

## The Intertext and the Paradox: Revisiting Carmen Boullosa's Early Novels (*La Milagrosa* and *Son Vacas, Somos Puercos*)

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PROLIFIC AND VERSATILE, Mexican-born writer Carmen Boullosa has attracted considerable critical interest in recent years by producing a respectable corpus of complex and multidimensional texts. Though primarily known as a novelist, she is also the author of poetry, short stories and plays. Regardless of the genre, her writing is instantly recognizable: both evocative and haunting, it makes explicit the suppressed (the subconscious, the erotic, the marginal, the body), and brings forth sensibilities associated with postcolonial perspectives and gender issues. The iconoclastic qualities of Boullosa's narrative have been widely acknowledged: her deconstructive metafictional (frequently historical in theme and anti-utopian in tone) are considered indicative of "a paradigmatic shift in Mexican literature" (Dröscher and Rincón 9), whereas the impetus of representing the totality of the nation gives way to new attitudes seeped in skepticism and characterized by a resistance to dominant discourses. Moreover, Boullosa's work constantly and consistently challenges the notion of rigid divisions between semantic spaces, such as conceptual art versus mass entertainment, normative versus alternative, margin versus center.

These aspects of Boullosa's narrative have been examined in insightful studies by critics such as Jean Franco, Julio Ortega, Barbara Dröscher and Carlos Rincón, among many others, who have defined her writing as one that occupies the borders of discourses, bodies and subjectivities. Numerous studies in recent years have outlined the complexity of Boullosa's texts by emphasizing their resistance to any attempt to subject them to reductionist reading(s), both in terms of genre definition and at the level of character/identity interpretation. The analysis that follows intends to add an additional layer to the existing critical discourse that corroborates the basic premise of embedded interpretative defiance: the dimension of intertextuality will be explored not only by highlighting existing thematic and/or structural correspondences with other works, but it will be also viewed

as a tool for deconstruction which invites the reader to acknowledge the essential ambiguity of key epistemological attempts, specifically the conceptualizations of reality/fictionality and identity/subjectivity.

As suggested by its title, the present study focuses on two of the author's earlier novels: the 1993 mystery *La Milagrosa/The Miracle Worker* and the 1991 pirate-adventure story *Son vacas, somos puercos/They Are Cows, We Are Pigs*. The analysis that follows centers on the use of intertextuality—and, by extension, the hybrid body—in the above-mentioned texts, and emphasizes their multilayered quality.<sup>1</sup> I argue that the meta-function of intertextuality in these novels is threefold: it serves to demonstrate the limits of discourse; it is also “a stratagem by which it becomes possible to challenge and resist discourse—to open up the possibilities of becoming other” (Fox); and it highlights the internal paradox contained by each novel, thus bringing readers into a dialectic exchange with internally contradictory texts. Through “devices which consciously enhance and emphasize intertextuality” (Fox ) both narratives openly challenge the notions of authoritativeness and representativeness, and therefore invite readers to re-configure their own notion of reality and identity by virtue of accepting or trying to grasp frequently unresolved paradoxes.

The concept of intertextuality is key to the understanding of the hybrid nature of both novels. The term is used here as conceived by Julia Kristeva and expanded by Roland Barthes to designate topical and structural similarities that result from a process of appropriation(s) and that are made evident by a process of interpretation. It is important to note that Kristeva introduces the term based on Bakhtin's ideas of plurality and heteroglossia, and that today—as Graham Allen has pointed out—the same term is used with different, sometimes contradictory meanings in the context of various critical approaches, including structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, postcolonial studies, feminist theories and psychoanalytic theory. In other words, the notion of the hybrid is interwoven in the critical term (intertextuality) used to highlight the dimension of hybridity in Boulosa's novels. The two works chosen for this analysis offer two different aspects of intertextuality: in *The Miracle Worker* it is primarily topical, related to feminine identity and writing, while in *They Are Cows, We Are Pigs* it has thematic, structural and functional dimensions that project onto genre definition and the process of reading, interpretation and identity formation.

The very structure of *The Miracle Worker* is indicative of a polymorphous body: it appears to be a detective novel, but it lacks an explicit narrative center—it is composed, instead, of nine, discursively distinct segments. Each segment both adds to the story and undermines it, leaving it open to different interpretations each of which depends on the reader's decision to give prevalence to one of the many explicit and implicit textual genres

and modes (literary fiction, allegory, testimonial narrative, philosophical essay, journalistic account, transcript, memoir, letter). This plurality and inability to define strict categorizations, establishes a direct parallel with the concept of *écriture féminine* as conceived by Hélène Cixous in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”: a practice which A. Game describes as “concerned with the openness of texts and multiplicity, in place of closure and univocality” (qtd. in Fox). The intertext with the French feminist’s essay stresses the interrelated concepts of body—M/Other making them a key to understanding the creative process in general and woman’s voice/writing in particular.

In addition to the structural allusion to *écriture féminine*, *The Miracle Worker* also contains a specific segment—the writings of the seamstress of the female protagonist—which establishes a thematic dialogue with Cixous’ essay. This fragment, as well as the personal notes of la Milagrosa and the story of private detective Aurelio Jiménez transcribed from a cassette found on a dead body, are the parts of the novel most relevant to the present analysis.

The title character and unifying center of the novel is a virginal young woman who allegedly has the power to alter reality through her dreams. We learn that The Industrial Textile Workers’ Union, after realizing the subversive potential of her miracles, has hired the private detective Aurelio Jiménez to discredit and ruin the “healer.” At first, the private eye perceives the so-called miracles to be a mass hallucination, but as he starts to fall in love with la Milagrosa, he becomes more susceptible to the idea that the gift of the young woman is real. In the course of the investigation, he witnesses how the politician Morales takes advantage of her magical powers to alter reality in a way that allows him to become the one and only political force in the country. Jiménez helps Milagrosa to escape Morales’ persecution, and aids her in destroying the politician.

At this level, the text can be read as a detective noir novel with a strong political subtext that unmasks the mechanisms of oppressive power and its tactics of manipulation. The supernatural gift of the Miracle-Worker is constantly questioned throughout the novel, both at the character level (Jiménez’ skepticism) and at the structural level (a compilation of segments whose very authenticity is questionable); it is constructed and deconstructed through language in a constant interpretative game between reader and text, in which the described phenomenon is simultaneously doubted and proved to be real. This dichotomy between reality and representation brings forth an epistemological discussion which leads to the ontological question of origin, of the construction and conditioning of human consciousness. The Miracle-Worker in Boulosa’s novel has the power of dreaming things into reality, and this makes her a mediatrix between the temporal world of shared reality and the timeless sphere of dreams and

the unconscious. Through this relation to the sphere of the unexplained and the transcendent her character acquires archetypal dimensions and becomes as mythical as Cixous' Medusa, who in the symbolic cluster of hero-monster-mirror, serves as a catalyst for understanding the self versus the other, the real versus the reflected.

When we think of Medusa of classical myth, the image that first comes to mind is probably the head of the monster, with snakes for hair, destroyed by the hero Perseus, who decapitates it by using his shield as a mirror to avoid the risk of being petrified if he looked directly into the face of the Gorgon. In fact, since classical times, the face of Medusa has been represented both as beautiful and grotesque. Through the use of the mirror, the myth of the Gorgon introduces an archetypal treatment of the relation between the objective world and the world of representation, thus connecting directly to the main concerns about reality and fiction expressed in the novel. However, if we take a closer look at the origins of the myth, we will find that multiple layers of meaning intermingle much like the snakes on Medusa's head. We realize that the Gorgon is essentially a hybrid construction, a combination of opposite cosmologies distilled in the transition from matricentric to patricentric pantheons. These qualities can also be seen in the character of *la Milagrosa* who is simultaneously healer, saint, menace, fraud, victim and savior. Both the literary character and the mythical figure are polysemic due to the continuous processes of inversion, appropriation and re-appropriation of values.

Both Barbara Walker (1983) and Patricia Monaghan (1981) have offered a more detailed hypothesis about the origin of Medusa. Most likely she was a deity imported from Libya, the destroyer aspect of the Great Triple Goddess, also called Neith, Anath, Athene or Ath-enna in North Africa and Athana, in 1400 c. BC Minoan Crete, which is in fact the prototype of the Greek deity Athena. The snake-haired head on her aegis was probably the mask the priestesses used while representing her Destroyer aspect. The classic myth of Perseus and Medusa was probably created when later peoples, not remembering the old rites, explained the image as a decapitated woman. With the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy a number of images related to older cults were appropriated with inverted value, and the image of the Supreme Father started to replace the one of the Supreme Mother. Myths were constructed around the deeds of heroes who subordinated, mastered and tamed the forces of nature, which, on their part, were associated with women for their life-bearing function. Those forces were represented in various forms, the most common being giant snakes or serpent monsters. Within this context it is possible to interpret the myth of Perseus and Medusa as representing the disembodiment of the feminine, which is silenced and limited to aspects of monstrosity when not of conformity.

It is fitting, therefore, that Cixous would use the Medusa in her seminal essay. The archetype is a vehicle, serving to recover the connection to the primordial feminine. This is achieved by restoring the original values of the archetype: by reintegrating the body as a discursive realm through the reinstatement of the Mother as a space where the Other is naturally included, and by reinforcing the idea of plurality of identity manifestations by defining “feminine” as fundamentally multiple and/or hybrid. It is interesting to observe that Boullosa’s text mirrors the exact same concerns and thematic elements. Cixous’ essay also projects over the novel the complexity of the myth and its various cultural substrata. A key to the understanding of this complexity is the treatment of the monstrous that appears with redefined value both in the novel and in the essay. Boullosa’s text offers an interesting view on the concept of “monster” in the form of an observation that Jiménez makes while describing *la Milagrosa*:

She was the most beautiful woman on earth. An angel, as I said. As ever, I am stiffed by my predilection for monstrous beings. Whores, alcoholics, air-headed women designed only for sex, or women agonized by their excessive intelligence or exceptional beauty . . . Why did I always fall for the grotesque? (77)

Here the *Miracle-Worker* is clearly identified with the monster in its two aspects: a being that does not fit the norm(s), and a being that is beautiful, even if extremely so. The beauty of *la Milagrosa* echoes the theme of restored beauty in Cixous’s essay: the French feminist insists on the reconstruction of the value of the feminine principle on an archetypal level, while in the novel the same idea is expressed symbolically by returning the element of beauty to the image of the female “monster” and by re-writing her body.

The strong thematic element of “writing with the body” is represented by the writings of *la Milagrosa*’s seamstress, whose message is the second-to-last long segment of the novel. The seamstress is the corporeal equivalent of the spiritual *Miracle-Worker*, her double and antipode, repeating as a mirror image all of the instants in which the protagonist eats, dresses, writes or reads. Her letter is the base of the direct intertextual dialogue between Boullosa’s novel and Cixous’ essay. Adding a more general dimension to this dialogue is the discursive plurality of the novel, which is an example of polymorphous, multi-corporeal writing, and is in direct correspondence with Cixous’ insistence on a polyphony of identity manifestations which challenge imposed and regulated modes of perception and create plural interpretative possibilities. This plurality defines the text as postmodern, and—in Cixous’ perspective—inherently feminine. Where the essay of the French feminist insists that “Women are body. More body, hence more writing” (356), “women must write through their bodies” (355),

the novel echoes similar thoughts through the words of the seamstress:

The only noble entity in your surroundings is the blue with which I write to you, and now I am thinking I see my pen burrowing between my legs to seize its writing fluid, to replenish its contents. (129)

"I'm a double dose of reality." . . . I am "doubly flesh." (133)

This example is indicative of the interesting correlation between the work of the Mexican author and the study of the French scholar. While Cixous has created an essay about *l'écriture féminine* which in fact is feminine writing, Boullosa has constructed a version of feminine writing, which could be read on a meta level as an essay on what is *l'écriture féminine*. Boullosa's perspective on feminine expression serves a twofold purpose in *The Miracle Worker*: on the one hand she creates spaces for expressing sensibilities that often remain at the margins of discourse, and on the other hand, her questioning of hierarchies, authority and power structures is an effective vehicle for voicing preoccupations about corruption and political life in Mexico during the last decades of the twentieth century.

Although the intertextual dialogue between novel and essay offers the attractive proposition of the "recovery of the body," it is necessary to admit, however, that read as a whole, the novel doesn't explicitly offer such recovery as a definite solution. The mystery of Jimenez's death and la Milagrosa's existence is never solved: the final clues are ambiguous; we never truly know whether she was a mere mass hallucination, a fictional creation. From the first to the last line we are dealing with a literally disembodied text: a text clutched by a dead body, and containing the accounts of different voices, intertwining and reflecting each other's version of a story whose existence is doubtful.

Adding to the complexity of any attempt at interpretation is the dichotomy between the Miracle Worker who is ethereal, virginal, separated from the multitude, drawing power from her One-ness, and the seamstress who is corporeal, sexual, part of the crowd, seeking empowerment through identification with the Other. La Milagrosa and her antipode are at the center of a whole cluster of oppositions: singular/plural, minority/majority, individual/mass, internal/external, spirit/body, asexual/sexual. On a meta-textual level readers must face the paradox of a text that strives to transcend binary oppositions while in fact being rooted in them. In effect, *The Miracle Worker* embodies the essential quality of a "feminine text": one "which encourages a play of textuality, which will deconstruct its own claims to authority and authenticity" (Fox).

As a result, in terms of interpretive possibility, the text elicits an internal paradox as it hovers in the space between the notions it defies and their alternative, never completely opting for one or the other. What is consistent, however, is this stance of being indefinable—a declaration of independence of sorts which opposes any kind of reductive understanding. It

could be argued that a text that can be read as auto-referential by activating its intertextual dimension, will project its inner qualities on the discourses it incorporates directly or indirectly. Thus, the inherent ‘indefinability’ of the novel blurs the boundaries of genre, gender and identity identifications by highlighting the diffuse and frequently ambiguous qualities that are at the core of even the most seemingly solid notions and subjects.

We can find the same ambiguity and the same stance of interpretive defiance in *We Are Cows, They Are Pigs*. When outlining Boullosa’s qualities as an author, Jean Franco has emphasized that her writing defies order, rules, limits, boundaries (19) and characterizes an authorial persona which is “ungovernable” and “irresponsible” (18). In addition, Emily Hind has pointed out the paradox that for many years in her native Mexico Boullosa has occupied a certain literary margin, while abroad her work has shifted to the center of academic interest (83). It seems that the literary identity of the author herself is a space where contradictory tendencies collide. And, remembering Roland Barthes’ implication that when writers write they are also written (*Image—Music—Text* 143), we will find that it is no wonder that Boullosa’s works, those who “write” her and define her as an author, are marked by a type of hybridity where opposite forces intermingle.

*They Are Cows, We Are Pigs* is representative of the same type of combination of contradictions and tensions, ambiguity and interpretive defiance. From the opening lines of the novel we realize the polymorphous quality of the focalizing character: his name is alternatively J. Smeeks, Esquemelín, Alejandro Oliverio Esquemelín, Jean Smeeks, El Trepanador. With each name comes a different role, a differing perspective, a shift in identity parameters.

At 13, Smeeks is enslaved and thrown amidst the 17th century Caribbean. He is taken to the mythical island of Tortuga where the African healer Negro Miel teaches him both the magic of medicinal plants and the dream of freedom embodied by the pirates. After the death of Negro Miel, who is assassinated by poison, Smeeks becomes an apprentice to the French surgeon Pineau. Pineau’s death is also abrupt, violent and shrouded in mystery. After many adventures Smeeks joins the Brothers of the Coast. He is torn between the desire to avenge the death of his masters/patrons, and the transformations he suffers as a result of the violence, alcoholic haze and volatility that accompany the pirate existence. Smeeks is at the same time the one who heals and who inflicts wounds; he is both the servant and the mercenary, the native and the foreigner, the male and the female perspective. What leaves the most profound mark is that he is forever suspended between the freewheeling pigs (the pirates) and the sedentary cows (the colonists, set in their ways and respectful of laws and rules).

A discerning reader may perceive certain thematic correlations and structural similarities (at times inverted and/or transformed) which estab-

lish the intertextual dialogue between *They Are Cows, We Are Pigs* and the famous novel by Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World/El reino de este mundo* (1949). Given the extension of this study, I will limit the examination of intertextual correlations to tracing the most important thematic coincidences, while stressing the common structural component.<sup>2</sup>

An important shared theme is the presence of two father figures: the African sage and the French master. Both Ti Noel, the black protagonist of *The Kingdom Of This World* and Smeeks, the young European in *They Are Cows, We Are Pigs*, have an African mentor who creates a world of myths and images, carving the identity of his listeners with inspired and poetic stories. This role of mentor-father figure is played by the mandinga healer-sorcerer Mackandal for Ti Noel and by the African medicine man Negro Miel for Smeeks. Joining the strong African voice is also the European presence. The way Ti Noel forms judgments is influenced, although indirectly, by his French master, Monsieur Lenormand de Mezy. At the same time, Smeeks' horizons of skill and understanding are significantly amplified by the person he serves and from whom he learns, the French surgeon Pineau.

The image of a world drowning in blood is created by both novels: in both there is an abundance of descriptions of violence, represented as an organic part of life in the Caribbean. Whether it would be the pirate attacks in *They Are Cows, We Are Pigs* or the bloody insurrections in *The Kingdom of This World*, in both narratives the utopia of freedom and fraternity is devoured by the unstoppable tides of violence.

An interesting thematic overlapping is the presence of a poison that acquires a life of its own. In *The Kingdom of This World* the poison is given by the black slaves to the white colonists-masters in an act of resistance against oppression. Its flow takes on magical proportions: in a literal representation of metonymic personification, the poison pours down the island of Haiti, invading houses and barns, reaching the most secluded areas, seeping in impenetrable and unexpected places. In *They Are Cows, We Are Pigs*, similarly, the poison reaches Negro Miel's lips by mysterious means, initiated by the inhabitants of the colony. It is interesting to notice that in terms of racial identification of power and resistance, its flow has an opposite direction—from the white colonists who are victimized and bound to the land to the black pirate who is assertive and free to roam. This time the oppressed are the sedentary “cows” who are subjected by force of violence: a type of suppression which is executed by the pirate “pigs” represented by Negro Miel.

Dreams, memory and heritage realized here on earth are the elements that construct the world-visions represented in both novels. In *The Kingdom Of This World*, at the end of his life cycle and after manifesting the full potential of Mackandal's magical legacy (already a master of bodily transformations that had allowed him to turn into different

animals), Ti Noel becomes aware that giving up his human condition is giving up the greatest gift he possessed here on earth. Turned into a body of indefinable flesh, he comes to the understanding that humans are beautiful in their strife and misery because they are capable of love. A message with great impact resonates through his experiences: despite all the pain, the Kingdom we should aspire to is not one of the Heavens with its established and never changing hierarchies, but on Earth where humans suffer, fight, bleed, reach their ultimate degradation and their ultimate glory.

On the other hand, Boulossa's novel offers a different view on the desire for an idealized utopia and the reality of human strife. The more ambiguous and somewhat pessimistic tone of *They Are Cows, We Are Pigs* becomes even more evident in comparison with Carpentier's declared belief in the essential goodness of humankind. At the end of his memoirs, Smeeks also realizes that he has to reevaluate his understanding of the heritage left by Negro Miel and Pineau. He also comes to the conclusion that the Kingdom is to be found on this Earth. But Smeeks' Kingdom is an ambiguous, inherently contradictory utopia—a pirate's dream which he confesses he didn't appreciate while living (in) it. This utopia of liberty and fraternity will always remain unattainable, hidden in the haze of alcohol and violence. The only solution Smeeks finds is to distance himself from the reality of the lived experience and to find meaning in conserving the memory of an ideal relayed to him by Negro Miel. Smeeks' goal is to exist: to conserve in his body, in the fibers of his being, the memory of a land made beautiful by the idealized, nostalgia-ridden description of Negro Miel—a mythical land of perfection somewhere in Africa, a fiction made real by telling and retelling, equally distant from the violent pirate utopia and the cold shores of Europe.

The use of focalization and wandering viewpoint to highlight the complexity of Caribbean identity is a technique used in both Carpentier's and Boulossa's texts. *The Kingdom Of This World* is a novel that has been extensively studied, and one of the key moments in its understanding is a chapter entitled "The Great Flight." It describes the moment of Mackandal's execution when two cultures see two completely different events: the white colonists see him burn at the stake, while the black slaves see him turn into a giant grasshopper and escape. The scene is especially interesting because its construction depends on a point of view that almost imperceptibly flickers between the one version of reality and the other, never allowing the reader to rely on the text to solve whose perspective is the "right" one. An important aspect related to this part of the novel is that on a meta-textual level it is also a "case study" of the real-marvelous (or, to use the broader, more pervasive term, Latin American magical realism): a genre reliant on mythopoesis and a hybrid both in terms of content and structure.

In a similar way, Smeeks' account of events is an amalgam of different,

at moments opposing worldviews. At times we see through his eyes of a pirate, at times through his eyes of a compassionate healer. He switches from an innocent to a drunk, to a bloodthirsty invader, to a consciousness that can sympathize with the raped women, and the cheated and massacred amerindians. In Boullosa's text the plural is introduced through the singular. The embodiment of plurality is the one character-narrator whose perspective changes with the different names he takes, and sometimes under the same name. He is always the same but different (or, rather, different but the same), representing, in a sense, a deconstruction of the mechanisms of identity formation.

The fluid identity of the narrator is reinforced by a cryptic segment entitled "Separate Chapter", which serves as the physical division between the two parts of the novel. In this chapter the narrator declares that everything that has been told up to this point, is in fact quite different and contradicts the veracity of the story. While highlighting the inaccuracies (which include a completely different version of Negro Miel who turns out to be not a free pirate, but rather a physically tied down slave), the narrator insists that even though there is a change in perspective, identity and context, the essence of the story remains the same. He points out that to understand this, we need to approach it not from its horizontal axis but rather read it vertically. This vertical reading is compared to the description of a room: instead of following the direction of the floors, our gaze would advance upwards, following the direction of the walls. This way, the room of our description would be different while the room itself remains the same.

Curiously, this outline of the horizontal and vertical axis echoes Kristeva's concept of intertextuality as a mosaic of allusions and appropriations that allow each text to absorb and transform others. For Kristeva, texts have two axes: one horizontal, which connects the author and reader, and one vertical, which connects the text to other texts (66). The meta-textual comments in the "Separate Chapter" also include an assertion that everything, even the impurities found in the vertical reading "belong to the room, even though they are not of the room." I perceive this somewhat enigmatic statement to be an allusion to the process of intertextual appropriations. This impression is reinforced by the insistence of the narrator that without the body of the reader s/he cannot ascend vertically, that without the heat of the reader's body, s/he cannot maintain the vertical flow of the tale. The narrator, like Ti Noel of *The Kingdom Of This World*, is of indefinable flesh. In the context of Boullosa's novel, s/he attains form only in the body of the reader. This seems to echo Barthes' concept of intertextuality. For him, the meaning of the text is positioned at the level of an eroticized interpretive experience in which the reader creates the text, the author and him/herself in a process where what is made evident are

the points of contact with other texts, whether written or not. Or, using the image offered in *They Are Cows, We Are Pigs*, the vertical, intertextual reading cannot be sustained without the reader, without the fusion of the inter-, intra- and extra-textual bodies.

An intriguing consequence of the inclusion of the “Separate Chapter” in the novel is that it seems to offer a code for interpretation, thus tying down to a constrained reading a text that otherwise seems open to a variety of potentially multiple possibilities of understanding.<sup>3</sup> The prescriptive nature of this chapter is very interesting particularly when examined through the perspective of a reading that views the novel as fluid, open and hybrid. The more we delve into the confined aspect of the text, the greater the chance that we encounter an unresolved paradox. The fact that the novel is split in two makes it, in a sense, a split object (or subject, depending on the philosophy of reading). This physical separation in two alludes symbolically to the essential duality of the “Separate Chapter” which is, ambiguously, both vague and prescriptive at the same time. If we remember Julio Ortega’s suggestion that in the novel there coexist two major versions of the formation of Latin American identity—the stability of the colonizing empire versus the centripetal forces seeking liberation from its oppression—we undoubtedly will have to ask ourselves what alternative does the pirate utopia offer (see Julio Ortega).

One answer that takes into account the complexity of the matter is that the pirates symbolize both rupture through heterodoxy and anarchy, and tyranny through violence and the strict rules of the Brotherhood of the Coast. The tyranny of the pirates, as opposed to that exerted by the colonial empire, does not come with the responsibility for the security and stability of those oppressed by it. In a similar way, the “Separate Chapter” indicates rupture through a series of negations and no single assertion to be trusted. It also brings in the tyranny of a prescriptive interpretation by way of the imposed model of intertextuality. The fact that intertextuality is by definition an open form of reading reinforces this vagueness: it is a tyranny without responsibility. This brings us full circle to the authorial identity, which is also textual. It is a pirate text: a text about pirates and a text that invades the consciousness like a pirate—violently, mercilessly, robbing all sense of stability and security. The text, and in Barthean terms, the author who has written it and is written by it, is an irresponsible pirate who never resolves the ontological question of origin, that is, who occupies the primary position in the dichotomy—the creator or the creation? One thing that we can say for sure after examining this novel, is that despite its apparently straightforward narrative form it is by no means a simple recount of adventures and battles, and that the key to its complexity is the meta-textual dimension of the “Separate Chapter.”

As we saw in both *The Miracle Worker* and *They Are Cows, We Are Pigs*, the notions of authoritativeness and representativeness are constantly challenged by the presence of unresolved internal paradoxes which invite the readers to participate in interpretative games that have the potential to reconfigure pre-set notions of reality and identity. Through the use of innovative narrative techniques and the implied games of intertextuality, the two novels surpass the limitations of prescribed genres. Both in structure and in subject matter, the narratives demand active reader participation in the construction of meaning. Whether overtly or discretely, the texts are markedly auto-referential: they highlight the processes of writing, reading and interpretation, frequently never resolving their own internal contradictions. As a result, the metatextual aspects of these narratives highlight the paradoxical nature of reality and contribute an additional dimension to the interpretive experience: they invite a philosophical stance that denies reductive and limited approaches to textual, cultural or gender identity.

### Endnotes

- 1 Hybrid/hybridity, as understood within the framework of this study, is a generalized term, which refers to a phenomenon defined by polymorphism: a unity of dissimilar, at times contradictory elements. A basic presupposition is that the phenomenon described both functions as a cohesive unit, and retains the tension between its constitutive elements. These very qualities, as made evident by its appropriation by various critical discourses, places the term "hybrid/hybridity" in opposition to homogeneity, essentialism and any other notion marked by a reductionist approach.
- 2 At first glance, it is possible to identify at least one structural and seven thematic parallels. These are, as follow: 1) the use of focalization and a wandering viewpoint to highlight the complexity of Caribbean identity; 2) the memoirs of Alejandro Oliverio Exquemeling, pirate and surgeon; 3) the two masters/father figures: the African sage and the French master; 4) a world drowning in blood; 5) rape; 6) poison that acquires a life of its own; 7) the Caribbean as the Promised Land; 8) dreams, memory and heritage realized here on earth. A more detailed analysis of all above-mentioned parallels can be found in Akrabova "Desconcierto barroco: conflictos e hibridez en la construcción de la identidad en *Son vacas, somos puercos* de Carmen Boulosa" presented at the 55th Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference, Winston Salem, October 2005.
- 3 The prescriptive aspect of the intertext is noted by Michael Riffaterre (1990), who observes: "Indeed, contrary to critics' favorite reaction to difficulty (they too often are content to invoke ambiguity and do not seem to think there may be a way out of deconstruction), facts of reading suggest that, when it activates or mobilizes the intertext, the text leaves little leeway to readers and controls closely their response" (57).

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