper …

Upon hearing such a despicable indiscretion, I jumped in right then before he could finish:

- A writer?... Me, a writer?... Me?... What nonsense!... Ah!... that is right… now I remember… you must be referring to some recipes I was jotting down the other day…

- Sure!... yes!... food recipes, with question marks, exclamation points, dialogues, and ellipses!... Well, it must be that in your recipes the ingredients hold
conversations, like characters in a fable, so that while cake batter is being stirred, let’s say, the sugar interrogates the eggs, the milk replies to the butter and the flour cries out from inside the pan or the oven…

The dialogue between uncle and niece continues until, much distressed over her uncle’s indiscretions, María Eugenia realizes that César Lear, her fiancée, is much too busy reciting his own upcoming public speech to pay any attention to their conversation on culinary matters.

While María Eugenia desperately tries to situate her creative talents within the kitchen walls, that scenario, at the same time, underscores the tension between reality and fiction (or meta-fiction). That is, María Eugenia’s frantic attempts to deny her intellectual abilities in front of her future husband – representative of bourgeois patriarchal norms in the novel – and thus validating the authoritative discourse, are subverted in the same utterance by her own insistence on the fictional nature of her “conversion.” In denying her past literary interests, she raises doubt over her “purely domestic” present. This double-voiced discourse is dominated by “ironic communication”; that is, “miscommunication as an oblique communication”: it shows what it hides while it masks what it says (Anolli 37). The reader becomes part of the conversation because she has the prior knowledge necessary to recognize the ironic mode. Let us remember that María Eugenia has warned us some time ago about the tangible antithesis that exists between her convictions and her actions. Once informed, and given that the protagonist’s behavior struggles to adhere to the principles imposed by the patriarchal system, the reader can then deduce that her beliefs are actually quite
contrary to what she exhibits. This complicity between reader and writer transcends the benevolent smile of literary irony to produce very worldly outbursts of laughter.

Bakhtin maintains that this type of laughter “has the remarkable power of making an object come up close (since a subject cannot be comical at a distance) …

Laughter is a vital factor in laying down the prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically” (Dialogic 23). The humorous function of irony continues to undermine dominant norms as it becomes oppositional, or “counter-discursive,” within the same utterance (Hutcheon 52). As stated above, authoritative and subversive ideologies dialogize within the same discourse – as it occurs in the dialogue between tío Pancho and the protagonist. They can also appear seemingly independent of each other, but counter-discursive irony brings opposite discourses together in a sort of “ironic dialogism.” The following quote from Leal’s senatorial speech, for instance, is in direct contrast with María Eugenia’s previous passionate performance and with her playful winks throughout her narrative. Leal “drowns” María Eugenia’s arguments with her uncle once he begins to read his senatorial sermon:

Las diversas agrupaciones incipientes de entidades heterogéneas, que fundidas en un mismo credo heroico, comulgaron ubérrimas, e inmarcesibles, en las palpitations étnicas y sociológicas de nuestra Gesta Magna, cuyos fastos gloriosos se evidencian en las colectividades generadoras de la epopeya, que ascendiendo a las cimas ígneas cual una Epifanía de cóndores, concibiera el concepto venerado de nuestro individualismo patriótico. (2: 124-25)

The diverse incipient associations of heterogeneous entities, which, united by a
single heroic creed, communed abundantly, and enduring, in the ethnic and sociological palpitations of our epic achievements,\textsuperscript{70} whose glorious deeds are evidenced in the collectivities that engendered the epic, which, rising to the igneous summits like an Epiphany of condors, conceived the venerated concept of our patriotic individualism…

Lacking the proper context, a reader would be hard-pressed to find much humor in Leal’s solemn speech, but the verbal and structural ironies that swathe the novel turn this sober, authoritative discourse into an almost farcical show of grandness. The Senate – that noble space where illustrious men decide María Eugenia’s legal worth – received the homily with great enthusiasm; surely then, the narrator concludes, her ignorance must be even greater than she had imagined.

As Dianna C. Niebylski notes in \textit{Humoring Resistance}, “those who have historically objected to the ironic mode for ethical reasons have done so on the grounds that ironic ‘duplicity and pretense’ could signal skepticism, cynicism, indifference, and, at the very least, insufficient commitment to whatever is being treated ironically” (90). De la Parra has already suggested that \textit{Ifigenia} is not to be taken literally, and that María Eugenia is an avid user of irony, or what Niebylski calls “skeptical humor” (90). María Eugenia’s comments, as narrator, certainly contribute a great deal of humor at the close of the cited speech: “… en realidad, mi ignorancia era mucho mayor de lo que me figuraba, puesto que no había logrado todavía tomar el hilo de un discurso tan elocuente,

\textsuperscript{70} “\textit{Gesta Magna}” may indeed insinuate “\textit{Carta Magna},” which refers to “Constitution” most often in Spanish. \textit{Gesta} means “heroic deed or exploit,” and \textit{Magna} simply translates as “great.” It should be noted that this is also the epithet that normally accompanies a celebrated historical hero, Alejandro Magno, or its English equivalent, Alexander the Great.
que dicho sea de paso, fue un verdadero éxito en el Senado” (“…in fact, my ignorance was much greater than I had reckoned, as I was still unable to grasp such an eloquent discourse, which was, by the way, a genuine success in the Senate”; 2: 125). If the newspaper says the speech was an absolute success, María Eugenia surmises it must be true.71

The contrast between the Senate – perhaps the ultimate site of “public space” in its gendered definition – and the home is never reconciled, and while irony plays a crucial role in undermining the former, the narrative does not really situate the domestic space in a privileged position. Abuelita’s home embodies a space where traditions and patriarchal norms that continue to control and intrude in women’s lives are protected. María Eugenia’s grandmother reconciles her aristocratic colonial values with César Leal’s bourgeois ideals precisely through their mutual belief that a woman, all women, should dedicate their lives to the administration of the domestic rituals. That is, María Eugenia’s responsibilities as woman, and as future wife and mother, involve and require a sort of non-participation: her future husband disregards her presence while he talks about matters inappropriate for a woman to discuss – politics and women. Religion, Leal tells the other men, is indispensable in a woman, and no woman has the right not to believe in it; after all, he says, what do they know about biology, Lamarck’s theories, Einstein’s ideas, or anything at all? Men, on the other hand, are capable of thought and reflection;

71 The comment on the newspaper story about Leal’s senatorial address is significant in relation to the formation of a national consciousness, as well as the power assigned to the printed press in times of a dictatorial regime, like that of Juan Vicente Gómez in Venezuela, 1908-1935. Ifigeniea once again uses sharp ironic commentary to undermine the power of the Senate and the press, both “public” sites where edicts are dictated and upheld in the private spaces, like Abuelita’s home. See Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities (37-46) for a specific discussion on the influence of newspapers in particular on the formation of a national consciousness.
hence, he concludes, he “decides” to be a materialist (2: 122). María Eugenia, on the other hand, is bound by her gender’s shortcomings. Her only option is to be married and tend to the home, caring for her husband and rearing her children. In order to be fully prepared as a wife, however, a “program,” already alluded to in her exchange with tío Pancho, has been created by her grandmother. This involves much sewing and embroidering, as well as etiquette training and personal care – her beloved short skirts, nail polish, and lipstick are now forbidden matter. Furthermore, Leal’s “hatred toward women like [herself] who think themselves wise and educated” (2: 116) has determined her intellectual fate.

In Euripides’ Iphigenia, “the sacrificial ritual becomes the organizing principle of the plot” (Foley 68). As the title of the novel suggests, María Eugenia’s final sacrifice will be voluntary – a sacrifice to save her family’s values and her own future as financially dependent upon that family. In de la Parra’s Ifigenia, we witness a young woman’s journey from rebellion against social norms to utter resignation, acceptance, and even perpetuation of the same social order she despised. At the beginning of the novel, the sacrifice is nowhere in sight. By the time the narrative reaches its climax, however, it becomes clear that, much like Euripides’ Iphigenia, sacrifice has been the organizing principle all along. Indeed, near the beginning of her letter to Cristina de Iturbe, María Eugenia reveals the reason for her intense “boredom,” or ennui: “… este fastidio cruel que presentí por vez primera la tarde de mi llegada, este fastidio que me ha hecho analista expansiva y escritora, tiene una raíz muy honda, y la Honda raíz tiene su origen en la siguiente reveladora escena que voy a referirte y que ocurrió una mañana, a los dos o tres días de mi llegada a Caracas” (“this cruel languor that I could foresee the
very first afternoon of my arrival, this ennui that has turned me into an analyst and a writer, has a very deep root, and this deep root has its origins in the following revealing scene that I am about to relate to you and which occurred one morning, two or three days after my arrival in Caracas” (1: 84) Setting up the stage, so to speak, with some intrigue and suspense, María Eugenia begins to narrate “the scene” during which she realized she was in fact poor.

Early in the narrative, the protagonist learns of her complete financial dependence on her uncle, the same uncle who allegedly robbed her of her inheritance, of her father’s hacienda:

Era el silencio horrible de la revelación. Envuelta en la voz de Abuelita, la verdad se había presentado a mi espíritu tan clara y terminante que no pedí explicación, ni hice ningún comentario. Comprendí que debía ser irremediable y decidí aceptarla desde el principio con valentía y con altivez… Con mis ojos espantados les miré a los dos [a tío Pancho y Abuelita] y seguí luego contemplando interiormente la horrible noticia que se abría de golpe ante mi porvenir, como una ventana sobre una noche lúgubre: ¡la pobreza!... Era la dependencia completa con todo su cortejo de humillaciones y dolores. (1: 87)

It was the horrible silence of revelation. Wrapped in Abuelita’s voice, the truth had presented itself so clearly and conclusively that I neither asked for an explanation nor made any comment. I understood that it must be irrevocable and decided to accept it from the beginning with courage and pride… With frightened eyes I looked at them both [Uncle Pancho and Abuelita] as I continued to contemplate the horrible news that was just opening suddenly right before my
future, like a window on a dismal night: poverty!... It was complete dependence with all its humiliations and sorrows.

And so it is that the young protagonist begins her journey to her final sacrifice, restricted and at the mercy of her uncle, on whom her grandmother and aunt already rely upon for financial sustenance. Her social and sexual fates are inevitably entwined with her thwarted future as a free thinker and writer. In this sense, de la Parra’s narrative follows Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s observation that the destiny of women in novels of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was either social – marriage – or condemnatory of their sexual and social failure – death (1). Ifígenia ends with the heroine’s impending marriage, narrated and described as a sacrificial death. María Eugenia accepts her “sacrifice” with the dignity of a tragic heroine. She has chosen to be Leal’s wife and thus conform to social expectations.

María Eugenia enters into a contract that places her in a respectable spot within the society embraced by her family since the colony. In choosing not to run away with her true (married) love, Gabriel Olmedo, we may conclude that she has finally fallen prey to, and accepted, her destiny – side by side with so many other fictional heroines, the same heroines she admired and critiqued in the novels she loved to read, novels now forbidden in her new life. But are we to believe that her days of reading and writing, of red lipstick and Parisian fashion, are over? Or is there a glimpse of a smile beyond the ending, and perhaps even a wink? María Eugenia has already fooled her fiancée into thinking that the color of her painted lips is nothing but natural. We also know that, in 1926, María Eugenia was still writing – lengthy letters if nothing else. But did de la Parra’s novel not begin with a lengthy letter?
4.7 Writing Home

In that first letter, written to her childhood friend Cristina de Iturbe, María Eugenia begins her own story in her own words. She inserts herself as the heroine in the story of her life, a heroine whose self-worth surpasses that of the heroines about whom she has read so much:

Ya no me considero en absoluto personaje secundario, estoy bastante satisfecha de mí misma, me he declarado en huelga contra la timidez y la humildad, y tengo además la pretensión de creer que valgo un millón de veces más que todas las heroínas de las novelas que leíamos en verano tú y yo, las cuales, dicho sea entre paréntesis, me parece ahora que debían estar muy mal escritas…. [S]iento un inmenso regocijo porque he visto desdoblarse de mí misma una personalidad nueva que yo no sospechaba y que me llena de satisfacción. Tú, yo, todos los que andamos por el mundo tenemos algunas dotes y algunas tristezas, somos héroes y heroínas en la propia novela de nuestra vida, que es más bonita y mil veces mejor que las novelas escritas. (1: 33, 34).

I do no longer consider myself a secondary character, I am satisfied enough about myself, I have begun a strike against bashfulness and humility, and I also dare to believe that I am worth a million times more than all the heroines of the novels you and I used to read in the summer, which, by the way, I now believe, must have been poorly written…. I feel immense joy because I have witnessed an unfolding from within of a new personality that I never suspected [of having] and which fills me with satisfaction. You, me, all of us who wander around the world
experience fortune and sadness, we are heroes and heroines of our own life novel, which is more beautiful and a thousand times better than the written novels.

Behind María Eugenia’s voice lies the shadow of de la Parra’s pen as she, too, speaks directly to readers and warns them that the story about to be unlocked is real, not to be confused with fictional (“written”) novels. Hiding behind her heroine’s voice, the author nonetheless affirms that all details of this autobiographical story will be written as they are in “auténticas novelas.”

María Eugenia, thus, does not begin to write simply out of boredom, as the novel’s subtitle claims. In first place, she becomes bored because her grandmother and aunt are incapable of appreciating her special talents:

Además he descubierto últimamente que tengo mucho don de observación y gran facilidad para expresarme. Desgraciadamente estos dotes de nada me han servido hasta el presente. Algunas veces he tratado de ponerlos en evidencia delante de tía Clara y Abuelita, pero ellas no han sabido apreciarlos. Tía Clara no se ha tomado siquiera la molestia de fijarse en ellos. En cuanto a Abuelita, que como es muy vieja, tiene unas ideas atrasadísimas, sí debe haberlos tomado en consideración, porque ha dicho ya dos veces que tengo la cabeza llena de cucarachas… [É]sta es una de las razones por las cuales me aburro en esta casa tan grande y tan triste, donde nadie me admira ni me comprende, y es esta necesidad de sentirme comprendida, lo que decididamente acabó de impulsarme a escribirte. (1: 34)
Besides, I have recently realized that I have a great gift for observation and an excellent ability to express myself. Unfortunately, these gifts have not helped me at all to this point. Sometimes I have tried to make them evident in front of aunt Clara and Abuelita, but they have failed to appreciate them. Aunt Clara has not even bothered to notice them. With respect to Abuelita, although she is very old and she has backward ideas, and indeed she must have grasped them because she has twice said that my head is filled with cockroaches… This is one of the reasons why I get bored in this big and sad house, where nobody admires or understands me, and it is this need to feel understood which definitely impelled me to write to you.

The heroine is bored and desperate to write, but her writing would have no meaning without a reader who shows utmost admiration and understanding for her as woman, writer, and observer. What she has to say is just as important as how she tells her stories. Being a storyteller is central to this novel whose foundation is layered with intimate histories that encompass not only her own, but that of her traditional grandmother and aunt Clara, her unhappily married friend Mercedes Galindo, her sensible uncle Pancho, and even her controlling fiancée. “All of us roaming the world,” María Eugenia cautions, have something to tell (1:34).

María Eugenia Alonso creates a space of her own in her writing, on the “numbered and written sheets of paper” her tío Pancho describes. But her intention when she writes this long letter is to share her “gifts,” to make her talents evident so that she may be admired, so that she may feel understood, so that she may exist in a world where a woman exists only as a zero until a man (a digit that counts) can make her “whole” by
standing next to her, by marrying her and thus allowing her an acceptable entrance into
the social and legal circles so desired by María Eugenia. Her own expressions and
behavior were critiqued, as we have established, because they were attributed to the
thirty-five year old author without taking in consideration the protagonist’s age. This is a
fundamental detail that has been largely ignored by critics. María Eugenia is eighteen
years old when she writes this letter. As Gabriela Mora states, “her youth and
inexperience… along with her shyness and naïveté, make her unaware of her own
personality and [also make her] write the most peculiar statements about herself and
others” (132). That María Eugenia is “unaware” of her own personality was also claimed
by her author. This statement points to a young woman trying to define herself in a
social order that denies her and, instead, imposes its own designation.

Her youth informs her worldview in many ways, and she constantly reminds the
reader of the generational differences between herself and her aunt and grandmother. It
is a time of transformation that is mediated by space, including geographical, narrative,
and her own body. The letter serves as a prologue into the novel, made up of her diary,
that both informs the reader of her recent past and provides a motive for her writing.
Through it we find that María Eugenia spent three months in Paris before arriving in
Caracas a month prior to her writing the letter. She was a student in the Sacred Heart

72 In a letter to Eduardo Guzmán Esponda written in 1926,Teresa de la Parra claims, “Mi gran
trabajo, trabajo ímprobo casi, ha sido el de intervenir todo el tiempo, entre María Eugenia Alonso y el
lector, dándole a entender a éste que ella no se conoce” (“My great job, an arduous task, has been to
intervene all the time between María Eugenia Alonso and the reader, suggesting that she does not know
herself”; OC 888, emphasis in original). This statement seems almost contradictory to her claim that the
novelist should leave the characters alone to let the readers find out “the thesis” behind it on their own.
Teresa de la Parra, much like María Eugenia Alonso, was a complex figure precisely because so many
contradictions seem to surround her. This alone could be an intriguing topic for a separate study.

73 For a meticulous analysis of Ifigenia as a failed Latin American Bildungsroman, see Edna
Boarding School in Biarritz from the age of eight until her father dies when she is eighteen years old. Leaving the school and spending three months in Paris, she tells us, transformed her from a shy girl into a modern and sophisticated woman (1:33): “[e]s esta tesis la que voy a desarrollar ante tus ojos, relatándote minuciosamente y como en las auténticas novelas, todo cuanto me ha ocurrido desde que dejé de verte en Biarritz” (“it is this thesis that I am about to elaborate before your eyes, recounting in detail and as in authentic novels, everything that has occurred to me since I last saw you in Biarritz”; 1: 34). This first transformation is the thesis that María Eugenia plans to relate to her friend. The protagonist considers several factors that contributed to her makeover, and they all take place in Paris.

Paris is the first space presented in the novel as a space of transformation. Here, María Eugenia discovers freedom of movement and of decision-making. She was able to walk alone throughout the city for the first time in her life: “me había tocado la varita mágica, andaba con soltura, con seguridad y con muchísima gracia…” (“the magic wand had touched me, I moved easily, confidently, and very gracefully…”; 1: 42). She also tells us that as she moved about the world, the entire world admired her: “me admiraba todo el mundo” (“everybody admired me”). But her claim loses some vigor when she enumerates the “everybody” that made up that world, which turns out to be the married couple with whom she will travel to Venezuela, their children, some employees of the hotel and a passerby (1:42). Nevertheless, Paris comes to signify the transformation of a school girl who grew up within the conservative walls of her religious institution to a modern woman ready to conquer the world bearing new dresses, a new garçonne haircut,
and red lipstick by Guerlain (1: 49). Paris, as the space of modernity, is counterposed to Venezuela, painted as backward, still colonial, the producer of flat and sad houses.

4.8 A Modern Façade

Early twentieth-century Venezuela was not much different from the late previous century, when national affairs were refocusing, after independence, on the modernization of the nation in terms of technological developments and a changing political economy. International commerce with the North Atlantic market expanded to become much more profitable since there was no intervention from Spain, but the growing commercial trade with Europe required, as John V. Lombardi explains, “... the existence of a reasonably sophisticated interface between the primitive social and political environment of most of Venezuela and the sophisticated European world of merchant capitalism” (160). Caracas became that “sophisticated interface” in the 1830s, which only strengthened its control over the rest of the nation. But the city was by no means modern; certainly not by European standards. By mid 1860s, Caracas continued to look like an aged colonial town, with the same buildings and streets it had at the beginning of that century and no developments in the public service area.

The city would be modernized, à la Paris, by President Antonio Guzmán Blanco throughout his three separate terms (1870-1877, 1879-1884, 1886-1887). Caracas was decorated with modern arches, boulevards, statues, and massive public buildings. Its affluent citizens began to enjoy the pleasures of drinking water, sewers and electricity. All of these developments sprang from the necessity to look the part as Caracas became the meeting point of financiers, trade contracts, and international and national
bureaucrats. Lombardi maintains that by creating a modern-looking capital, Guzmán Blanco increased the government’s credibility as a growing commercial power. And perhaps more importantly, the dramatic physical transformation of Caracas under Guzmán Blanco “… served as a visible symbol of the city’s greater knowledge of the modern world” (194-95). Modernization of Caracas was crucial for the city’s new role as the connection between modern Europe and archaic Venezuela. Europe, it should be noted, stood primarily for France and other northern European nations. Spain was not, in Guzmán Blanco’s opinion, worthy of imitation. In fact, his stance on the modernization of Latin America was akin to that of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in Argentina; both leaders, in an effort to separate themselves from a colonial past, celebrated Latin American reproductions of “modern” European nations as much as they encouraged severance from the “colonial” Iberian Peninsula. This is also reminiscent of the Latin American Modernismo movement of late nineteenth century that favored French influences over Spanish literature and art.74

4.9 Into the Twentieth Century

By the time Teresa de la Parra gave voice to María Eugenia, Caracas was in the midst of an accelerated process of modernization aimed at remaking the nation in order to compete more aggressively in the foreign market. Juan Vicente Gómez had taken political control of the nation in 1908, and under his dictatorship, mostly as a consequence of petroleum exploitation, its economy would make a drastic jump from a

quintessential agricultural economy based primarily on coffee exports – and dependent on North Atlantic markets – to “… a complex, sophisticated, urbanized, industrializing, extractive, mining society closely attached to the ebb and flow of North Atlantic politics and economics” (211). Petroleum became the big industry of the 1920s, in national and international terms, and 89 percent of the market in Venezuela was controlled by foreign companies. But the truth is that besides foreign concessionaires, only Gómez and the Venezuelan elite had keys to the black gold treasure chest – the rest of the population remained in the same poor and rural conditions while no industrial progress was generated. The sophisticated, urbanized society of which Lombardi writes was very much limited to Caracas and to a handful of petroleum areas and growing cities. This highly uneven share of national wealth and modernizing mechanisms pushed waves of citizens out of rural lands and into petroleum cities. This upsurge of rural migration – which had begun the previous century under the presidency of Guzmán Blanco – contributed to the growing inequality highlighted by lines of ethnicity, gender and, in particular, social class.

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75 As Lombardi and other historians and economists of Venezuela have asserted, Venezuelan elites were dependent on the North Atlantic market for the exportation of coffee, cacao and hides, and this gave the market the power to dictate Venezuela’s external policies. With the dramatic upsurge of oil extraction and the complexities of import-export mechanisms, the North Atlantic powers began to interfere with internal affairs as well. We must remember the great impact that both world wars had on the demand for crude oil. It was in the international market powers’ interest to “assist” the Venezuelan government in its effort to keep the country peaceful and deliver the oil.

76 By 1928, only three companies - Dutch Shell, Standard Oil, and Gulf - controlled the oil market in Venezuela (Keen 485).
4.10 Geographies of Home: Desire and Denial

These urban features appear in de la Parra’s *Ifigenia*, but María Eugenia’s perspective is dominated by a romantic lens perhaps proper of her social status and age. The first Venezuelan scene she recognizes from the boat is described as an enchanting landscape representative of a bucolic painting,

Ante mis ojos, Cristina, se alzaba bruscamente, una gran montaña amarilla y estéril, pero florecida de casitas de todos los colores, que parecían trepar y escalonarse por los ribazos y las rocas con la audacia pastoril de un rebaño de cabras. La vegetación surgía a veces como un capricho ante aquellas casitas que sabían colgarse tan atrevidamente sobre los barrancos y que tenían la ingenuidad y la inverosímil apariencia de aquellas otras cabañitas de cartón con que sembraban las Madres por Navidad el nacimiento del Colegio. (1: 55)

Before my eyes, Cristina, a huge yellow and sterile mountain was rising abruptly, but flourishing with little houses in every color that seemed to climb and spread out on the steep banks and rocks with the pastoral audacity of a flock of goats. The vegetation sprouted sometimes as a whim before those little houses that knew how to hold on so daringly above the ravines and which had the ingenuousness and implausible appearance of those other little cardboard huts sprinkled over the nativity scene on Christmas by the school Mothers.

Such picturesque imagery creates an atmosphere of fantasy that underscores its disconnection with reality. The colorful houses which knew how to hang on the ravines
without falling off the cliffs are personalized by the same language that disassociates them from any possibility of life within them. The charming little houses appear as bright empty shells, like those paper homes placed each year on the nativity scene by the school nuns. But many of the hanging houses that María Eugenia describes were indeed made of cardboard; they were also inhabited by some of the most impoverished residents of Caracas – consequence of the petroleum boom of early twentieth century.

Those descriptions also stand out against the elegant Parisian hotel, the stylish salons, the trendy fashion shops where she left behind her schoolgirl looks of “chien fouetté” and acquired a “Parisian elegance” that would leave her family “épatée” (1: 40). Paris opened its arms to embrace her as its own daughter, María Eugenia exclaims, and she then came to join the exclusive group of women so often evoked by her father as though they were “algún dulce rico” (“a delicious candy”; 1:42). Paris, then, is the place of positive transformation from the protagonist’s point of view. But the bird with new wings, as she describes herself, had to fly away from Paris one day, lamenting this “desgracia tan grande” (“great misfortune”) as she takes a firm hold of her “nécessaire” (1:44) while boarding the ship that would take her to the land of the cardboard houses.

The above settings clearly mark the beginning of the story from which we may garner an early opinion of our heroine – a naïve and sentimental young woman who is incapable of seeing past the façades. But María Eugenia, as we discover in the pages that follow, learns about that other reality when tío Pancho reveals it to her as they drive around some of the most impoverished neighborhoods of Caracas. These places appear in the novel to show “the ugly” and “the poor” side of Caracas which, according to María Eugenia, is also the “most representative” (1: 121), as much as “the old” or colonial parts
that remind her of her grandmother’s youth and bring her back to her own present: “¡Ah! ¡Ventanas, floridas ventanas del tiempo de Abuelita! … ¡Y cómo me parecía descubrir ahora, en su quietud, el mismo enigma ancestral de mi fastidio, sentada tras de la reja, tejiendo telarañas de ensueño sobre el silencio mortal de la calle!” (“Ah! Windows! Windows full of flowers from Abuelita’s era! … And how I now seemed to discover, in its stillness, the same ancestral enigma of my ennui, sitting behind the window bars, weaving wistful webs upon the mortal silence of the street!”; 1: 121). In her grandmother’s past she sees her own future: that ancestral enigma that foreshadows her fated “boring monotony” (1: 164) also determined the lives of the women who came before her.

Her grandmother stands for colonial values, among them women’s abnegation and obedience; she represents what Ileana Rodríguez calls a “politically conservative pragmatist” (61).77 Her granddaughter’s future (through marriage) is not based on how much money she has, but on how obedient and irreproachable she is (1: 108). Rodríguez maintains that de la Parra adds to the debates of marriage and property through observations on national development and her own position of mestizo and mulatto republics. One such observation, according to Rodríguez, materializes during the city tour mentioned above, where the mulattos and their living environments are described in terms of ugliness: “…las calles están empedradas con guijarros, las aceras son de laja, las verdes motas de hierba crecen por todas partes donde se asome un hilillo de tierra, y es el barrio que habitan los pardos, los pobres vergonzantes y los enfermos que buscan el aire”

77 Rodríguez also points out that although this is the type of woman favored in de la Parra’s second novel, Las memorias de Mamá Blanca (1929), Ifigenia indeed seems to repudiate those women’s positions “as they move to more modern circumstances” (61).
(“the streets are paved with pebbles, the sidewalks are made of slab, the green specks of grass grow anywhere there is a string of soil, and it is the slums occupied by the mulattos, the shamefaced poor, and the sick seeking air”; 1: 121). Rodríguez concludes that descriptions such as this qualify “the nation as mulatta, a geography populated and possibly governed, at least metaphorically and symbolically, by a mixture” (61). Hence, she states, a mixed nation is painted in unfavorable colors. Nonetheless, the scenes to which Rodríguez refers take place in the marginal spaces of the city. The dominant “color” is represented by María Eugenia and her family, a lineage of the oligarchy in decline. Thus, perhaps what is associated here with the sick, the poor, and the mulattos is not only the threat of a new mixed nation, as Rodríguez suggests, but a sign that the absence of modernity necessarily brings misery and backwardness.79

4.11 Quid Pro Quo: The Body as Site of Worth

Rodríguez, however, does propose a connection between modernity, money, and wellbeing. María Eugenia loses her inheritance at the hands of her maternal uncle, who takes her father’s hacienda, San Nicolás, and renders her financially dependent on him. The money question comes up in two different instances: as the actual land and hacienda, and as the 20,000 franc inheritance afforded her while she was in Paris. Believing that this amount of money was meant to cover “toilette” expenses, María Eugenia spends it all

78 “Pardo” is a term generally applied to a person of mixed races whose skin color is not white. In the 2008 edition of Ifígenia, Elizabeth Garrels explains the evolution of the term “pardo” in Venezuela (63). The word was used in the 18th century to designate mulattos, or people of mixed black and white heritage. During the time of independence struggles, “pardo” was used to include any person of mixed races. However, a distinction was usually held in that century’s discussions of race between “mestizo” (white European and native Indian), “zambo” (black and Indian), and “pardo” (mulatto – black and white).

79 See Elizabeth Russ (2005) for a discussion of the intersection of race and romance in Ifígenia.
indiscriminately on fashion and beauty products, determined to return to Venezuela a transformed and modern woman (1:38, 40). Rodriguez maintains that therein lies the link between Latin American and European Modernist aesthetics. The introduction of commercial advertising into the text allows for the enunciation of these two types of modernity (Guerlain rouge and cosmetics, Lavin fashion dresses, and even Vogue as a fashion magazine). Modern Europe meets colonial Venezuela in a head-on confrontation. In order to be modern, nonetheless, money is of utmost necessity: “[t]he personal sense of self, the constitution of the subject, is based on accessing, as well as using properly, fashion products that permit the transformation of appearances” (Rodríguez 62). In this sense, María Eugenia’s sense of self depends upon the “generosity” of her uncle Eduardo.

For “landless women,” Latin American modernity means being at the mercy of relatives, or “in custody” as Rodríguez asserts (63). Given that the protagonist has lost her only property, she turns to her body as a site of potential worth: her white, Creole body would bring her a wealthy suitor. This re-evaluation of her body, Rodríguez asserts, along with the encouragement by her family to exhibit it through the front windows of the house once the mourning period for her father has passed (after two years), demands self-denial (abnegation, in her grandmother’s words) through complete acceptance of patriarchal authority. It is not only “a” body that fills the requirements, but a specific set of attributes must be present in order for this type of quid pro quo transaction to take place. Much importance is placed on physical beauty, and this includes the color of her skin, her age, and the family (or group of bodies, so to speak) to whom she belongs.
Therefore, as her grandmother assures her, beauty is a treasure to be prized in lieu of money. She underscores the difference between what is valued in Europe in contrast to what holds value in Caracas. “Do not look at your situation from the European point of view,” she warns her granddaughter, “over there, a young woman’s lack of money generally represents a complete life failure. Not here…” (1:107). For what is valued “here,” we have learned, is an impeccable, virginal, beautiful body that is beyond social reproach. Even tío Pancho stresses that a woman is never poor when she is as pretty as María Eugenia (1:128). According to Rodríguez, “[b]ody is capital” (65), and María Eugenia must invest it properly. Rodríguez, transcending the reduction of space to private (feminine) and public (masculine) spheres, reads María Eugenia’s body through the politicization of gender, ethnicity, and class. The protagonist invests her “capital” in shaping her figure. Rodríguez claims that María Eugenia decides to stop being a shy schoolgirl and to value herself “a million times more than all the heroines of the novels” (1: 33) because she is in fact using her body as capital in exchange for the possibility of a “good marriage.” We must remember, however, that the protagonist acquires this “transformation” before she knows about her father’s hacienda; that is, she uses the money she is sent – which, unbeknownst to her, turns out to be her only inheritance – because she thinks there will be more waiting for her when she arrives in Caracas.

María Eugenia’s body, instead, became a central obsession for the protagonist from the very moment she felt free in Paris, free from the restrictions instituted by the nuns and free from financial dependency, even if for only three months. She repeatedly admires her body in front of the mirror throughout the novel as part of that “unfolding” process she mentions to her friend: she is witnessing a new, “free” personality come out
from within herself (1: 33). She yearns for others’ admiration as well, she desires to be noticed, just as she needs a reader to witness her writing, her life, her story and, ultimately her body. It is after the second transformation that she decides to comply with her grandmother and “sell” her body in exchange for a “good marriage.”

After two years of silence, María Eugenia finds her diary and decides to write again, now from a changed perspective altogether: “About two years ago, I was in the habit of writing my impressions,” she says (2: 55). But after only a few months she began to feel “silly” about writing impressions nobody else would ever read. She, thus, decided to gather her written sheets of paper and hide them in the bottom drawer of her half-moon armoire. One day, as she found herself in “another day of activity” (2: 55), she rediscovered them. This is how the second half of the novel begins. The two-year mourning period has ended and she is now encouraged by grandmother and aunt to start thinking about marriage. She is, after all, twenty years old by now. The plan involves a deep-seated traditional activity: she sits by the front windows each evening with the other single woman of the house as chaperone, her aunt Clara, dressed in her best garments in hopes of attracting a future husband. Her body is for sale, and as a woman with no money she has two choices: to sell herself in exchange for marriage (and thus be noticed, exist, in society) or to accept her aunt Clara’s fate, never marry and always be financially dependent on her uncle Eduardo.

Modernization à la Paris, then, would only cover the façade of the city. Inside homes and political institutions, women continued to be subordinate to men in almost every respect. Their lives were still dictated by their duties as wives, mothers, and guardians of morality and beauty. The vision and company of women could heal the
most desolate men, according to articles printed in women’s magazines. Particularly at a time when emerging bourgeois men – like María Eugenia’s future fiancé – were earning their income outside of home, wives’ duties became focused on the physical and moral wellbeing of their husbands. As Elizabeth Garrels explains, the ideal Venezuelan woman of the early twentieth century was still very much akin to the ideal Victorian woman of the previous century. The modernizing project in Venezuela, driven in great part by the growing petroleum exporting industry, affected the domestic dynamics and generated new gender roles now focused on the division of labor. As more men entered the competitive work force, the private domestic space became the site of a new type of consumerism where family values began to join other luxury objects greatly admired by men who “could not attend to them properly whether at the bank or in the factory” (14). Women, then, turned into sentinels of religion, morality, and beauty within the walls of the now sacred home. Such moral superiority also served to justify a sexual division of labor.

This imputed female advantage was certainly sung in poetry and magazines alike. In 1893, for instance, Venezuelan writer Manuel C. Correa published a brief essay titled “Flores y mujeres” in which he calls on men to seek relief in women and flowers, both destined by nature to fill everything with beauty and charm:

… Unas y otras reflejan poesía, y constituyen, por decirlo así, los polos sobre que descansa el mundo del amor. Los más hermosos cuadros y los cantos más bellos… han recibido la vida en esa fuente siempre inagotable de inspiración y de ternura. Son hermanas inseparables, destinadas por la naturaleza á llenarlo todo con sus aromas y encantos. ¿Quién no admira á esas hijas predilectas del alma,
que doquiera llevan las puras emanaciones del sentimiento?… Contempladlas de cerca, y recibiréis el bautizo de una nueva vida; la vida del ideal, á que ellas dan forma en las notas del pentagrama, ó en las páginas del libro… Suprimidlas, y habréis deshojado el árbol de las ilusiones. ¿Cuáles atractivos harían entonces agradable la existencia?… Oh! Vosotros, los que sentís la nostalgia del hastío: los que habéis hecho de la duda santuario para vuestros sentimientos: los que habéis helado vuestros corazones en el cierzo de las realidades: los que confiáis á las frialdades del cálculo todos los atributos del alma; volved la vista á las mujeres y las flores, para que os sintáis regenerados… (n.p.)

Both of them mirror poetry, and comprise, so to speak, the poles upon which the world of love rests. The most beautiful paintings and the most lovely songs… have received life from that inexhaustible source of inspiration and tenderness. They are inseparable sisters, destined by nature to fill everything with their aromas and charm. Who does not admire these beloved daughters of the soul who, wherever they go, bear the purest emanations of sentiments?… Look at them up close, and you will receive the baptism of a new life; the life of the ideal, to which they give shape on the notes of a pentagram, or on the pages of a book… Remove them, and you will have stripped the leaves off the tree of dreams. What attractions would then make life pleasant?… Oh! All of you, who feel weariness and nostalgia: those of you who have turned doubt into a sanctuary for your feelings: those of you who have frozen your hearts on the north wind of reality: those of you who entrust all of soul’s attributes to the frivolities of arithmetic; turn your sights back to women and flowers so that you may feel regenerated…
Women, as flowers, were made to be seen for the pleasure and relief of tired, working men. There is no doubt that the stress given to the looks of women – fashion and hairstyle among them – was a topic of great discussion in magazines like El Cojo Ilustrado (1892-1915).

It was not simply a question of men writing about women’s expected behavior and dress, however. In 1892, roughly thirty years before Ifígenia was published, a woman with the name of baroness Staffe (la baronesa Staffe) circulated a series of articles in the same biweekly Caracas magazine aimed to serve as “guide and norm” to all women readers. One article warns wives, “[n]o basta ser mujer honrada y buena madre para conseguir de su marido la permanencia en el hogar” (“it is not enough that a woman be of honorable reputation and a good mother to keep hold of the husband at home”; 10). Being virtuous may get them a husband, but it is no assurance that honor and virtue will keep him. Beauty, nonetheless, is attainable by almost every woman who is willing to invest “a little effort” in their hair and dress. Lest the husband run off with another woman, the wife has the “obligation” to appear more “pleasant” than her competitors by wearing harmonious color combinations in dress and makeup, among other “flirtations”:

Cuando veo una mujer ridículamente vestida en su casa, con su traje arrugado y sin gracia, siempre auguro un porvenir desgraciado aún siendo muy bello el presente. Es para el compañero de nuestra vida que debemos reservar todas las graciosas coqueterías femeninas, y es para él que debemos ser bellas, cuidadosas, exhalando siempre hálito de tomillo (10).
When I see a woman ridiculously clothed at home, with her wrinkled dress and without grace, I always augur an unfortunate future even if the present is beautiful. It is for our life’s companion that we must reserve all the graceful feminine flirtations, and it is for him that we must be beautiful, careful, always exhaling a gentle breath of thyme.

This type of social discourse, then, was not limited to men – although the language directly supports the male tradition of power and authority. Women, as guardians of tradition, also perpetuated women’s obligation to look their best even when they are behind closed doors. But where doors divide private and public spaces, so to speak, windows make excellent gateways between house and street.

As illustrated earlier, it was customary that women of a certain social status sit by the front window to allow potential suitors a view of young, single women. Ifigenia illustrates this middle-class tradition using irony and humor. As mentioned, two years after the beginning of her letter to Cristina and the birth of her diary, María Eugenia “wakes up” from a long slumber still waiting for her prince. Only this time she holds no expectations of intellectual freedom and appears to have accepted her grandmother’s values as her own. Thus, she sits, “so beautiful” in her “white crepé dress from China,” her “thin naked arms,” and her garnet choker clung to her “snowy neck” so close to her blonde, wavy, and silky garçonne-style hair (2: 65). With supposed resignation, María

80 In House/Garden/Nation (1994), Ileana Rodríguez suggests a conservative agenda by de la Parra based on the positive description of her white, Creole body in contrast to the depiction of the mulatto and mestizo body, portrayed in terms of repugnance and ugliness. In this sense, Rodríguez maintains that the author represents a new, mixed-race nation in a negative light and that her conservative agenda is hidden behind her emergent feminism: she substitutes a white oligarchic woman for patriarchal power.
Eugenia begins to look outside her window as she laments: “¡Ah! ¡qué triste sino el de los condenados a mirar cómo pasa la vida, sentados así en esta actitud secundaria de humilde espectador!” (“Ah! what a sad fate that of the condemned to watch life pass by, sitting thus with a secondary attitude of humble spectator!”; 2: 63). Her resolve to stop being a secondary character has apparently vanished in this new transformation, one that will take her to her final sacrifice and eventual marriage. For it is sitting by the window that she catches César Leal’s eye, who soon visits her family to announce his intentions of marriage.

Her young body is at once her escape from aunt Clara’s fate and her sacrifice to maintain patriarchal values. Life, she says, is a fair, and she is merely an object waiting to be bought: “Sí. Soy, en efecto, un objeto fino de lujo que se halla de venta en esta feria de la vida…. ¡Estoy de venta!... ¿Quién me compra?... ¿Quién me comprará?... ¿Quién me compra?... Estoy de venta!... ¿Quién me compra?... ¿Quién me comprará?... ¿Quién me compra? (“Yes. I am, in effect, a luxurious object for sale in this life fair…. I am on sale!... Who can buy me?... Who will buy me?... Who can buy me?... I am on sale!... Who can buy me?... Who can buy me?... Who can buy me?”; 2:66). As Rodríguez has argued, the wrapping cover, so to speak, chosen by María Eugenia to be ever more “sellable” is as important as the parts of her body that are uncovered. Indeed, beauty and fashion products make up essential attributes of being a woman. Consider, as an example of the importance given to such details, the following fragment taken from an article published in El Cojo Ilustrado on January 1, 1894 (written in November 1893):

Los „modistos” quisieron… traer el peinado venda que cubría las sienes y bajaba toscamente hasta la nuca, tornando de esta suerte el rostro de la mujer más bella
en rostro octogenario; …mas para fortuna del bello sexo la intentona se ha llevado chasco…

Nos querían quitar el triunfo más bello del siglo XIX – que es la naturalidad del traje femenino. Querían suprimir el graciosísimo escote que dejaba á descubierto las líneas puras y gloriosas de los cuellos; el talle prolongado con sus ondulaciones artísticas, y en una palabra, querían arrollar\textsuperscript{81} á la mujer, no ya en telas sino en mantas, para que fueran, por ahí, sin formas, sin nobleza, sin arrogancias…. 

Todavía podéis enorgulleceros del traje sencillo que nos deleita, del „traje-verdad”; todavía podéis ser cantadas por la lira del poeta. (Pardo, 11)

The fashion designers wanted… to bring the \textit{bandage} hairstyle that covered the temples and reached crudely down to the neck, turning in this manner the countenance of a beautiful woman into the face of an octogenarian; …but to the fortune of the beautiful sex this bid has been hindered…

They wanted to take from us the most beautiful triumph of the nineteenth century – which is the simplicity of the feminine dress. They wanted to obliterate the intensely graceful low neckline that left uncovered the pure and glorious lines of [women’s] necks; the elongated figure with its artistic undulations; in a word, they wanted to roll woman up, not in fabric any longer but in sheets, so that they would move without form, without refinement, without arrogance…. 

\textsuperscript{81} Although the term “arrollar” has a contemporary meaning of “to run over” or “crush” someone or something, based on context it means “enrollar” in this case: “to roll up” (reel, spool, etc.).
You may still take pride in the unpretentious dress that we relish, in the “true-dress”; you may still be sung by the poet’s lyre.

Men delight in the simple dress that allows women to show off their necklines, the writer states. The article is but one piece of evidence of the influence that men had not only on women’s civil rights, but also on how they dressed and how women’s fashion should be designed. The above article, incidentally, follows a commentary by the same author about the death of Julián del Casal (1863-1893), notable Cuban poet who influenced and led Latin American Modernismo from its conception. It seems appropriate to point out here that female figures were certainly sung in del Casal’s poetry, and that their pale, “pure and glorious necklines” were admired in his poems along with other bodily fragments. Surely the “excessively covered” European fashion described by Pardo could not inspire the poet to sing the beautiful sex, for the beautiful sex must be seen before it is sung.

César Leal sees María Eugenia through the open and well-lit window of Abuelita’s house. A conservative man, Leal is a Senator whose representation in the novel “descalifica el trabajo femenino fuera de la casa y la instrucción de las jóvenes,

82 “Baste saber que Julián del Casal era una legítima y reconocida personalidad literaria en Cuba, y no como quiera. Fué una de las más genuinas y netas representaciones de la nueva escuela…. Y Julián venía del mundo de las tristezas … proclamando su vejez en la florecencia y plenitud de sus treinta años. Iba de prisa hacia la tumba” (“Suffice it to know that Julián del Casal was a legitimate and renowned literary personality in Cuba, and not without reason. He was one of the most genuine and pure representatives of the new school…. And Julián came from the world of suffering … claiming old age in the plenitude of his thirty years. He was on his hasty way to his tomb”; Pardo 10).

The same article precedes a brief observation about the death of another literary figure, María del Pilar Sinués. Pardo’s reflection on this novelist’s death, however, is mostly related to irony (“coincidencia extraña”): the writer’s body was found in her bedroom, where she had died suddenly and alone. Her last novel was titled Morir sola (“To Die Alone”), and thus her death, Pardo points out, was “sadly original.”
implica la exclusión de la esfera política, el sometimiento de la mujer al marido y sostiene la incapacidad intelectual de la mujer” (“disqualifies women’s work outside of the house and young women’s education, implies the exclusion of the political sphere [for women], the subordination of the woman to her husband, and it sustains women’s intellectual inabilities”; Truneau Castillo 130). Leal echoes Abuelita’s colonial values despite his bourgeois, mestizo background: “those Leal,” Abuelita declares, were never mentioned in her time. His family is more “second class,” but “things are so different today!” (2: 78). Nevertheless, her marriage to him is the only thing, according to María Eugenia, that would keep her from turning into her aunt Clara, financially dependent on relatives, living “between Chispita [aunt Clara’s dog], the ferns, and the rosary” (2: 79). Once married, she will depend entirely on her husband, but it will be a socially accepted dependency. She will no longer have to endure the humiliating experience of receiving monetary support from the very man who stole her inheritance.

César Leal, or “Loyal Caesar,” denies María Eugenia the freedom of thought and expression that she had appropriated during the first half of the novel. The question of democracy comes up throughout the novel in dialogues between men, and Leal firmly believes that in a democratic system, “the man must always act like a man and the woman like a woman” (2: 94). This vague statement is clarified on the pages that follow throughout the novel, as Leal steadily prohibits his fiancé from reading, writing, or engaging in any activity not suitable for a woman. The scene that follows, for instance, shows how Leal begins to demonstrate his disdain for women’s literary pretensions. Here, María Eugenia is reciting a poem by Modernist poet José Asunción Silva:
“Una noche, una noche toda llena de murmullos, de perfume y de música de alas…” Pero él, muchísimo más disgustado que antes, cuando iba yo por la palabra “murmullos” me cortó bruscamente el nocturno para pronunciar, él, un extenso monólogo, enérgico e imperioso, el cual, comprimido en pocas palabras, venía a expresar más o menos lo siguiente: Que odiaba romanticismos; que odiaba las recitaciones; y que odiaba todavía más las mujeres como yo, que pretendían ser sabias y bachilleras; que en su opinión, la cabeza de una mujer era un objeto más o menos decorativo, completamente vacío por dentro, hecho para alegrar la vista de los hombres, y adornado con dos orejas cuyo único oficio debía ser el recibir y coleccionar las órdenes que éstos les dictasen; y que además y finalmente, le parecía indispensable el que dicho decorativo objeto usase una cabellera muy larga puesto que así lo había indicado ya la sapientísima filosofía de Schopenhauer. (2: 116)

“One night, one night filled with murmurs, with perfume and with the music of wings…” But he, even more annoyed than before, when I was on the word “murmurs,” cut me off abruptly from reciting the poem to deliver, himself, an extensive monologue, energetic and commanding, which, compressed in few words, came to express roughly the following: That he hated romanticism; that he hated recitals; and that he hated even more women like me, who pretended to be wise and erudite; that in his opinion, a woman’s head was more or less decorative, completely empty inside, made only to cheer the sight of men, and adorned with two ears whose only task should be to receive and gather the orders dictated by these [men]; and that, besides and lastly, it seemed imperative that such
decorative object use a very long head of hair given that it had thus been
designated by Schopenhauer’s wise philosophy.

Her body is now his property, for even before their marriage she is forbidden from
wearing any makeup. Her hair must be worn long from now on because, in the words of
Leal, “Como la pintura, el pelo corto no es cosa propia de mujeres decentes!” (“Like
makeup, short hair is not suitable for decent women!”; 2: 117). Maria Eugenia, then,
confesses that she no longer paints her lips with Rouge éclatant de Guerlain in keeping
with the rules she now follows. She now uses Rouge vif de Saint-Ange instead. This
color is “softer” and she is thus able to convince Leal that this is in fact the natural color
of her lips. She laments giving up her short hair. But, alas, ridding her head of all the
books she has read in the course of two years is a much more intricate task, she says:

…it troubled me even more to think that I had worked without respite reading
and studying, with the purpose of cultivating myself and thus acquire a new
appeal, which suddenly appeared, according to what Leal had emphatically
declared, a unfavorable condition, unsightly and intolerable in a woman: “the scholarly woman!”

Ah, what a great conflict… How to clean my head of this din of accumulated readings [that] floated ceaselessly in it?

A woman who reads is just as troublesome as a woman who writes. María Eugenia, protagonist and narrator, has a room of her own, a room that at times is her refuge and, at others, her prison. This is the space from where she writes and where she reads her favorite novels, all of which have been deemed – by her grandmother, aunt, and fiancée - to corrupt a young lady's sense of morality. Previously decorated with aunt Clara’s style, the protagonist turns it into the room where she spends most of her time, where her letter and diaries were born. In this space, the space of enunciation, she creates another home with a literal key that nevertheless allows for a connection with the scene on the other side of her bedroom window. This is not the exhibition window where she is the object being observed. From this barred window, she has access to an orange tree planted in one of the patios of the house. Her room is a welcoming place: “Mi cuarto es grande, claro, empapelado de azul celeste, y tiene una ventana con reja que da sobre el segundo patio de la casa. Del lado de afuera de la ventana, muy pegadito a la reja, hay un naranjo, y más allá, en cada una de las otras esquinas, hay otros naranjos…” (“My bedroom is large, bright, wallpapered in sky blue, and it has a barred window that opens to the second patio of the house. Outside the window, touching the bars, there is an orange tree, and beyond that, on each corner, there are other orange trees…”; 1: 35). The simplicity of the orange trees, their aroma, and their color provoke in the protagonist a special calm that allows her to “think,” to write. It is also the only connection to the house while she
writes given that nobody knows about her literary activities. Gregoria, the laundress, sneaks books in from the library without her grandmother or aunt suspecting it. When María Eugenia is not reading books like the scandalous Voltaire’s Dictionary of Philosophy, she hides them “like a treasure in the double bottom drawer of [her] mirrored armoire” (1: 150).

4.12 Home as Writing, Writing Home

It is in that double bottom drawer that she hides her own writing too. Her writing is the innermost site of the home she has created, a home that is her own. Paris, Caracas, Abuelita’s house, and her own bedroom are all spaces from which she draws material to construct this home: everything she writes in it is part of what she calls her soul: “Por suerte inventaron la escritura, y en ella va y viene algo de esto que tanto queremos en las personas queridas, esto que es alma y es espíritu, que así como dicen que no muere nunca, tampoco se ausenta del todo, cuando porque quiere, no quiere ausentarse” (“Fortunately writing was invented, and within it comes and goes something of what we want and cherish in our loved ones, that which is soul and spirit, which, just as they say it never dies, it also does not leave outright, since because it loves, it does not want to leave”; 2: 150-151). Her spirit flows in her writing, and what and how she writes is as important as the act of writing itself; hence the fundamental significance of her discourse. Karin Hopfe has studied Ifígenia’s discourse as confession, a sort of fictional testimonial.

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83 There is a play of words here with “querer,” which can translate as to want, to love, and to cherish. The novel’s language is rich not only in word plays such as this, but in colloquial and regional articulations which do not translate faithfully, and where even the attempt to translate them does a disservice to the author, the novel, and its characters. Nevertheless, I continue to attempt as faithful a translation as it is possible.
that projects a quality of frankness expressed in a style that coincides with a “purpose of absolute sincerity in [María Eugenia’s] writing” (233). Through her writing, she makes herself present, thus countering “her absence in the real world” (235).

Nonetheless, writing without a public renders it a lonely act. Her letter reached the intended person without much consequence. Cristina returned a letter with barely a few lines on it and did not address any of the intimate concerns conveyed by María Eugenia. Cristina’s “apathetic and late reply” on grey embossed paper brings with it the recognition that María Eugenia’s confession has not been understood: “¡Ah! ¡qué traición a sí mismo; qué irreparable imprudencia; qué sentimiento de pudor ante la propia desnudez del alma, son estas confidencias y estos secretos que al decirse, rebotan en los oídos amigos y vuelven a caer sobre nosotros, deshechos en lluvia de decepciones!” (“Ah! What self-treason; what an irreparable imprudence; what a feeling of shame before the naked soul; that is what these intimacies and these secrets are, which, once told, rebound on friendly ears and come back to fall on ourselves, dissolved in a rain of disappointment!”; 2: 8). This comes in stark contrast to her earlier convictions that she would never regret pouring her soul’s secrets into that letter (1: 34). Both letter and diary emerge as vehicles that allow the writer to translate that je ne sais quoi, that “soul or spirit,” onto paper. Her diary reveals the impossibility of fulfillment, her own realization affronted by a series of censure, prohibitions, and prejudices she encounters in her grandmother’s house (Truneau Castillo 134). The two-year “silent” period initiated a process in which María Eugenia had in one way or another “adapted” to the Venezuelan traditions against which she rebelled on the first half of the novel.
Despite the seeming absence of a reading audience, Hopfe argues that a second voice renders manifest the existence of a reader and, thus, turns the text into literature (text with a reading audience). That is, each chapter in the novel is presented by a voice that is not María Eugenia’s and that introduces brief commentaries which at times are critical and ironic,84 while alluding to literary models at the same time.85 This implies, according to Hopfe, that this extratextual voice is not only a commentator but a necessary reader of the text commented upon. The possibility of a reader opens up the closed space of the diary: “el paratexto simula una abertura hacia el espacio público cuya falta había sido compensada por la autora ficticia mediante la escritura; esta se re-inscribe ahora justo allí donde estaba excluida” (“the paratext [surrounding text: title, subtitles, etc.] simulates an opening toward the public space, an absence previously compensated by the fictional author through her writing; this [her writing] is re-inscribed now precisely where it had been excluded”; Hopfe 238). Through María Eugenia’s text, Teresa de la Parra presents women’s struggle for equal rights as a complex social problem where neither rebellion nor total abnegation solve it.

84 For example, the third part of the novel begins: “Capítulo I: Después de dormir profundamente durante largos meses, una mañana, del fondo de un armario, entre lazos, encajes y telas viejas, se ha despertado de golpe la verbosidad literaria de María Eugenia Alonso. Hela aquí restregándose los ojos todavía” (“Chapter I: After a deep sleep over long months, one morning, from the bottom of an armoire, among bows, lace, and old fabric, María Eugenia Alonso’s literary verbosity has suddenly awakened. Here it is, still rubbing its eyes”; 2: 55).

85 As in the title of the first chapter: “Una carta muy larga donde las cosas se cuentan como en las novelas” (“A very long letter where things are told as in the novels”; 1: 29).
4.13 Conclusion: A “Moderate” Modern Feminist

In her letters and conferences, de la Parra proclaims the need for women’s independence. **Ifigenia**, the author insists, presents the “critical case of the modern young woman” (OC 684) who refuses to follow traditions blindly. She argues that, contrary to how critics received it, **María Eugenia**’s diary did not pose threats to young women readers of her time, that it is not “a book of revolutionary propaganda” because the text simply reflected them: all young women who lived in similar circumstances as the protagonist had a María Eugenia living within them even before they read her book. **Ifigenia**, then, is “la exposiciñn de un caso típico de nuestra enfermedad contemporánea, la del bovarismo hispanoamericano, la de la inconformidad aguda por cambio brusco de temperatura y falta de aire nuevo en el ambiente” (“the disclosure of a typical case of our contemporary disease, that of the Spanish American bovarism, the acute inconformity due to sudden change in temperature and lack of new air in the environment”; OC 684). Modern women’s “crises,” she insists, are not cured by preaching submission as it was carried out in colonial times, “when the gentle life could be hidden behind closed doors” (OC 685). She asserts that modern life demands new social norms, a sort of “new air,” as she describes it:

86 Reference to the state of chronic dissatisfaction, produced by the stark contrast between a person’s hopes and aspirations and a reality that hinders them. This term was first used by French philosopher Jules de Gaultier in his study, *Le Bovarysme, la psychologie dans l’œuvre de Flaubert* (1892), where he refers to Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857) and in particular its main character, Emma Bovary, as the prototype of conjugal dissatisfaction. Although *bovarismo* is not found in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, its usage is common in essays, such as the one written by de la Parra only three decades after Gaultier’s study was published. See Wikipedia: http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bovarismo. Although *Bovarism* can be found (http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/bovarism) with a similar definition, it is also interesting to note here that the term *bovarismo* does not always translate into English as *Bovarism*; in one instance, at least, it may be used “to describe the elite in identifying themselves with elements of European ancestry while denouncing any ties to their African legacy” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bovarism).
La vida actual, la del automóvil conducido por su dueña, la del micrófono junto a la cama, la de la prensa y la de los viajes, no respeta puertas cerradas. Como el radio… atraviesa las paredes, y quieres que no, se hace oír y se mezcla a la vida del hogar. Para que la mujer sea fuerte, sana y verdaderamente limpia de hipocresía, no se la debe sojuzgar frente a la nueva vida, al contrario, debe ser libre ante sí misma, consciente de los peligros y de las responsabilidades, útil a la sociedad, aunque no sea madre de familia, e independiente pecuniariamente por su trabajo y su colaboración junto al hombre, ni dueño, ni enemigo, ni candidato explotable, sino compañero y amigo. (OC 685)

Our present life, that of the automobile driven by its [female] owner, the microphone next to the bed, the press and the travels, does not respect closed doors. As with radio… it pierces walls, and whether you want it to or not, it makes itself heard and it blends in with the domestic life. In order for women to be strong, healthy and truly free of hypocrisy, they must not be subdued in this new lifestyle, on the contrary, they must be free in themselves, aware of the dangers and the responsibilities, useful to society, even if they are not mothers, and financially independent on account of their work and collaboration side by side with men, [who are] not their owners, or their enemies, or exploitable contenders, but companions and friends.

Her novel’s “only objective” is to show young women’s duality; that is, the conflict between who they think they are and who they are told they should be. She offers “esta pregunta eterna y torturante sometida al lector: ¿cuál es el verdadero yo fruto de nosotros
mismos, el yo que razona o el que se conduce?” (“this eternal and torturing question to the reader: which is the true I product of ourselves, the I who reasons or the one who is led?”; OC 887). The author sustains that men and women ought to work side by side. Imposed submission and passivity only lead to silent hatred and bitterness. Work, she says, is another discipline that purifies and strengthens the spirit. Women can achieve equal civil rights through education. Work can be a weapon against women only when it is humiliating and badly paid, and it leads to the exploitation of poor young women (685). Although de la Parra does not propose how to make education affordable or even accessible to all women alike, she does emphasize formal careers as channels leading to women’s equality outside of the home.

Despite her “moderate feminism” (686) and equal rights’ discourse, de la Parra also sustained that she preferred, “in the bottom of her soul,” colonial women because they possessed “la gracia del pasado y la poesía infinita del sacrificio voluntario y sincero” (“the grace of the past and the infinite poetry of the voluntary and sincere sacrifice”; 687). Teresa de la Parra has been criticized as hiding a conservative agenda behind her “moderate feminism” based on her observation about her “preference” for colonial women. I believe her moderate feminism supports and encourages women’s freedom of thought and citizenship, but she as well leaves open a grey area where traditional women – women who sacrifice “voluntarily” – also have a privileged place in history. The colonial/modern dichotomy continues to struggle in the twenty-first century. For it is indeed a struggle that, primarily based on Catholic dogma, is present in many Venezuelan families even today. Although Ifígenia’s protagonist is still privileged despite her “landless” condition, this ubiquitous “illness” crosses class and racial
boundaries, with their Abuelitas and María Eugenias constantly negotiating a space of compromise and *convivencia*. For María Eugenia, narrator and protagonist, the compromise that filled that space was her sacrifice in marriage, her entrance into society as a whole number, as a wife and future mother. But let us not forget that, if only for a brief time, she created her own space within the pages of her letter and diary. This home of hers offered a shield from her beloved grandmother’s norms. And as mentioned earlier in the chapter, based on María Eugenia’s extratextual writing after her marriage to César Leal, there is a hopeful possibility that she may still be writing and reading, and hiding her pages in the double bottom drawer of her half-moon mirrored armoire.
CONCLUSION

And if going home is denied me, then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture -- una cultura mestiza -- with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture.

- Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/LaFrontera*

It makes perfect sense to me now how I resisted the act of writing, the commitment to writing. To write is to confront one’s demons, look them in the face and live to write about them. Fear acts like a magnet; it draws the demons out of the closet and into the ink in our pens... Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under triple or quadruple oppression. Yet in that very act lies our survival because a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared.

- Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*

Almost one hundred and forty years since María Amparo Ruiz de Burton published her first novel and eighty five years after *Ifígenia* set off waves of scandal within literary, social, and religious Caracas circles, we continue to confront, be appalled by, have conversations about, and challenge many of the troubling issues represented in and by these women’s writings. The complexities embedded in their texts span from their personal ambivalence regarding questions of gender, class, and racial prejudices to how they resist stereotypical constructions of what in their own historical situation were
marginal beings, namely women and Mexicans. Did these women consciously employ their particular rhetoric to defend their own interests? Textual as well as extratextual evidence suggest they did. Both Ruiz de Burton and de la Parra adhered to a class structure that privileged their own position. Both authors write from a white, high-middle class stance that also seems to favor social stratification grounded on race relations. They have been critiqued for holding conservative, or even neocolonialist, worldviews that envision a continuation of patriarchy and hierarchical systems in which they will benefit. Questions have been raised about whether and to what extent these authors in fact wrote resistance literature, arguing that in Ruiz de Burton’s case, the resistance was in fact a masked desire to enter that same organism she critiqued.87

When I began this project, I was amazed by the amount of criticism directed toward both writers based solely on their privileged class positions. For some critics, the mere fact that these two women had enjoyed social or economic advantages somehow diminished their credibility as writers. I wonder if a similar phenomenon exists among students of canonized male writers. I assume social class and privilege must be relevant in the scholarship dedicated to them, at least to some extent, although I have not encountered anything like the criticism that surrounds the two women studied here. It would be disingenuous to ignore that Ruiz de Burton endorses a privileged class of Californios in her writing, thus upholding her own elite values. But to focus solely on

87 Several recent critiques point to Ruiz de Burton’s complicity in power relations, contending that her objective was to simply present the elite Californio as white and Anglo-like in order to earn citizenship rights. See, for instance, José Aranda, Jesse Alemán, John González, Amelia de la Luz Montes, David Luis-Brown, and other Mexican American scholars listed in the bibliography.
that aspect dismisses the intricacies and contribution of her work to the entire body of Chicana/o literary heritage.

As Marcial González, Tey Diana Rebolledo, and Amelia de la Luz Montes, among few others, have pointed out, to write her off as a precursor to Chicana/o literature simply because she does not represent the working class Chicano would entail dismissing other Hispanic nineteenth-century women’s voices whose economic positions afforded them “the means to speak and create for themselves a literary space in a primarily male Mexican and American literary landscape” (Montes 217). Rebolledo reminds us that Ruiz de Burton writes beyond her class as well, that indeed this author “explores and documents the clash of two different legal systems, two different ways of doing business, two different cultures” (126). Ruiz de Burton undeniably explores and, I would add, exposes many of the essential contradictions that shaped this very nation. Thomas Jefferson’s conflictive positions as a public promoter of liberty for all people and as an advocate of absolute segregation between races, entailing the complete absence of civil rights and liberties for African Americans, have not eradicated his accomplishments in our history texts. This may be not be an entirely adequate analogy, but it does serve to exemplify the inherent complexities that exist even in individuals who have dared to think differently, who, recalling Gloria Anzaldúa’s definition of nepantleras, have at least attempted to change worldviews.

Ruiz de Burton’s personal and textual ambiguities in fact infringe upon the nineteenth-century constructions of the Mexicans through one-dimensional stereotypes. I would even argue that the complexities embedded in her writings prophetically echo Gloria Anzaldúa’s conception of the new mestiza in the 1980s. In Borderlands/La
**Frontera**, Anzaldúa suggests that there is no home for the Chicana, at least not in the static sense; it is full of contradictions and ambiguity. In order to *feel at home* the new mestiza must forge a new consciousness that houses a tolerance and acceptance of the many contradictions that are inherent in the condition of being mestiza: “We are a living, breathing contradiction, we who live *en las entrañas del monstruo* [inside the monster’s bowels], but I refuse to be forced to identify,” writes Cherríe Moraga (“Acento” 301).

The mestiza is the point of intersection between what divides and what unites, as Jean Franco reiterates (xvi). She sits at the crossroads, as Anzaldúa has said, between *lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto*. Anzaldúa suggests that the new mestiza has to transcend the borders that have defined her in order to discover new ways of seeing herself and others, new ways of imagining her self, of acting, of writing:

> The work of the *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (102)

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88 Roughly translated as “what we have inherited, what we have acquired, what has been imposed upon us.”
Cherrie Moraga accepts that her Chicana heritage is not only of the “indígena” but also of the “conquistador.” *Lo heredado* includes both colonizer and colonized. She also admits that most days she is “deathly ashamed” of her “explorer” claim, but that in order to grow, as suggested Anzaldúa above, “we must open the wound to make it heal, purify ourselves with the prick of Maguey thorns” (*Generation* 122). To study Ruiz de Burton and her particularly controversial body of work is to recognize another aspect of that rich heritage from which Chicana writers have evolved.

To be sure, Ruiz de Burton’s novels privilege a racial and social stratification that renders her complicit in power relations. Whereas I agree to some extent with José David Saldívar that Ruiz de Burton indeed functions as a “radical critic of an Anglocentric historiography” (170), I believe that the novel also inadvertently places that same historiography in a favorable position by making it its central object. In their introduction to *Minor Transnationalism* (2005), Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih suggest that “[c]ritiquing the center, when it stands as an end in itself, seems only to enhance it; the center remains the focus and the main object of study … The marginal or the other remains a philosophical concept and futuristic promise: the other never ‘arrives’” (3). In Ruiz de Burton’s texts, the other arrives quite literally oftentimes only to be assimilated, as in Lola’s case in *Who Would Have Thought It*? In critiquing the dominant Northeastern white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant racism and greed, Ruiz de Burton, perhaps unwittingly, privileges that same position by validating the beauty and superiority of White over dark, black, or “spotted,” demonstrated in the reactions to the transformation of little Lola from a black-skinned “Indian” girl, to a spotted-skinned young woman, and finally to a “beautiful” white woman worthy of a place in the
hierarchy of home – and, by extension, of the nation – no longer as the unofficially 
adopted child but as a legitimate member of the household.

Amelia de la Luz Montes sustains that “[t]o read texts that dare to reveal and 
portray the complexities of power relations is to bring us face to face with our own 
implications in power structures today” (216). This is one reason why Ruiz de Burtons 
texts are so useful and relevant even over a century later. Her contributions to public 
conversations about various kinds of power are invaluable because they reveal a side of 
history not many historians cared to divulge, certainly not in her time. This is where I 
agree with Saldívar and his view of Ruiz de Burton as a critic of Anglocentric 
historiography. Saldívar’s qualification of “radical” may well be justified if we locate her 
in her own historical time and personal circumstances. All too often we forget to 
transcend our time of reading to the moment in which the text was created, the conditions 
to which it responded. Thus, although these texts certainly prove to be relevant today in 
view of the complex matters they expound, it is also essential that we locate them in their 
own time. As such, they also provide invaluable sources of sociohistorical narrations and 
constructions, and render themselves historiographies other than the Anglocentric 
account. Ruiz de Burton’s texts further support their views with numerous direct 
quotations from treaties, printed legislation, and even public figures like Collis 
Huntington, one of the Big Four censured in The Squatter and the Don.

Framed in the generic form of the historical romance, Ruiz de Burton’s novels 
exploit the connection between fiction and history to expose corruption in the legal 
system, the political realm, and the growing monopolistic practices that dominated the 
transportation structure behind Manifest Destiny’s expansionist endeavor. Although
other contemporaneous writers also stamped some of these historical facts in their fiction, Ruiz de Burton’s is the first account to be narrated from the perspective of the “conquered,” as Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita first observed. As such, her writings can be considered part of a resistance literature that seeks to respond to domination by means of thematic and formal frameworks (R. Saldívar 24, 217). As already discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, Ruiz de Burton indeed appropriates the historical romance as a strategy that will help her get published (by fulfilling the required generic form) while also permitting her to accomplish her ideological objective by substituting the love story with “an expressly political history: of class conflict, racial injustice, land theft” (Goldman 131), even if the “racial injustice” portrayed only the elite Californio as the victims. And yet, it is issues of her own ethnicity, class, and gender that complicate her classification within a literary canon, as Montes suggests.

In her introduction to Challenging Boundaries, Joyce W. Warren asserts,

Ruiz de Burton does not fit easily into any preestablished periods or traditions. She was a novelist of the West whose works cannot be categorized as “Westerns” in the traditional association of the genre with Anglo stories of western exploration; she was an upper-class Mexican American woman whose perspective does not coincide with a tradition of Chicano working-class literature; she was a realist and a muckraker and an author of the sentimental romance; and she was a woman writer seeking to establish herself in a male Mexican and Anglo-American culture. (xvii-xviii)
Given such complexities, Warren argues that literary critics have chosen to ignore the position of Ruiz de Burton within the American literary canon. Montes further suggests that the author needs to be studied both within and outside of literary periods and traditions because her writings defy classification. Her works certainly “broaden racial and cultural perspectives” that complicate the literary body already canonized in American literary history, but Montes also agrees that there is still much work to do in this area (203).

The rediscovery of Ruiz de Burton’s work has generated significant reconsiderations and revisions not only in a broad American literary history, but particularly in the field of Chicana/o studies. First, she was the first Spanish speaker to write and publish in English, using the hegemonic language to reach a larger readership, seeking to change the Mexican stereotype as uneducated. 89 Second, her reappearance forced a rearrangement within the history of Hispanic fiction, locating her 1872 novel as the first work in this area and rendering her as the first Latino writer. 90 Third, she was a woman. That in itself is significant when we consider the geohistorical circumstances, for sure, but it is even more remarkable that the first Latino writer was also a Latina. Her works, furthermore, are unconventional in that they also reveal varying degrees of participation in power relations that marginalize other peoples of color, like Native

89 Although Ruiz de Burton succeeded in having her works published and publicized, the actual readership extended only to the San Diego area, where it did receive substantial attention. But it never achieved the success that other contemporary novels attained, like Helen Hunt Jackson’s Ramona (1884). Some critics perceive this failed bid as another indicator of a wide-ranging marginalization of Mexican Americans during that period (See Moyna and Alemán’s “Amnesia”).

90 Before Ruiz de Burton’s rediscovery by Sánchez and Pita, New Mexican Eusebio Chacñn’s 1892 novellas were believed to have been the earliest works “to express a Mexican-American sensibility in contrast to the Anglo-dominated tradition…” (Augenbraum 114).
Americans and mestizos. They thus differ greatly, according to Montes, from nineteenth-century western texts that show Anglo perspectives which “tend toward uncomplicated stereotypes of other races and of women” (221 fn 13). This complication is implicit in Warren’s comment about Ruiz de Burton’s lack of recognition among literary critics instead of addressing her “placement” in literary studies.\(^{91}\)

A similar phenomenon occurs with Teresa de la Parra’s ambiguous “place” in the history of Latin American literature. Miguel Gomes published a meticulous study about the complexities encountered by critics when they attempt to pigeonhole, as it were, de la Parra’s works into specific periods or movements using a context that has been reinvented \textit{a posteriori}. Gomes also explores the author’s own “finesse” when situating herself in a temporality constructed around other texts and discourses. He points out three common alternatives used to locate de la Parra in a literary context. He calls the first “synchronization” or the connection with a literary mode of her own time, namely the avant-garde current.\(^{92}\) “Anachronism” describes the second approach: de la Parra’s work is seen as a rejection of the so-called “telluric novel” of the 1920s and 1930s.\(^{93}\)

\(^{91}\) Jesse Alemán supports this claim, stating that Ruiz de Burton’s writings muddle the otherwise plainly erected ethno-racial lines framing and differentiating American and Chicano/a literary histories: “[s]uch is the dual citizenship of Ruiz de Burton’s novels: they challenge the Anglocentrism of northeastern America by arguing that upper-class Californios are white. No wonder her works have yet to find a place in literary studies” (“Amnesia” 61).

\(^{92}\) Gomes critiques Francine Masiello’s classification of de la Parra as “vanguardista” because, according to him, it is supported solely on the basis of chronology: Teresa de la Parra began writing during the avant-garde period. Gomes also mentions other contradictions in Masiello’s logic that, although not covered here, raise questions about this method of periodization (48-49).

\(^{93}\) These novels are sometimes addressed as depicting a “social realism” grounded on regional and historical elements where the central themes are tied to the land. A celebrated Venezuelan writer, Rómulo Gallegos, is one of the most prominent representatives of this current. A Gallegos-Parra comparison has been examined by other critics, but Gomes maintains that, although it is necessary to explore it, the connection between the two writers exists more in the critics’ psyche, which has had ample time to develop this association. De la Parra, he insists, did not have access to this “chronological experience” (49). It is
Gomes calls it an anachronistic mistake because the exegeses claiming de la Parra’s anti-telluric stance are founded on intertextualities that are impossible to demonstrate, especially given that the canonized telluric novels were published after her own work. The third variant he exposes is what he calls “uchronia,” a process that renders de la Parra’s works ahistorical by disconnecting her from the existent literary works of her time. This approach, Gomes claims, implicates a sort of “autistic” creative process that disengages de la Parra from the literary and historical factors that influenced her writing.

Other critics have called attention to textual elements in Ifigenia that indeed parallel those cultivated by the modernista movement. The rich descriptions of glamorous ornaments and materials imported from China and Japan, María Eugenia’s fondness for French couture and flair, her obsession with lavish beauty products and perfumes (also imported from Paris), and the love sonnet the protagonist composed, among other aspects, certainly nourish associations with an early modernista style. In her letter, for instance, María Eugenia explains how she developed her taste for haute couture and modern style: “I explained [to Madame Jourdan] that I had decided to cut my hair because I intended to return to my country turned into a truly chic and fashionable person. Very friendly and obliging, she began to offer me advice on toilette and good taste. She pointed out fashion designers, hats, hairstylists, manicures, and a host of other things” (1: 40). She is determined to become “modern,” which in this early stage is equivalent to emulating French styles, including “Louis XV’s high-heeled shoes” (45). Following a sort of decadent panache, María Eugenia’s sketch of her friend Mercedes

only in the “long-term” vantage point that de la Parra becomes a contrasting example to the telluric novel (50).
Galindo’s bedroom is analogous to a picture we may encounter in a modernista poem by Julián del Casal, overflowing with images of delicate artificialities:

Mercedes’ house is very elegant, and her table is as sumptuous and rich as any one may find in a palace. The finest silver objects alternate everywhere with Sajonia and Sèvres china; the walls are covered with highly refined mirrors, tapestries and paintings, and the plants appear happily in authentic Chinese vases. But above all it has an enchanting oriental boudoir... Ah, how wonderful that low chaise lounge is, square and enormous, covered in dark pillows of all shapes and hues; soft and warm like a kiss! What I would not give to have one like it, so that I could sink in it and disappear for days, reading towers and mountain ranges of books between Turkish incense, a leopard fur, and an ivory chest sculpted in Japan! (180-81)

This “picture-perfect” rendition of comfort and all things modern would be recognized by any reader familiar with the early writings produced by late nineteenth-century Latin American modernista poets. On the other hand, one may also suggest that the novel in fact mocks this artistic movement precisely by representing portrayals that exaggerate and, in effect, construct a caricature of the modernista endeavor.  

De la Parra’s ambiguous place in Venezuelan and Latin American literary histories is attributed to the difficulty in ascribing fixed conventions of concurrent literary models to her texts. Even though Ifigenia’s denouement adheres to a public “moral”  

94 Karin Hopfe suggests that Ifigenia indeed manifests postmodernist tendencies. Hopfe maintains that de la Parra’s text participates in modernismo’s “counter-current,” made evident by its critique and rewriting of (male) modernista models from a woman’s perspective.
discourse, the protagonist’s failure as Bildungsroman\textsuperscript{95} translates to the success of the novel in opening a dialogue about women's modern realities (“bovarismo,” as de la Parra describes it) in the Venezuela of the 1920s, a dialogue in which many prominent literary critics participated, perhaps unwittingly, in their representation of the novel as a threat to the sociopolitical establishment at the wake of its publication. Moreover, the fact that de la Parra chose a mythical model to work out María Eugenia’s final sacrifice confers an ambiguous ending to the story: in Euripide’s Iphigenia, the heroine is replaced by a goat, thereby sidestepping the real sacrifice altogether.

María Amparo Ruiz de Burton and Teresa de la Parra are only two of the many women writers that are yet to find an unambiguous place in literary canons. Teresa de la Parra does appear in a few anthologies and her works are by no uncertain means more widely recognized in Latin America than those of Ruiz de Burton in American literary circles. The urgency expressed by some scholars, like those mentioned here, related to the problematic (or nonexistent) location of women writers within the parameters of a literary canon is not capricious. It is not simply a matter of adding these writers to an established list, organized by periods or national borders. The failure to represent in effect “homeless” authors in anthologies and course syllabi has implications in how we teach literary studies and how contemporary women writers are situated as well.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{95} See Edna Aizenberg’s “El Bildungsroman fracasado en Latinoamérica: El caso de Ifigenia, de Teresa de la Parra” (1985).

\textsuperscript{96} Joyce W. Warren describes how Adrienne Rich consciously influences the categorization and even periodization of her poetry through the manipulation of her essays. Warren observes that despite Rich’s capacity to reinvent herself and experiment with multiple means of expression, “she wants to fix her place in twentieth-century literature rather than to rely on the changing estimate of her work which will come through canon-forming critics or future readers of her poetry” (Boundaries xviii).
The fiction produced by these women remains relevant today and should occupy a notable place in literary canons and academic curricula. Given that the work of women writers is much more accessible today than ever before, either in paperback reprints or on websites dedicated to providing access to otherwise unavailable literature (oftentimes a free service), I suggest we bypass the canon and anthologies to situate their work as central pieces in the curriculum. Whether designed around conventional periods or thematic frameworks, a transnational approach to women writers like Ruiz de Burton and de la Parra would not only enrich and expand the way we teach literary studies, but it would also contribute to the remapping and rethinking of periods themselves, conventionally organized around male production, through the inclusion of women writers. In Joyce W. Warren’s words, given that academic specializations and anthologies “express, if only implicitly, an interpretation of our culture, then organizing them by literary periods that include a wide range of women writers will have to spring from as well as encourage a reconsideration of those values. Such a task, however, will not be easy” (Boundaries xix). It is through independently designed course curricula and even dissertations that focus on women writers that complicate a lineal literary history that this task, however difficult and time-consuming, will be attained.

Teresa de la Parra’s works continue to be discussed among a few Latin American literary scholars, but she is still patently absent from the classroom. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton is remarkably unrecognized in American literary circles, but, as Amelia Montes appropriately remarks, “Ruiz de Burton is just one among a large group of silenced writers whose works provide the opportunity to expand our understanding of American and Chicana literary history.” Furthermore, Ruiz de Burton’s importance and
contribution to this history is clear in that “[s]he brings to both our present Chicano literary history and to Anglo-American literary history a voice that complicates the definition of what it means to be an American” (217). Their significance is not grounded in their gender. We should not explore their work simply because they are women writers whose voices had been silenced, although that in itself would justify a close examination.

We study them because what they wrote matters. Even if these writers’ works prove to be implicit in the dominant hierarchical system of power relations that continue to marginalize women and dark-skinned groups of people, they also counter the dominant, essentialist definitions of female nature and race supported by the middle-class characters, narrators, and even the authors themselves. Through a close reading of their work, we hear many more voices that tell different stories, thereby also countering whatever the authors’ beliefs and positions on those issues may have been. The issues of gender, class, and ethnicity to which they respond in their texts are just as relevant today, as exemplified by the case of Sonia Sotomayor in the introduction and the polemical immigration policies addressed in Horwitz’s article at the beginning of the second chapter; they also help us reconceptualize a literary heritage that in turn allows us to construct a history other than the predominant male narratives. It is through their writing that they forge a space of their own, as intricate as their own place in the canon today. By complicating, overturning, and carving these spaces they empowered themselves and the “others” that came into existence in those liminal spaces.


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