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**“(UN) ROMANCING MEXICO: NEW SEXUAL LANDSCAPES
IN SARA SEFCHOVICH’S *DEMASIADO AMOR*”**

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Since 1968, Mexican authors have been recording a “postnational” period defined by emergent cultural movements that have shattered the prevailing representation of the nation as a united, homogenous entity. Born out of this rupture, post-1968 literature reveals a radical questioning of nationalism and of hegemonic representations of the national landscape: new narratives reflect a return to the material realities of the social and counter elitist approaches to culture, in turn exploring new alliances with popular culture. In more recent years many Mexican authors have returned to the symbolic in an attempt to move beyond the geographical limits of the idea of nationhood. Stories about immigration, emigration and expatriation explore the possibilities of re-imagining the nation space but also of creating a new site of belonging that does not necessarily reflect the mold of the nation state. Neil Larsen has described this desire to move beyond nation narrations in his *North by South*. Here he poses the question: “if the solution is to undream the nationalist romance and then have some other dream in its place... [then the problem arises of how] consciously to effect this substitution” (145). What does it mean to “undream the nationalist romance”? What is involved in such an act? If there exists another dream, in what landscape does it unfold and what kind of relationships do we find there? As I suggest here, Sara Sefchovich’s novel *Demasiado amor* (1990) bears witness to such undreaming even as it demonstrates that such questions are not easily answered, even within the refuge of fiction.¹

Confined by the social limits of nationality and the patriarchal traps of heterosexual love, the female protagonist of Sefchovich’s novel, Beatriz, a middle class, single woman living in Mexico City, decides that she no longer

wants to participate in a romantic bond to Mexico. *Demasiado amor* (1990) relates the story of how she relinquishes the national romance and chooses expatriation to a sanctuary that in her heart and mind lies beyond the space of the nation. In this sense, Sara Sefchovich's *Demasiado amor* participates in the undreaming and redreaming processes that Neil Larsen ponders by setting up a dialogic structure to reconfigure novel space. The novel produces a textual dialogue by exploring Beatriz identity in two separate narratives: she is both a sex worker who wants to be free of patriarchy and a woman in love with a passionate nationalist. Two alternating narratives, one romantic and the other epistolary, respectively capture the divide and displacement that characterizes Beatriz daily life. In the romantic narrative, the protagonist recounts her travels throughout the nation with her lover and reminisces how she simultaneously fell in love with Mexico and the man of her dreams. In so far as Beatriz travels with an economically mobile male who indulges her every desire to see, taste and possess the landscape before her, this narrative lays bare the traps of romance including the apparatus of consumption built into middle class heterosexual rituals of courting. The epistolary narrative contains the story of the protagonist's coming into being as a sex worker in Mexico City, as well as her struggle, and experience of freedom when her business prospers. As the dialogic structure progresses, the epistolary narrative unravels the romantic narrative ultimately leaving it a dangling end. In this sense, the dialogic structure represents the double consciousness that occurs when Beatriz chooses displacement and initiates the process of questioning nationalism. Sefchovich closes the last several chapters of the epistolary narrative in what Foucault might call a "heterotopic" location, transforming the location of the marginalized prostitute into a site of expatriation and sexual liberation. As a result, the feminist logic of the bipartite structure of *Demasiado amor* also works to undo the strands of masculinist discourse that mediate the romance.

Nation Narration and Foundational Myths in Mexico

Sara Sefchovich creates a dialogic text as a tactic for writing against a history of Mexican romances that have played a symbolic role in representing and reinforcing socially prescribed limits on women's mobility. These texts include but are not limited to *Clemencia* (1869), *Santa* (1908) y *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1964). As Doris summer explains in her *Foundational Fictions*, in the national romance the male protagonist (often creole and of a privileged class) moves about the land, "naturalizing" and often eroticizing his interaction with a place with which he has no proper genealogy. In this quest for male identity the male protagonist reenacts a foundational myth, plotting a relationship to the land (often configured as female) and the

people (often represented as feminine) in an attempt to make claims and assert rights of belonging. The male protagonist finally legitimates his presence and asserts himself as a founding father by establishing “conjugal and then paternity rights” (15). This can only be achieved through a “mutual love” which would “naturally” lead to marriage and the production of “legitimate citizens.” In Latin America, but particularly in Mexico, the conquest, a foundational mythic reality more powerful than the biblical myth of origin, constantly looms in the background of the national romance. Romantic longing, the male quest for national identity and the possibilities of “mutual love” become mythically entangled in a complex web of ethno-linguistic significations surrounding the historical indigenous figure Malintzin Tenepal. The national romance provokes a highly engendered, racialised and class based enactment of this foundational myth even as it hinges on producing a complicit female.

While the subject of race is absent from *Demasiado amor*, Sara Sefchovich’s challenges these romantic narratives by suggesting another itinerary for working and middle class women. As Josefina Ludmer has suggested, one tactic for achieving feminist change consists of reconstructing the space of knowledge from the perspective of an otherwise ignored or marginalized position:

it is always possible to annex other camps and establish other territories. ... this practice of displacement and transformation reorganizes the given structure at the social and cultural levels. The combination of opposition and compliance potentially establish another form of reason... and another knowing subject.²

In their traditional form romances have prescribed what Henri Lefebvre refers to as set spatial arrangements, whereby each member of society is assigned a place and a series of designated routes within the social order. By rehearsing their social place and their assigned routes, each person continuously experiences and participates in the reproduction of the social order thus “ensur[ing] continuity and some degree of cohesion” (33). The national romance represents heterosexual reproduction and the continued dependence of the feminine subject on the masculine subject as the dominant mode of amorous relationship. If as Lefebvre suggests, “spatial practices secrete society’s space,” then these conditions of dependence are spatially realized and enforced through humans’ experiences, their gendered behavior and actions, and their practice of movement or confinement. Women have traditionally been taught that in order to retain a respectable social identity, they must remain home and refrain from sexual pleasure until married. As Debra Castillo has stated: “woman must of necessity embody those unchanging, pristine values of permanence, privacy, immobility, and purity as the essential core of national identity” (16).

In the traditional romance the location of permanence, privacy, immobility and purity has been the home. Almost programmatically then, these romances confine the female characters to the home, delineate rules for women's socio-sexual behavior, and depict punishment for those who go astray. According to these romances, women, especially those of the upper class, maintain their "honor" and protect their "decencia" by staying home until marriage. Both of these terms, refer to a woman's socio sexual behavior and more specifically to her virginity, which until she is married must be protected as the father's property. In the early Mexican romance *Clemencia* (1869)³ the virgin Isabel is mortified when her lover asks her to run away with him and become a soldadera. Refusing to join "those women" who move beyond the home she reacts in the following manner:

¡él hacerme semejante preposición! ¡él creerme una de esas muchachas sin pudor que se entregan al primer oficial que las seduce; él confundirme con esas desdichadas criaturas que abandonan la casa paterna y con ella la honra, y siguen a sus amantes en el ejército, siendo el ludibrio de todo el mundo! (134)

[How could he make me such a proposition! How could he think that I was one of those girls without modesty that turn themselves over to the first official that seduces them; how could he confuse me with those pitiful creatures who abandon their paternal home and with it their honor, and follow their lovers in the army, as a mockery for the entire world!]⁴

As the many descriptives here demonstrate, ("without modesty," "pitiful," "honorless," "the object of mockery"), Isabel suggests that a woman who moves beyond the home loses the only dignity that society bestows upon her—that of her socio-sexual protection by the patriarchy. In short she agrees to become a public woman, a prostitute. Once she crosses the property line, she has transgressed into the territory of the indecent woman, who has fallen from the father's grace. Historically in Mexico, as in other societies, a woman who has lost her decency by breaking social codes or moving beyond the home was considered a prostitute. These narratives therefore reveal what Jill Nagle terms "compulsory virtue," rendering warnings against the "delinquent" behavior associated with the prostitute: "Whores are something that women are not only supposed to not be, but also, not be mistaken for" (5).

Nineteenth and twentieth century authors represent the prostitute as an exemplary of the "mala mujer" or the "public woman" who stands in stark contrast to the "decent" woman discussed above. Here the woman-gone-public is blamed for her actions, even if she was forced out into the public space as a result of violence or misfortune. Fernández de Lizardi's picaresque novel, *La Quijota y su prima* (1818), reasserts symbolic control over women's mobility and their socio-spatial place by reemphasizing that

women are not safe beyond the confines of home. Furthermore the novel implies that society too can be harmed by free-roaming women, women beyond the structures of social restraint. But if a woman has transgressed certain boundaries and cannot turn back home, she may have no other alternative but to survive by performing sexual work. In this vein, Federico Gamboa's novel, *Santa* (1908), demonstrates the relationship between the woman made "indecent" from sex out of wedlock and the prostitute, and therefore serves as a continuation of the above narrative taken from *Clemencia*. The main protagonist, Santa, a "pure" (virgin) country girl, becomes pregnant out of wedlock. The official who supposedly loves her and promises to take her away, abandons her, thus ruining Santa's "decency" and her possibilities for marriage. Now "honorless," Santa's mother exiles her from the home, thus forcing her into a destitute situation with few alternatives. Santa turns to a brothel in Mexico City for refuge.

Similar binaries are developed in Mariano Azeula's *Los de abajo* (1916, 1924), a work canonized as the first novel of the Revolution and the first novel of modern Mexico. *Los de abajo* examines Mexico's landscape under Revolution as a space negotiated and fought for by men. Here revolution is something made by men while women huddle behind the fragile walls of the home and pray that they will not be swept away by the male revolutionaries, later to be abandoned or transformed into prostitutes or *soldaderas*. Seduced away from her home by Luis Cervantes of whom she is enamored, Camila is deceived and betrayed when she is later forced to become a *soldadera*. Thereafter Camila cannot return to her home "sana y buena." During a more critical period in this national literature, Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1953) and Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1964) both make considerable headway in providing masculinist critiques of these national romances. In both novels "mutual love" is a male fantasy veiling the history of violence on which the national patriarchy has been founded. Pedro Páramo, the tyrant of Comala, murders Bartolomé San Juan and forces his daughter Susana San Juan into becoming his wife. Similarly, Artemio Cruz rapes Regina,⁵ whom he forever considers his true love, and later forces Catalina to be his wife after killing her brother. Neither Pedro Páramo nor Artemio Cruz ever win the love of the women they desire, but instead use force to manipulate them and take power. In these narratives, Mexico is not founded on an ideal of heroic masculinity but on a kind of pathological masculinity. In all of these models of romance, women's socio-sexual behavior is symbolically controlled and severely limited while men build their masculinity upon women's bodies and the power they gain from subjugating them. Women are the possessed territory on which male fantasies and privilege are founded.

It is the classic essay, *Laberinto de la soledad* (1955) by Octavio Paz, that most forcefully reinscribes the romantic myth of Mexican identity.

Following Alfonso Reyes, Paz foregrounds the Conquest as the point of origin in the formation of Mexico's identity. He represents La Malinche in symbolically negative terms as both the agent of betrayal (traitor/prostitute) and the subject of victimization. According to Paz she is cohort in the violation of the indigenous peoples but also the sign of the original rape, **la chingada**. As Charles Berg has noted, Paz's representations of Malinche have circulated through film with particular force: Malintzin is "the mother of mestizo Mexico, the symbol of **mexicanidad** betrayed" (57). In reasserting patriarchal fears of women who remain outside symbolic control, in condemning them for being agents in their own destiny, Paz creates a "neomyth... unaware of its misogynistic residue" (Alarcón 62).

(Un) Romancing Mexico: Reading *Demasiado amor*

Demasiado amor participates in untelling or what Nelly Richard has termed "des-narración" (38). Sefchovich extracts the narrative power of these romantic myths by rewriting female fantasy and sexuality from the perspective of a liberated woman. Undreaming the romance, Sefchovich explores the process of imagining and constructing new sexual identities. Her new story about romance undermines the men's conquest of women and questions women's heterosexual allegiance to the nation. More specifically, Sefchovich represents new "spatial practices" by embracing female eroticism as a form that pushes on and ultimately ruptures the limits placed on women's socio-sexual identity in nationalist fantasies of romance. As Margarite Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert have noted, the increased use of erotic discourse in women's writing is significant: "opens new literary and cultural horizons... towards a sharp criticism of sex and politics" (xxiv). Whereas in previous women's writing the erotic "remained tentative," as Sylvia Malloy has suggested (120), in *Demasiado amor* it comes to the forefront in a liberated, erotic vision about the power of passion and dreams. As a final act of dissidence, the protagonist passes the erotic narrative of the book down to her niece, thus turning her desnarration genealogical.

In her *Demasiado amor* (1991), Sara Sefchovich begins rewriting this variegated history of national romances by exploring Mexico and love through the perspective of the protagonist, Beatriz, a woman in love who is also a sex worker. Although the term 'sex worker' does not appear in the novel, I have chosen to use this term as opposed to prostitute, which is also absent from the text, in order to signal the subversiveness of Sara Sefchovich's intervention. As opposed to Elvira Sánchez-Blake who recycles the word "prostitute" in her analysis of the novel, I argue that Sefchovich avoids the term as an attempt to move beyond the dichotomous language within which women must attempt to assert their identities. This is most evident in the

final scenes of the novel. Here the protagonist creates “a salon of her own” in which she and those who visit her, men and women alike, transcend the sexual binaries assigned to society. It is important to highlight that for Beatriz sexual work is a choice, a choice affordable to women who don’t have to worry about survival. At the same time, by belonging to the middle class, Beatriz enjoys flexibility.⁷ In this way the novel explicitly sheds light on the interests and privileges of the middle class at the same time that it attempts to incite awareness and the fantasy of transgression in this class.

In its subtext, *Demasiado amor* suggests that traditionally gendered spatial practices continue to define women’s socio-sexual identity. Through the life experiences of her protagonist, Sefchovich demonstrates the multiple processes by which these spatial practices are undone but also remade in women’s daily lives. The protagonist, Beatriz, initially occupies three spaces in the novel: the office, where she works as a secretary, her home, and “los rincones de la patria” or in literal terms, the space of the nation exterior to Mexico City. Out of her curiosity for something new she then finds a new space, Vips, a nearby diner, where in time she establishes herself as a sex worker and meets the man of her dreams. From this point on, Beatriz occupies several subject positions. Thus she not only occupies the positions of secretary, sister, and sex worker, but she is also a woman in love. A typical day in Beatriz’s life includes an eight hour shift at the office, a moment at home to write to her sister, an half hour or so at Vips where she picks up her clients, and another hour at home where she provides her sexual services. Then on the weekends Beatriz goes on a two-day tour of Mexico with her lover. In all of these ways, Beatriz handles multiple subjectivities and enacts diverse “spatial practices,” which according to the patriarchal society she lives in, are incompatible. According to traditional binarisms, a prostitute cannot be a secretary nor can she entertain a serious romantic relationship. However, Beatriz’s greatest violation of patriarchal spatial codes occurs when she brings her clients to her home. In such a society which venerates the paternal home and fixes women’s actions and movement within and beyond the home, Beatriz is a transgressor; she consistently disobeys the symbolic structure of the “gender regime.”⁸ She creates her own path, performing what deCerteau refers to as “delinquency” (130).

The epistolary narrative in *Demasiado amor* provides the context for Beatriz’s beginnings as a sexual worker. In her letters to her sister, Beatriz describes the changes she is making in her life. The most dramatic change occurs when Beatriz, consciously begins doing sexual work as a form of extra pay. The series of letters to her sister—written over a three year period—therefore tell the story of Beatriz’s excitement, depression, frustration and ultimate joy in this new line of work.

In these letters, Sefchovich presents the protagonist’s shift into the world of sexual work as the result of her desire to try something new and

change spaces. Depressed by the extra typing work she has brought home to earn more money, Beatriz decides to take a break one night and visit the local twenty-four hour diner, Vips, with the hopes of relaxing. At this moment, Beatriz breaks with her routine of remaining at home and experiments delinquency by entering into a new space where women are not generally found alone. She first feels self-conscious that she is alone at night in a public space, but as it turns out, this new space effects numerous positive changes in her life. During one of her visits to Vips, she meets a young man and the two enter into a romantic relationship. To her surprise, the young man comes from a wealthy family and occasionally gives her money to help her out. After the relationship with the young man terminates, she brings another man home one night and upon departure he leaves money for her on the dresser. At first the protagonist feels insulted, but later, with some thought she decides that this is an appropriate gesture: "...luego pensé que era justo porque por estar con él no había yo adelantado nada de mi trabajo" [...afterwards I thought that it was justified because by being with him I didn't get ahead in my [typing] work] (42). It is at this point that Beatriz has the capitalist vision that "time is money" and that she can sell her body as a commodity. From this moment on Beatriz starts asking for money from all the men she sleeps with. Over the course of time, she builds a clientele and manages to run a small business from Vips. While at first Beatriz uses Vips to establish her own space, she is soon approached by the manager who insists that she give him a cut by servicing him weekly. He therefore establishes authority over Beatriz's space, thus cutting into her initial freedom.

Beatriz's story relates her own wrestling with her decision to do sexual work. Occupying a space in between the binaries which construct female identity, she finds that all of the subject positions she holds pull on her and define her simultaneously, thus stirring in her an ambivalence or what Gloria Anzaldúa terms "mental nepantilism..." "an Aztec word meaning torn between ways" (78). In this way the bi-textual narrative reveals Beatriz's double consciousness and her process of coming to terms with her fractured identity. Moving back and forth between her fantasy world and her day to day life we witness her negotiate the "two ways" of being that she has embraced. As opposed to the homogenous character of the romantic narrative in which Beatriz neatly preserves the fantasy of heterosexual union against the national landscape, the epistolary narrative reveals the fractured state and vulnerability in Beatriz, but also her excitement before something new and liberating.

As we learn, in addition to her own doubts about the physical demands of being both a secretary and a sex worker, Beatriz faces reprimands from her sister which cause her a great deal of confusion. Citing her sister in her own letter she writes: "te prometo que nunca más bajaré al Vips para que

como tú dices ‘te puedas sentir orgullosa de tu hermana’ y ‘podamos juntas recordar limpiamente a nuestros padres’” [I promise that I will never go to Vips again so that as you say ‘you can feel proud of your sister’ and ‘we can remember our parents together with a clean conscience’] (72). Although Beatriz does not keep her promise, the guilt she experiences from her sister’s remarks continues to haunt her and ultimately leads her to take distance from their relationship. Furthermore a client, who has grown attached to Beatriz, wants to see her on the weekends and beats her up when she refuses him. But Beatriz finally finds her way through her sister’s resentment, her own confusion and her fear of physical abuse and adopts strategies to preserve her self-image and remain safe. As I discuss later, she fully unlearns the dichotomy which makes her psychologically restless by the end of the novel.

Love and Nation

One day, after two months of working steadily at Vips, Beatriz meets a man to whom she is instantly attracted. The two spend a passionate few days together and thereafter she decides to spend all of her weekends with him, leaving her sex work for the mid-week. In a letter to her sister, Beatriz notes the tumultuous joy that the relationship has caused in her life:

Yo aquí estoy, tratando de salir del espasmo en que me dejó el señor que conocí. Ya nunca seré la misma porque sólo vivo para esperar los fines de semana. Ahora soy dos personas, una que trabaja y una que vuela, una que existe en la tierra de lunes a jueves y otra que se instala en el paraíso de viernes a domingo. (54)

[Here I am, trying to get over the spasm in which the man I met left me. I will never be the same because I only live for the weekends. Now I am two people, one that works and one that flies, one that exists on the earth Monday through Friday, and another that enters paradise Friday through Sunday.]

This “paradise” in which Beatriz “flies” during the weekends with her lover, becomes her own secret world. After this initial comment to her sister, she refuses to divulge further details about the relationship, despite her sister’s questioning. Beatriz therefore draws another dividing line, separating the details of her romantic relationship from all the other aspects of her life that she shares with her sister.

And yet the reader has had access to the details of Beatriz’s romance since the first chapter of the book, where the romantic affair with “el señor,” has been delivered to the reader in the form of a retrospective diary that also

reads like a romantic travelogue. This text recaptures in the past tense the weekend trips she took with her lover over a seven-year period. Although the name of “el señor” is never mentioned, Beatriz directs this erotic travelogue to this lover in the second person singular. Writing as if she speaks to him, Beatriz reminds him of all of the places they visited, the things that they saw and consumed together. She provides various details about their travels and often refers to many intimate or cherished moments. In this sense, Beatriz’s narrative is the memory of the relationship. In so far as she directs the narrative to her **amante** and continuously reveals her adoration for him, Beatriz’s travelogue could also be read as a love letter. The character of their relationship and the process of their intimacy, on the other hand, are exempt from this narrative. The lover remains unidimensional and undeveloped as a character.

And yet *Demasiado amor* does not free itself of the basic elements of the romance for it grapples with the various strains of masculinist discourse which run through this genre. As Fredric Jameson has stated, ideology is often inseparable from form: “a genre is essentially a socio-symbolic message... immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right. When authors re-appropriate and refashion forms in new social and cultural contexts, the message persists and must be functionally reckoned into the new form” (141). Following the traditional romance, *Demasiado amor* is set in the landscape of “el país” [the country], that defined geographical space of the nation. More specifically however, “el país” in Beatriz’s narrative exists outside Mexico City. She and her lover leave the central metropolis of Mexico to visit “los rincones de la patria” [the corners of the fatherland]. In this sense, the space of the nation in Beatriz’s narrative has a pastoral quality evoking the meaning of “countryside” in “país.” This departure from the city is important for several reasons. First and foremost “el país” becomes associated with the lover and his masculinist self-identification with this space. Furthermore, he is the authority in this space (albeit with Beatriz’s complicity): he shapes Beatriz’s movement in this realm and her knowledge of it, thus fully mediating Beatriz’s relationship to “el país.” And although Beatriz narrates, the travelogue reveals the male lover as the mobile guide who leads the passive female. Beatriz describes her travel as though she is being carried on a magic carpet about the country: “Porque tú me enseñaste este país. Tú me llevaste y me trajiste, me subiste y me bajaste, me hiciste conocerlo y me hiciste amarlo” [Because you showed me this country. You took me and you carried me, you lifted me and lowered me, you made me know it and you made me love it] (24). She is not the agent of travel, but a traveling companion. She does not depart of her own volition, but lets herself be taken. Beatriz’s lover also commands her vision of Mexico out of his own desire for her to experience, to be penetrated by, the Mexican spirit: “siempre decías que yo tenía que conocer el espíritu de

este país" [you always said that I had to become familiar with the spirit of this country] (64). In all of these ways, the lover shapes the form of their affair.

Sefchovich reckons with the traps of romance by making them visible. She juxtaposes the masculine space of the nation with the city space of the epistolary narrative and thereby reveals how Beatriz submits to the spatial practices and logic of the national romance when she travels in "el país." As Elizabeth Wilson states, cities "dislocate established frontiers and force apparent opposites together in thought" (75). In Mexico City, Beatriz experiences a greater amount of autonomy. As I have already discussed, she creates a new identity for herself thereby deviating from the patriarchal spatial practices assigned to her. Furthermore, the city represents a site of transgression and the unexpected, often allowing its inhabitants to free themselves from the strict confines of patriarchal tradition. As Elizabeth Wilson suggests, such a space is "the mise en scène of [a] disintegrating masculine potency." Remaining outside the city, then, the romantic letter/travelogue secures the masculinity of the male lover, an essential component of the romance.

The letter/travelogue also reproduces a discourse of rediscovery and reterritorialization and thus dialogues the Conquest. Beatriz makes extensive lists of the details of their journey, naming everything as if for the first time, just as Cortés mapped and catalogued México:

Garzas y peces, cerdos y borregos, pozos de petróleo, un aeropuerto en Uruapan, un pulpo enorme metido en una caja de madera, sembradíos de caña de azúcar, árboles de mangos y barras de jabón de coco. (39)

[Geese and fish, pigs and lambs, oil wells, an airport in Uruapan, an enormous octopus crammed inside a wood crate, fields of sugarcane, mango trees and bars of coconut soap.]

At times she produces a list of random objects and experiences (as in the above example) and in other cases she organizes the list around one object category such as fruit, or a theme, such as the duration of three days. Like the Spanish conquistadores, Beatriz beholds Mexico as an explorer, taking inventory of the land before her with what Gillian Rose terms "geographical knowledge" which "aims to be exhaustive" (7). Indeed the numerous lists are exhaustive, and the reader begins to lose interest in the monotony of signs.

The correlation here between the Christian origin myth and the Conquest is not accidental, for Beatriz continually refers to this discovered, plentiful space as paradisiacal. In travelling through the country, and naming the things she sees and experiences, Beatriz feels that she has grown to possess México as her own. In affect she falls into the trap of national romance. The

travelogue therefore makes recourse to the most powerful trope in romantic narratives, metaphorical triangulation, or the process by which the amorous identity of the couple is sedimented in space (Sommer 73). To begin, Beatriz experiences her discovery of Mexico as a self-discovery: "...he descubierto la vida" (52). The two lovers, Beatriz and "el señor" are then bound by their "mutual love" for each other and their love of the nation. Just as she feels that she belongs to her lover, so does she feel that she belongs to Mexico. This is most evident when in one instant she refers to Mexico as her own country: "...me contaste todo sobre este país, mi país" [you told me everything about this country, my country] (33). In another moment she compares her love for Mexico to the love of her amante: "Y yo contigo y con este país enloquecí" [And I was crazy about you and about this country] (118). At still another point she attributes her love for her amante to the fact that he showed her México: "Y te amé porque me enseñaste a este país" [And I loved you because you showed me this country] (141). In these moments Beatriz has reached the pinnacle of her amorous relationship. She is deeply in love, and her love of her amante and of the nation are one.

But at the same time that this narrative consciously remains trapped in the traditional forms and discourses of the romance, so does it also resist traditional forms of the genre. The text therefore demonstrates how literature always provides a space in which to perform forbidden practices and shape alternative territories.⁹ Beatriz's form of mapping counters that found in the Conquest narrative or in traditionally heroic forms of the romance in which the travelling protagonist makes himself master-of-the-land. Nor is her description of Mexico one of a subjugated territory, so typical of traditional masculinist narratives. Instead Beatriz describes Mexico as a series of orifices or endogenous points and anchors the couple's experience of place in the body, thus indulging the senses: "Me llevaste por tianguis y mercados a que viera y oliera y me mareara de colores" [You took me to flea markets and fruit and vegetable markets so that I could smell and swoon from the colors] (98). Furthermore the places they visit are always sites of memorable sexual pleasure: "Me acuerdo de todo, de todos los lugares que junto recorrimos. Y me acuerdo de que en todos hicimos el amor" [I remember everything, all the places that passed through together and I remember that in all of these places we made love] (62). The first part of the travelogue is particularly titillating in so far as Beatriz lists the many experiences that she shared with her lover. From the moment of their first encounter, Beatriz's sexual relationship with her lover expands her notion of what is physically possible:

Tú me enseñaste formas del amor que yo no sabía que existían. Mis piernas aparecían primero en el techo y al rato en el espejo. Mi cuerpo se doblaba como si fuera de tela y hasta mis orejas y los dedos de los pies perdieron su dureza habitual. (13)

[You showed me forms of love that I never knew existed. My fist appeared on the ceiling and a minute later on the mirror. My body folded like fabric and even my ears and toes lost their usual firmness.]

Finally Mexico is visited and consumed in rhythms created by the use of repetition throughout the narrative. In all of these ways, Beatriz “*juega con la construcción de determinados cuerpos de escritura*” [plays with the construction of specific bodies of writing].¹⁰ She plays with the romance, narrating a sensual exploration of Mexico grounded vividly in feminine sexual experience; she reconfigures the “*la*” in “*patria*.”

Yet just when it appears that *Demasiado amor* has exalted the national romance and love of the nation with a twist of feminine eroticism, just when Beatriz seems to have sensually touched every place and part of Mexico, learned the histories of Mexico, smelled all of the different plants and tasted all of the foods, just when Beatriz seems to have completely “*incorporated*” Mexico, a change occurs. The initial vibrancy of her amorous relationship begins to fade and difficulties begin to arise. As the relationship becomes lackluster, so does her vision of Mexico. From this point Beatriz’s lists relate a dystopic rediscovery of Mexico:

Y entonces, precisamente cuando las cosas se empezaron a poner difíciles, descubrimos que la blusa deshilada no era de Aguascalientes sino del mercado de Tepoztlán, descubrimos que el rebozo de Santa María no cabía por el aro de un anillo porque no era de seda sino de imitación... (155-6)

[And so just when things started to get difficult, we discovered that the embroidered blouse wasn’t from Aguascalientes but instead from the market at Tepoztlán, we discovered that the cloak of Santa María didn’t fit inside the hoop of a ring because it wasn’t made out of silk but was instead an imitation...]

These lists registering numerous types of disappointment and feelings of deception record a fall of a once paradisiacal Mexico in the eyes of the travelers. Mexico loses its authenticity as the two discover that the products they acquired weren’t authentic but imitations of the real thing. Beatriz no longer describes Mexico in terms of a paradisiacal garden, but instead as a contaminated backyard: “*Vimos aguas negras que corrían libres, coladeras sin tapar, basura abandonada, ratas, bichos, alimañas, excrementos y hasta muertos sin enterrar*” [We saw black water running freely, uncovered sewage pipes, abandoned trash, rats, bugs, predators, excrements and even unburied dead] (159). Furthermore her vision of the nation become perforated with problems as Beatriz reflects on the paramount conditions of poverty and government corruption that she observes. As the lists become longer and longer, filled with negative and painful impressions rather than images

of beauty and purity, the two enter into an enveloping abyss. The erotic entries also wane and eventually disappear from the text.

As the two move further and further away from the Mexico they once loved, they simultaneously experience the deterioration of the love they once knew: “Así empezaron las dudas, las torpezas, las ridiculeces, las desconfianzas, los miedos, los insomios” [So began the doubts, the stupidities, the ridicules, the distrusts, the fears, and the insomnias] (164). Beatriz never gives a concrete answer for why the relationship fails, but the manner in which she describes the deterioration of the relationship reveals how their relationship from the beginning remained trapped within masculinist discourses of penetration, colonization and domination: “Un día me di cuenta de que ya no quedaban lugares por visitar ni posturas en el amor por inventar ni palabras por pronunciar. Porque todo entre nosotros había sido dicho, visto, tocado” [One day I realized that there were no more places to visit, no love making postures to invent, no words to pronounce] (173). The couple has conquered the relationship. Rather than be entranced by repetition, Beatriz is bored by that which has already been explored. Feeling that she and her lover have come to the end of the road, that they have exhausted all the travelling possibilities, done everything there is to do, Beatriz begins to withdraw from her lover. She is overtaken by a fear that this love that she has idealized and protected for so long will grow routine:

no podía luchar contra la costumbre. Contra este amor que amenazaba con durar para siempre y por siempre igual. Tuve miedo de no poder preservarlo sin corromperlo, sin aburrirlo, sin saciarlo, sin saturarlo, sin que se volviera insulso, vacío. Tuve miedo de que los cuerpos no pudieran renovar su alegría, miedo de que el sueño no perdurara. (175)

[I couldn't fight against custom. Against that love that threatens to continue forever and forever the same. I was afraid of not being able to preserve it without corrupting it, without making it boring, without satiating it, saturating it, without it turning dull, empty. I was afraid that our bodies wouldn't be able to renew their pleasure, fear that the dream wouldn't last.]

In essence, Beatriz expresses a fear of the domination that regularized and monotonous “spatial practices” exert over people's lives. She fears that habit, rather than ritual, comes from repetition, that an “established” relationship is like an institution, remaining fixed and inflexible to spontaneity. In her view, “costumbre” is a kind of dulling normalcy that leads to mental and physical oppression. In the face of her fear of routine, her mind grows listless and her body numb. In sum, she feels repelled by the very threat of performing the same socio-sexual behavior, that according to Lefebvre, “ensures” the “cohesion” of social order and according to Beatriz ends in emotional and libidinal boredom.

Beatriz's disenchantment with her romantic relationship and her disdain for "la costumbre" deepen as she observes her clients' married lives: "...cualquiera diría que lo correcto es vivir la vida organizada y en familia como la que tienen los señores que me vienen a ver, pero si vieras lo tristes e infelices que están!" [...anyone would say that the correct thing to do is to live an organized life with a family like the men that come to see me, but if you saw how sad and unhappy they are] (166). Although Beatriz never expresses a desire to be married and have children, the growing monotony in her relationship and her inability to imagine a way to renew the spark ultimately repel her from romance altogether. Rather than a source of happiness, she begins to view her romantic life as a source of displeasure. If previously her weekend getaways helped her to survive the work week, she now sees her life in inverted terms: "...estoy contenta, a gusto de verdad con mi vida, aunque no con toda ella, sólo entre semana, porque los fines de semana sufro mucho" [I am happy, truly pleased with my life, although not all of it, only the weekdays, because the weekends I suffer a lot] (166).

Beatriz puts a final end to her relationship by bringing her lover home one day and showing him the new sex salon she has created for herself. He leaves pale and silent and in her heart she believes that he will never return: "Pero así tenía que ser. Yo lo había convertido en Dios y al Dios hay que arrastrarlo por los templos... Ya no lo veré nunca más ni veré tampoco los rincones de la patria" [But it had to be like that. I had converted him into a God and Gods must be torn from the temples... I will never see him again nor will I see the corners of the country] (185). By terminating her relationship with her lover, Beatriz also terminates her relationship to the fatherland. The triangle of "mutual love" and love for the nation has come undone. On this note Sefchovich therefore terminates the romance as an anti-romance. Rather than plotting a "happy ending" where the woman consents to reproducing nationhood, Sefchovich plots a rejection of the institutions of marriage and heterosexual reproduction, and an ultimate escape from these patriarchal and state regulated traditions. Her "foundational gesture" (Richard, 47) is a fall which creates the space and time for Beatriz's final recreation of herself in a space exterior to the nation.

Beyond the Nation

During the time that Beatriz's relationship has begun to dissolve, she has grown increasingly satisfied with her sexual work: "...el dinero es lo de menos. Me gusta el teatrillo de seducir y de cambiar de personalidad según lo que quiera el señor en turno." [...it's not really about the money. I enjoy the theater of seducing and changing personalities depending on what the client at hand wants] (166). Perhaps Beatriz's greatest lesson has been to

fully reject the monotony of one identity and to embrace herself as a fluid being, capable of shifting from one personality to another. As Wendy Chapkis has stated, sex work as performance is a “cultural practice that is open to subversive signification” (12). Beatriz learns to enjoy her business more by transgressively turning her sex work into a performance that she herself takes pleasure in. She turns her labor into an act of self creation and reaffirmation.

Eventually Beatriz confides to her sister that she has left her office job and that she doesn't intend to change her lifestyle or her mode of earning money. She plans to remain in Mexico City, where she has created her own “casa de huespedes” [guesthouse]:

La casa parece un bosque con sus plantas, sus globos, sus mariposas, su tapete grueso de color café. Mi amigo Gómez convirtió la tina del baño en fuente, llena de pescados. Y por toda la casa los clientes están echados, fumando bebiendo, durmiendo. Ya nadie se preocupa por vestirse. La esposa de uno de ellos, que viene junto con él, trae incienso y perfume, así que huele muy bien. Lo que se ve, se huele y se oye son nuestros placeres. (180-2)

[The house seems like a forest with plants, bulbs, butterflies and its' thick coffee colored rug. My friend Gómez converted the bathtub into a fountain, filled with fish. And throughout the house, the clients are lounging about, smoking, drinking, sleeping. Now nobody worries about dressing. The wife of one of them, who comes with him, brings incense and perfume, so it smells very good... All you see, smell, and hear are our pleasures.]

In more than one way, Beatriz's space resembles a new kind of surreal paradise filled with things that seem out of place in a metropolitan environment. By surrounding the new space with natural life, and inviting her clients to move about naked, Beatriz creates an edenic garden salon which is experienced as an autonomous space, outside the structures of society and beyond the passage of time. She also eliminates the windows so that “se siente el viento, el calor, la humedad, el frío” [one can feel the wind the heat, the humidity and the cold] (181). In so far as the noise and pollution of the city never enter her garden salon, it is as if Beatriz's space transcends the city, floating like a cloud above all the commotion and order of society.

Most importantly Beatriz's salon exists outside the space of the nation. She describes the feeling of being beyond an order, beyond the symbols and signs of the nation. The torrent of signs which flooded the travelogue is nowhere to be found here. Instead she narrates emptiness, describing her new space in sparse and elusive terms. She emphasizes the absence of all manufactured objects, save her bed. This is the new space in which Beatriz will give shape to her new sense of self. Beatriz effects these changes by

changing the interior of the house. Most symbolically, she tears down the walls, thus eliminating any divisions to the space as well as the structure of a family home. These architectural restructurings of space affect ideological space. By eliminating the physical signs of patriarchy, which relegate sex and sexual conduct to the domesticated 'home' space or the public/private domain of the brothel and by providing an indoor garden where people walk about naked, Beatriz challenges the binaristic significations surrounding private/public sex. By placing her bed in the middle of the space Beatriz resignifies this laden sign as an altar of sexual pleasure, rather than the site of reproduction.

With sexual pleasure, not sexual power, as the centering force, Beatriz creates a space where there is no patriarchy. The men that enter her space do not regard it as "the provenance of their own self-expression and self-creation," (Grosz, 57) but instead respect the space, and Beatriz. Beatriz not only offers sexual release but emotional release, offering her body or lending an ear. In fact, Beatriz feels at home with her clients: "son mis amigos, son mi familia" [they are my friends, my family] (182). Furthermore there are no sexual limits; even the clients engage in sexual activity among themselves as they wait their turn. Finally her space is always open to her friends; she allows people to come and go as they please, and she uses the space only for the realization of relaxation and pleasure. In all of these ways Beatriz "uncovers an eros free of the distortions of patriarchy" (Chapkis, 13).

Thus like her sister, Beatriz fulfills her dream by leaving the homeland behind. Unlike her sister, who has reproduced the social order of the family within her own guesthouse, Beatriz conversely carves an alternative space which "escapa al control de la significación paterna" [escapes the control of paternal signification] (Richard, Tres, 49). Beatriz also makes radical changes in her daily activities. She completely abandons her earlier spatial practices, including her trips to Vips, and she quits her job. She then makes her sex work a full time activity. Rarely leaving her salon, she frees herself from society, ultimately rejecting the social space of Mexico City and cutting herself off from her relationship with her sister. In her closing letter to her sister, Beatriz summarizes her current situation:

ha terminado mi historia de amor y con ella todo el sentido de mi vida. En adelante voy a desaparecer, a perderme en las sombras, a dejarme llevar por los amores fáciles, gozosos, que son los únicos que no hacen daño, que no lastimen. [185]

[my love story has terminated and with it all the meaning of my life. From here on out I am going to disappear, to lose myself in the shadows, to let myself be taken by the easy, pleasurable kinds of love, that are the only ones that don't do harm, that don't hurt.]

It is with a mix of independence and nostalgia that Beatriz makes these closing statements. She has not only decided to give up the only love of her life, but she has also decided to isolate herself from “los rincones de la patria.”

By giving up her relationship to her once beloved country and dedicating herself completely to this new space, Beatriz adopts an expatriate identity. She steps away from the discursive center of nationalism and national fantasies of heterosexual union and escapes to a place where she can mold her own socio-sexual subjectivity. Relinquishing herself from “la historia de amor” she surrenders the quest for romance (heterosexual unity) and with it the definition, “el sentido,” that such a relationship produces for a woman in a male centered society. By deciding to remain in her own paradise in the city, Beatriz definitively links herself to this new city space beyond space, or what Foucault refers to as a “heterotopia” (23). She creates her own notions of temporality and spatiality, building a viable space from which she can enjoy her life and her work. Furthermore Beatriz creates her own subjectivity, opting for a space of pleasure, which to the greatest extent possible, places her outside the dominant order. Within this new space, Beatriz finds peace and simplicity: “Lejos del mundo, lejos de todo y sin extrañar nada” [Far from the world, far from everything and without missing anything] (180).

By way of the sex worker, *Demasiado amor* attempts to reterritorialize one space of the sexual woman, her relationship to her body and her relationship to the men who seek her out. If the prostitute was once a sacred and revered woman (Stone), then Sefchovich attempts to return her protagonist to this place from which she has been expelled, finally creating a new sexual position that has not been formerly acknowledged as possible and for which no space has been designated. As a “new space in the imagination,” Beatriz’s garden salon represents a “new terrain, a new location, in feminist poetics” (Kaplan, 197). As a space in the imagination, it is also a critical space. By juxtaposing this space with the other spaces Beatriz occupies in the novel, particularly the symbolic “rincones de la patria,” Sefchovich demonstrates the extent to which men have taken over space, their “occupancy of the whole of space, of space as their own” (Grosz, 57).

According to Teresa de Lauretis, “the only way to position oneself outside... is to displace oneself within it” (5). The position of the sex worker is ideal to this project. For from the displaced site of sexual agency, the independent sex worker represents a “potent symbolic challenge to confining notions of proper womanhood and conventional sexuality” (Chapkis, 30). As an independent sex worker, Beatriz cannot “dismantle the master’s house with the masters’ tools,” as Audre Lorde has warned (98) but she certainly guts his house out and refashions it to her liking. In this sense

Beatriz creates an 'outside inside' space in an otherwise phallic world. The question residing is the following: how will she "secrete," to use Lefebvre's words, this new space? How will the men that visit her effect change back home? And how would Beatriz's 'outside inside' space be transformed in the process?

Beatriz closes her last letter to her sister with an instruction: She must deliver to her niece a notebook of memories that Beatriz composed about "her one and only love and her beloved country: "Dile que su tía Beatriz se lo dejó para que sepa que existe el amor y que existen los sueños. Dile que hasta es posible amar demasiado, con demasiado amor" [Tell her that her aunt Beatriz left it for her so that she knows that love exists and that dreams exist. Tell her that it is possible to love too much, with too much love] (185). By turning the story of her anti-romance over to her niece, Beatriz passes her critical vision of institutional romance and "happy endings" down through the female line of her family. In the final letter to her sister Beatriz makes reference to "las mariposas, el incienso, el sonido de las gotas de agua y mis amigos" [the butterflies, incense, the sound of dripping water, and my friends] (51), the definitive markers of the new space to which she has disappeared. Beatriz's package to her niece symbolizes both an invitation to dream and a warning. Between the lines, the romantic travelogue demonstrates how patriarchy and its discourses of romantic love "[enclose] female power in a fantasy land that lies far beyond the cities and towns of genuine feminist change."¹¹

NOTES

- 1 Sara Sefchovich has engaged in one of the most interesting critical studies of Mexican nationality and nationalism as evidenced in her earlier literary criticism: *Ideología y ficción en Luis Spota* (1985) and *México, país de ideas, país de novelas* (1988).
- 2 Translation is mine.
- 3 Clemencia contrasts the hero and the internal enemy, respectively presented through the characters Enrique Flores and Fernando Valle. This story of rivals, follows these two soldiers as they move through Mexico defending the nation against France, and charming young women who they ultimately abandon.
- 4 Translations throughout this chapter are mine, unless otherwise indicated in a footnote.
- 5 The act of rape found in pages eighty two and eighty three of *The Death of Artemio Cruz* is ambiguously represented as an act both of force and will, a representation common to male fantasies of conquest.
- 6 Translation is mine.
- 7 The majority of sex workers throughout the world do sex work to survive or out of force. See for example a discussion of prostitution in the international tourism industry in Enloe.
- 8 Sylvia Walby's term for patriarchy and the gendered relations produced by this social system.
- 9 "Siempre es posible tomar un espacio desde donde se puede practicar lo vedado en otros; siempre es posible anexar otros campos e instaurar otras territorialidades." Ludmer, 53.
- 10 Eltit, 23.
- 11 McClintock, 102.

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