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THE ACTUALIZATION OF A DISTANT PAST: CARMEN BOULLOSA'S HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

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Introduction

Following the notable resurgence of historicity in literature, critics have begun to dissect the new, hybrid narrative genres and to examine the markedly complex intertextual relations between the new texts and their 'historic' underpinnings.¹

Emblematic of the constant shifting of the boundaries of academic fields, literary theory has come to encompass that which was previously viewed as exclusive property of historians. This trend, in turn, underlines a changing concept of history. Since critics like Hayden White proposed that history — or any story for that matter — is contingent upon subjective constructions and the author's own biased emplotments, history can no longer be held up as a monologic truth statement.² History itself has come to be viewed as a multi-layered textuality wherein myriad versions of an event provide overlapping voices — decentering the 'truth' about the past — and creating what Janet Levarie Smarr terms "embarras de richesses" (2). This richness introduces a certain degree of textual competition as we find that revisions and rewritings are in no way gratuitous, but in fact vic for the inherent powers of historicism — powers that concretize and institutionalize a singular optic or perspective and contribute to a controlled, configured world vision.

What has happened on the forefront of historical literature is that fiction has been appropriating and competing with the very tales of history in entirely new ways, retelling them in free and, at times, irreverent manners. Thus, the heretofore rigid distinction between history and literature has already become less easily distinguishable and critics have begun to ask such questions as: "If

all literature is historical and all history is literary, what privilege can the notion of history or the historic have at all?" (Smarr 17).

These concepts of historiographic plurality and blurred generic boundaries have been widely beneficial to novelists playing with the nuances between history and fiction. In her definition of the new, postmodern version of the historical novel, Linda Hutcheon says that it, namely historiographic metafiction, "always asserts that its world is both resolutely fictive and yet undeniably historical, and that what both realms share is their constitution in and as discourse" (*Poetics* 142). This hybrid genre also admits to its fictitious and historical textual inheritance. In other words, it flaunts its "intertextual play and intellectual contingency" (*Poetics* 16) — and it embraces the Bakhtinian concept of the novel as a free and transforming translation of the works of others (*Parody* 72), as well as Umberto Eco's assertion that, "books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told" (*Poetics* 128).

Historiographic metafiction has long been a popular forum for the literary rewriting of history and its consequent revisionist tendencies among major Latin American novelists. In Mexico, younger writers are now exploring the very textual nature of this historic, fictive narrative.

A recent article by Patricia Ruvalcaba confirms this evidence:

La literatura se vuelve a hacer cargo de la historia de México; en los años recientes ha habido una proliferación de novelas principalmente — pero también ensayos, crónicas, y obras teatrales — inspiradas en figuras o sucesos históricos.

Backed by a culture containing centuries of traditional and historic information, as well as powerful debates among its discordant texts, Mexican writers have found international attention for these works, especially in and around the year of the Quincentennial of the encounter of two worlds.

In two of her recent novels, Carmen Boullosa, a renowned Mexican writer born in 1956,³ has chosen richly diverse historical textualities — pirate narratives and the figure of Moctezuma — for her historiographic metafiction. This has enabled her to create upon a historical basis, to surpass historiography with her imagination, to continue a history's intertextual discourse, and to enshrine a new version — one which is grounded in past documents, but has a decidedly new perspective or optic. This paper will explore the ways in which Boullosa manipulates past versions of a history in order to craft her historiographic metafictional novels.

In *Son vacas, somos puercos* (Era: Mexico, 1991), Boullosa expands on the famous and widely re-written memoirs of Alexander Olivier Exquemelin about his life at sea in the Caribbean with the filibusters of the Brotherhood of the Coast. She continues the text's own renovative tradition, rewriting or recreating the narrator (Smeeks) and the ambiance of the 17th century filibusters

in a dramatically different postmodern discourse.

In *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* (Era: Mexico, 1992), she views the voluminous expansive historiography about Moctezuma, the last emperor of the Aztecs, and sees that it is an insufficient representation of what happened with the Mesoamerican and European worlds met, forming the roots of today's Mexican culture. Thus, she creates her novel around debating the different versions of Moctezuma's actions and death, but feeling the futility of a realistic interpretation of the ancient world of Mexico.

Through this study, we will see how two very different historic textualities give rise to Boullosa's novels, *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *Llanto*. In the first, a primary source or hypotext, has a clear tradition of being rewritten in order to appease nationalistic indignations. Boullosa follows suit, but with the goal of a more literary, postmodern retelling of Exquemelin's tale. In the second, the narrator/writer shows us her roughly drafted ideas on the novel she wishes to write—in which Moctezuma II returns to present day Mexico City. We are told and shown through the narrative, however, that the ancient world of the Aztecs has been lost due to faulty and erroneous representations in the historiography.

I: Textual Evolutions: 1678 to the Postmodern

Carmen Boullosa relishes the challenge to retell and her novel, *Son vacas, somos puercos, filibusteros del mar Caribe*, literally beckons the reader to do a study of its sources and references—in short, to delve into its hypertextuality—what Genette deems “toute relation unissant un texte B (que j'appellerai **hypertexte**) à un texte antérieur A (que j'appellerai, bien sûr, **hypotexte**) sur lequel il se greffe d'une manière qui n'est pas celle du commentaire” (11).⁴ The author herself has stated that, “Siempre, hasta hoy, me había parecido tonto tener que explicar de qué está hecho un libro, una novela de la que es el autor. Hoy no, hoy creo que no está mal decir de qué hice *Son vacas, somos puercos*.” (“Yo sí, soy puerco” 9) First among her sources is, of course, *De Americaense Zee Roovers* (*Los Piratas de América* or *The Buccaneers of America*) by Alexander Olivier Exquemelin. Boullosa claims to have “sacked and plagiarized” this text (Ramírez Aguilar 10)—we could even say she **pirated** it! In this playful challenge to her readers to explore the work's hypertextual relationships, Boullosa shifts emphasis from the author-text relationship to one between reader and text. This not only serves to situate textual meaning as lying within the history of the discourse itself (Hutchcon *Poetics* 126), but it also opens up the text for it preempts closure and a single, centralized meaning (*Poetics* 127). What reader could resist this call to arms, this invitation to enter into a relationship with a text that would be at the same time generative and without limitations?

As we take up this challenge, we shall study the dialogic relationship between Boullosa's novel and its primary hypotext or antecedent by demonstrating two things: first, we will see just how it fits into the textual family that constitutes its discursive history; and second, we will uncover how it transforms portions of *Los Piratas de América*—the version of Exquemelin's memoir used by Boullosa—in two distinct ways, bringing the fundamental story line up to date in a postmodern discourse.

Interestingly, there exists an entire family of texts supposedly by Exquemelin which spans over three centuries and five languages. Because the history of the discourse itself plays a role in generating textual meaning, it is, of course, an important topic of investigation—and one which provides for a shocking look into textual deviation, if not a few new insights into the relative unreliability of narrative history.

When Exquemelin published *De Americaensche Zee Roovers* in Amsterdam in 1678, it quickly gained popularity and was translated into German (1679), Spanish (1681), English (1684), and finally French (1686). The problem, however, with all this so-called translation is that it was not translation at all. It was, better yet, **re-writing** as no two texts are the same in the story they tell. The first Spanish edition is said to have altered the spirit of the word in order to defend Spanish honor and to punish what was seen as Buccaneer vice (Tavares 8). The English proved equally as nationalistic and protective of **their** honor. Their version, based on the Spanish rendition, is an even further transmutation of Exquemelin's work. The English felt the need to alter the text not only for its ghastly portrayal of Englishmen in general, but also for its lawless portrayal of a certain Henry Morgan—Captain of many a buccaneer expedition who, in the meantime, had been knighted SIR Henry Morgan and was officially sent back to the Caribbean with a royal commission and the governorship of Jamaica. The French, in turn, did their share of damage to the text as the translator admits that, "I found many obscure or poorly printed spots and many things hard to understand; it was necessary to correct the poor expressions, determine unclear meanings and clear up the obscure spots. It cost me much work and application, but the work merited it" (*Histoire* v.i, 2).

What we now see retrospectively through the diversification of Exquemelin's original message is that history is a decidedly human construct (*Poetics* 16) and that its production can be seen as "natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance, and new species of fact arise" (*Poetics* 120).

Which brings us back to *Son vacas, somos puercos*, the most recent member of the textual family, and indeed its most interesting and complex "mutation". Structurally, we see that *Son vacas, somos puercos* adopts both the skeletal tale and the travel plot of *Los piratas de América*. However, the majority of echoes exist on the anecdotal level. Boullosa transcribes entire scenes, though she actively re-words the discourse. It is as if she uses the language of her hypotext as an anti-model, one from which she **must** differen-

tiate her own discourse. This is emblematic of historiographic metafiction. As Linda Hutcheon states, intertextuality signals difference, it “echoes in order to mark difference rather than similarity.” (*Parody* 64) Some of the anecdotes that are marked only by their discursive difference — that is, a simple re-wording — include: the lifestyles of the Buccaneers; the brutal treatment of slaves who try to escape; the fact that eating crabs can damage one’s eyes; the drunken revelry in Port Royal; the repartitioning of booty among Buccaneers; and the remarkable story of how the Buccaneer captain L’Olonnais escaped death at the hands of the Spanish by hiding among piles of corpses. But with **what** does this list leave us but a knowledge of what is, in essence, the same in the two texts?

Despite its heavy reliance on Exquemelin’s memoir, Boullosa insists that this is **not** a historic novel.⁵ She is right, of course, as it is not a mere monologic re-writing of *Los piratas de América*. *Son vacas, somos puercos* does not simply re-tell Exquemelin’s memoirs for it often re-works the narrative material through alterations which function towards such goals as changes in characterization, or a radical twist in the narrative perspective. Let us now focus on these primary means of differentiation between the novel and its hypotext. For clarity’s sake, I’ll refer to the narrator of *Los piratas de América* as Exquemelin, and the narrator of *Son vacas, somos puercos* as Smeeks — which seems fitting testimony to the textual schizophrenia caused by so many revisions.

In the first alteration, change of characterization, we see how Smeeks is able to redefine a group of people by simply adding a small detail or a short elaborative discourse to Exquemelin’s descriptive account. One group whose textual image is dramatically different under Smeeks’ pen is the savage Indians — or ‘indios bravos.’ Here, Smeeks achieves a humanization that is not evident in Exquemelin’s memoirs. For example, in the horrific scene of violence where the buccaneer captain, L’Olonnais, actually rips the heart from a man and chews on it in front of his face, Exquemelin says that it was an act of violence done to a **Spanish** prisoner in order to intimidate others into confessing where their riches were. Smeeks, however, puts an **Indian** in his place. Then, Smeeks tells us the following medically improbable tale, “vi los ojos del bravo mirando con expresión indescriptible, ojos vivos, sí, cómo L’Olonnais mordía su corazón, y **tan bravo era** que escupió en el rostro a L’Olonnais antes de caer para siempre.” (100) A noble feat to accomplish without a heart! Through this example and numerous other incidents of textual alteration, the original inhabitants of America are vindicated and shown to be more defiant, more empowered, as well as more cruelly persecuted than in the original narration where they were barely mentioned and played no significant roles in the story line.

The largest and most profound change to Exquemelin’s text, however, is at the level of the discourse itself, and it helps to explain many of Smeeks’ textual alterations. As we have stated earlier, *Son vacas, somos puercos*’s primary project is placing the content of its hypotext, *Los piratas de América*, in a postmodern context. What better way to do this than to shift the impersonal

narrative voice of the colonial document inwards to the subjective, self-conscious and intimate first person voice of postmodernity. Boullosa herself admits that “Empecé a escribirla sin contarla en primera persona, contándola de afuera y no me salían las palabras, no eran ciertas, era una mentira que no funcionaba.” (Ramírez Aguilar, 10) Thus, in order to physically create *Son vacas, somos puercos*, it had to be in the first person, abandoning Exquemelin’s impersonal perspective. In *Los piratas de América*, Exquemelin narrates primarily in the third person, and he tells of the deeds of his Captains as if he were a detached observer. Smeeks, however, narrates almost exclusively in the first person, giving us a much more empathic view of the Brotherhood, and demonstrating a remarkable amount of personal responsibility for what was done on the marauding expeditions.

In addition to making the narrative more intimate, Smeeks’ first person narration lends a weighty authority to his project — the effort to continue the history of this text’s metamorphosis and tell it again — **this time, correctly**. This project is clearly laid out in the novel as Smeeks tell us time and again that he is narrating all of this as a promise to his mentor, Negro Miel, an old, half-blind African medicine man. Negro Miel is the only voice of judgment in the novel as he had warned Smeeks against joining the filibusters because of their insatiable cruelty and unflagging violence. Smeeks promises Negro Miel: “Te recordaré siempre... te prometo, Negro Miel, que yo venceré a la muerte en nombre de tu memoria,” (44) thus designating him as the primary interlocutor and giving the modern rendition of Exquemelin’s memoirs a new intention. The twist is that remembering Negro Miel and narrating to him have **nothing** to do with Exquemelin nor any of the numerous versions of the text to date. Negro Miel is one of the few aspects of the novel which is **completely** fictitious. What this promise of remembrance and reverence for the character of Negro Miel serves to do, then, is to question those past versions and, in turn, enshrine the new, the literary creation we are reading. Negro Miel is described as half blind because he was torn from his native land, and for this reason, he takes Smeeks, a white Frenchman, under his wing without realizing the racial difference — or perhaps without caring. He is full of compassion, wisdom and an eternity of memory (36). Hence, Smeeks’ innovations on Exquemelin’s text: he shows us a kinder treatment of racial groups — namely the Indians; he serves as a receptacle for all the lost wisdom of those subjugated in the creation of America; and he inspires sympathy for all those torn from homelands to build the world and the discourse which is America. Most of all, in Smeek’s narration, we see the consequences of his not having heeded Negro Miel’s warning about the cruelty of the filibusters which is, in itself the framework of the novel; For it is precisely the violence and the loss of one’s own body that drove Boullosa to write this novel¹⁶ — that required her to use the first person and that, in the end causes Smeeks to promise to revive the memory of Negro Miel — the real vision for a utopian America — a member of the Brotherhood, blind to racial

differences, wise beyond his years because of his cultural heritage, but sadly displaced in a new world of violence — America.

II: Moctezuma as Seen Through a Veil of Tears

As we have just seen with the Exquemelin memoirs, a single narrative can be reproduced and dispersed over centuries, thus producing its textuality. In the case of the conquest of Mexico, however, an even more prolific textuality arises from the countless visions or perspectives that vie for narrative prominence over time. These varied accounts demonstrate the rich narrative traditions that Boullosa seeks in a textual history as she writes to recuperate the past while supplanting it with a new vision or myth. Boullosa uses numerous versions of the conquest in *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* (1992), to create a historiographic, metafictional — but impossible — novel. Again, we shall see how she heavily documents her work to assert its historicity, while she simultaneously discusses its fictiveness.

In *Llanto*, Boullosa is careful to include as many of the voices of the past as possible, and therefore taps into much of the abundant literature pertinent to this phase of the conquest. In this textual family, there is far more at stake than the nationalism we see fueling rewritings of Exquemelin's texts. Here, an entire empire balances on the brink of dramatically different concepts: Was Mexico conquered by Cortés, ceded by Moctezuma, rife with civil war, or rightfully colonizeable by Diego Velázquez?

In Hernán Cortés's *Cartas de relación*, the focus of the text is the politicization and manipulation of events to bolster Cortés's legitimacy as sole Conqueror of the Aztec empire. In this official story, he asserts that 'Muc-tuzuma' died as a result of a stone thrown at his head by his own subjects. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a soldier on Cortés's expedition, also took pen to paper in a reportedly true telling of the conquest. He wrote his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* as a corrective response to Francisco López de Gómara's allegedly inaccurate version of the tale. Díaz del Castillo wished for a more pluralistic view of the events in Mexico — notably one in which he himself played a much larger role. He, too states that Moctezuma dies from wounds acquired at the hands of his own people, and we thus see that the European version of the event blames the indigenous for Moctezuma's perishing.

In addition to the historically official, but mutated, histories by Cortés himself and the chroniclers of the time, there are a variety of Codices that seek to record the indigenous view of the ordeal. First, two examples of what can be accomplished through the cooperation of Spanish missionaries and their indigenous interpreters are Fray Bernadino de Sahagún's *Códice Florentino* (better known as the four volumes of *Historia de las cosas de la Nueva España*, whose

twelfth and last book is entitled *Historia de la conquista de México*) and Fray Toribio de Benavente Motolinía's *Memoriales: Libro de las cosas de la Nueva España y los naturales de ella* (which includes information most likely originally intended for two separate works). Both are voluminous works that resulted from years of experience in the Americas with natives and countless hours of interpretation and translation of the bases of pre-Hispanic cultures. They are encyclopedic attempts to document everything from the creation myths of different tribes to their "idolatrous" religious beliefs, their institutions, histories and their own versions of the invasion and consequent conquest by the Castillians.

Also among the texts in this category of Codices are examples of multilingual recordings of pre-Hispanic cultures whose circumstances of creation are unknown. The *Códice Ramírez*, for example, is an untitled 16th century manuscript found in a monastery in the 19th century. It is thought to have been translated from the Nahuatl and written by a secular Indian because of, among other things, "el desvío y aún el desprecio con que habla de Moctezuma al describir su trágica muerte, atribuyéndola a los españoles mismos" (*Códice Ramírez* 9-10). The *Códice Aubin*, on the other hand, consists solely of "glifos ideográficos y una tradición oral memorizada y transmitida a través de generaciones" (Dibble 13). Its glyphs are accompanied by varying amounts of interpretation in Nahuatl and is thought to have been compiled around the year 1562, "tomado con cierto descuido de códices y anales anteriores, pero todos posteriores al año 1540" (Dibble 13). Each of these indigenous texts states that their emperor was, in fact, already dead when the stone was thrown by the crowd or when his body was thrown from the temple that doubled as a Spanish fort.

As evidenced by this small cross-section of histories representative of the remarkable textuality of the conquest of Mexico, there are, in essence, two views of what happened to the Aztec emperor. Boullosa takes this bipartisan textual ambiguity as the basis for her novel, *Llanto*, and sets out to write a historiographic metafictional novel that is based in history but surpasses it with imagination, and that continues the texts' historic revisions by enshrining a new version.

As the title indicates, this project is doomed "novelas imposibles", and after briefly describing the objects towards which it strives, one will understand why. First of all, the truncated novel itself is about three contemporary Mexican women, who, after a night out partying, find Moctezuma, the ninth Tlatoani, has reappeared and been brought back to life in the Parque Hundido of Mexico City. Second, the novel is about its own writing and creation, as in the 'fragmentos de novela' we find the possible writer(s) debating their own ability to fictionalize Moctezuma in the aforementioned plot because so much has been carelessly left out of historic documents. And thirdly, we find an attempt being made to recover much of the mythic content of Mexico's past. As the novel is composed of a fragmented, tattered narrative, we ask ourselves, Why this form?

and Why Moctezuma?

One answer to these questions lies in the sources Boullosa includes in her 'Agradecimientos' on the last page of the text. First she mentions Sahagún and his extraordinary co-authors, the trilingual Indians. Then, she cites Todorov's *La conquista de América: El problema del otro*. Through an examination of these texts, their methodologies and conclusions, we come to see that Boullosa herself writes *Llanto* by adopting the optic of Sahagún and his aides, while narrating through Todorov's discourse of the Other. Like Sahagún's *Historia*, *Llanto* is largely the transcribing — and at times interpreting — of past accounts. Whereas Sahagún labored to document the cosmovision of the native Mexicans through work with symbolic, pictorial glyphs and narratives in many languages⁷, Boullosa is her own trilingual aide, transcribing, interpreting and creating at once. She tries to piece together a coherent vision of ancient Mexico by joining Nahuatl images and icons as well as indigenous and Spanish views of Moctezuma's death. Just as Todorov dedicates his work to analyzing the conquest through the discourse of the Other — peering through 16th century Aztec eyes at the Conquistadors, and visa versa —, Boullosa shows her narrator struggling with the difficult task of writing about Moctezuma — a figure who has no satisfactorily documented referent. Thus the fragmentary nature of the narrative is explainable as a metaphor for the piecemeal work that chroniclers like Sahagún performed in the name of documentation; and the utter incomprehension that frustrates both writer and character in *Llanto* is actually that of a present day Mexican peering back in time to the Others that played out the conquest on the same spot some four centuries ago.

The truncated narrative also expounds new conclusions drawn about the figure of Moctezuma. He can no longer be seen as superstitious, vacillating or as having been assassinated by his own subjects — the vision that the official chronicles would have us believe —, but instead is a revered leader who watched uncomprehendingly as the Westerners turned the valley of Tenochtitlan into a "cuna de cadáveres" (96), an extermination that put an end to the Mexican empire and its manner of seeing the world. In the days of Cortés's arrival in Mexico, Moctezuma tried in vain to read the messages he needed from the Gods in order to act appropriately. The narrator of *Llanto* abandons "la idea del hombre atribulado, indeciso, aterrorizado y vacilante" (97) believing instead that "dejarlos entrar, obsequiarlos, albergarlos como nobles huéspedes en el palacio... son acciones que han sido erróneamente leídas como signos de entrega y de cobardía" (37). However, as Moctezuma searched for ritualistic answers to his dilemma of how to behave, it is evident that the messages and gifts he sent to the Spaniards to try and deter them from marching to Tenochtitlan all failed because they were rituals used to appease gods, and not comunicués to uncover or understand what the Spaniards wanted.⁸

The writer of *Llanto* demonstrates an equally puzzled and frustrated optic as (s)he watches the fictive narrative fail. This failure is due to a complete lack

of referents as (s)he laments the loss of the cultural framework of ancient Mexico: “Tenochtitlan ha muerto y su memoria es confusa” (39); and (s)he asserts that Moctezuma is illegible to us because we have nothing on him, “Ni huesos, ni señas de cómo era su pensamiento, ni nada de nada” (75). Like the sacred but misguided rituals Moctezuma applied to the Spaniards, the histories of the conquest neither inform nor help in *Llanto*’s recreation and fictionalization of Moctezuma’s thought process or mind-set. There exists an informational void that historiographic metafiction hoped to fill with fictionalization, but in the end, the narrator deems it impossible. Thus, *Llanto* creates a perspective that directly imitates that of Moctezuma upon the arrival of the Castellians. Both are riddled with incomprehension — Moctezuma’s for his inability to discern ritual from real, and *Llanto*’s for the unavailability of sufficient past referents.

As *Llanto* comes to a close, we see that the many texts of this history have been put to use in a way that is entirely different from the literary postmodernization of *Son vacas, somos puercos*. Here, the project does not simply rewrite history, but it actually debates the very texts upon which it is based. *Llanto* demonstrates the shortcomings of the history of conquest which has been left to us by openly declaring the problematic of a narrative so far removed from the present both temporally and conceptually, but it also treats the subject with reverence and care by acknowledging the sensitivity of the matter. As Ortega states, “*Llanto* presenta la disputa, y abre el camino de la reivindicación de Moctezuma... a nombre no de la historia... sino de la nacionalidad posible” (*El Semanario*) — but it never fully achieves its goals, nor does it resolve the discord. We note that, “la imposibilidad de la novela, al final, termina siendo la novela misma, en tanto discurso fragmentario: el cuerpo simbólico del país es una raíz rota, una imposibilidad mayor” (Ortega, *El Semanario*). *Llanto*, then, is not a synthesized response, nor is it a coherent, new vision. It is, however, emblematic of much: of Mexico and Mexican identity; of the disjointed vision of the Other that sprung from the 16th century; of the responsible historiographic approaches to events such as these, exemplified by Sahagún et al.; and of how the historiographic metafiction of Carmen Boullosa heeds the calling to rewrite and revive the past in remarkably different ways.

Concluding Notes:

As the opening comments of this paper show, recently emerging narrative genres like historiographic metafiction demonstrate an innovative hybrid quality that is based upon fiction’s reappropriation of the historic. The resulting narratives no longer privilege history’s texts, but instead view them with sardonic suspicion. Historiographic metafiction tempers this critique with playful rewritings of history whose imagination and intellectual inquisitiveness work to salvage the narrative material of each tale while at the same time

incorporating critical commentary or suggestively manipulative reformations.

As we have seen, the historiographic metafiction of Carmen Boullosa heeds the calling to rewrite and revive the past in remarkably different ways. In the case of *Son vacas, somos puercos*, her project is mainly a creative one. Boullosa transforms her hypotext, Exquemelin's 17th century narrative, into a postmodern discourse, narrated by a pluralistic voice. Her narrator, Smeeks' literarization and profundization of the development of many characters, including himself, render his retelling of the story much more intimate than the original. Thus, through the comparison of hypotext and hypertext, we find the bases upon which the fictionalizing dialogic operates, mutating the tale even further.

In *Llanto: Novelas imposibles*, we see Boullosa attempting a far more ambitious and nebulous rewriting than before. Instead of simply retelling a story grounded in a single text, she seeks to revive Moctezuma in a fictive plot that is played out in the present day reality of Mexico City. She finds, however, that despite the vast field of conquest literature, Moctezuma is nowhere to be found in its pages, and therefore lacks the very information that would make her fictionalization possible. *Llanto*, then, unable to build upon any historic image of Moctezuma, uses the faulty and incomplete historic textuality to create a metaphoric reworking that textually mimics the methods, perspectives, and discourses of history on the pages of fiction.

Even as Boullosa's work has been consecrated and lauded in Mexico's literary circles, we see that her narrative confirms trends which are present throughout much of modern literature. In her historiographic metafiction, she reaffirms the revival of history, the freedom and flexibility of the postmodern narrative voice, and the innumerable creative uses of hypotexts. However universal these tendencies may be, in Boullosa's case, they are fed by decidedly rich Mexican and Latin American literary traditions. Many such traditions show an intense preoccupation with history and its sources, as evidenced in this quote from another Mexican writer, Fernando del Paso:

Propongo el asalto de los novelistas latinoamericanos a la historia oficial. Propongo que no dejemos a unos cuantos historiadores independientes la tarea de contar la historia de nuestras enfermedades. Propongo que el nuevo novelista latinoamericano conozca a fondo nuestra historia y que después no la olvide. (322)

It has been the intention here to demonstrate Carmen Boullosa's participation in this assault on the official story while exploring the complexity and richness her narrative offers in its textual reworkings. As we have seen, her textual operations lend purely imaginative and artful qualities to the rapidly expanding discourse on history.

NOTES

1 See Hutcheon's book, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, for a detailed study of what she calls the paradox of postmodernity: "when modernist aesthetic autonomy and self-reflexivity come up against a counterforce in the form of a grounding in the historical, social and political world" (p. ix). See, also, Smarr's *Historical Criticism and the Challenge of Theory*, on the complexities of relation between literary and historical study, as well as the issues and possibilities involved in a historical criticism of literature.

2 See Hayden White's article, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" in *The Writing of History* by Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki where White states that, "The events [of history] are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motif repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like — in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or play" (47, emphasis mine).

3 Carmen Boullosa has published collections of poetry [*La memoria vacía* (1978), *El hilo olvidado* (1978) and *Ingobernable* (1979) compiled in *La salvaja* (México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989)] theater [*Cocinar Hombres*, *Aura y las once mil vírgenes*, *Propusieron a María*, and *Mi visión de los hechos*] and narratives [*Mejor desaparece* (México, Océano, 1987), *Antes* (México, Vuelta, 1989), *Papeles irresponsables* (México, Juan Pablo Editor and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1989), *Son vacas, somos puercos* (México, Era, 1991), *El médico de los piratas* (Madrid, Siruela, 1992), *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* (México, Era, 1992) and *La milagrosa* (México, Era, 1993)]. She was awarded the prestigious Xavier Villaurutia Prize in 1989, has been a Guggenheim Foundation Scholar, and has seen her works translated into English and German. Julio Ortega lauds the creative fervor evident in *Son vacas, somos puercos* (*L'Imaginaire*, 39) and in a review of *Llanto*, Cynthia Tompkins calls her "one of the most intellectually stimulating and compelling voices in contemporary Mexican literature" (781). In his introduction to *Antes* (México, Vuelta, 1989), Christopher Domínguez Michael also deems her one of the most brilliant and complex personalities in contemporary Mexican literature.

4 To clarify his use of "se greffe" (to graft), Genette says that it is a provisional metaphor that signals otherness in the two texts so that, instead of simultaneously meaning hyper- and meta-, it refers to the text's derivation from another pre-existing text (12).

5 In her interview with the *Canario de Coyoacan*, Boullosa states, "No es una novela histórica. Todos son personajes rigurosamente históricos y de todos hice lo que me dio la gana para que funcionaran literariamente" (7).

6 For Boullosa's own words on the subjects of violence and the loss of one's body, see the following interviews: "Carmen Boullosa: Escritora por oficio" in *El Canario de Coyoacan*, and "Yo sí soy puerco" in *El Nacional*.

7 In addition to the quote below on p. 10 by Dibble about the *Códice Aubin*, Todorov, too says, "Los dibujos de los códices sólo conservan los principales puntos de la historia que, en esa forma, son ininteligibles; los vuelve comprensible el discurso ritual que los acompaña" (88).

8 Despite the tragedy inherent in this misunderstanding, Elena Poniatowska admits, "Siempre le tuve una simpatía enorme a Moctezuma porque él creía que si le enviaba más y más regalos a Hernán Cortés, éste acabaría por largarse satisfecho. ¡Qué táctica equivocada, pobrecito mío, sólo a un inocente se le ocurriría!" (27), demonstrating the popularly held image of the emperor as confused and child-like. It is precisely this error in perception that both Boullosa and Todorov seek to correct by educating us as to the cultural bases upon which Moctezuma acted.

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