

A STUDY OF SELECTED THEMES IN THE FEMINIST NOVELS
OF ALICIA YANEZ COSSIO

by

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the feminist elements and attitudes in four of Alicia Yáñez Cossío's novels. Four of the novels are treated in depth while one novel, Más allá de las islas, is left aside since its theme to a large extent lies outside the focus of the present study.

Yáñez Cossío writes to expose injustices and oppression propagated by patriarchal society. She uses her women characters as mouthpieces to enlighten and educate both males and females. Yáñez Cossío narrates these events with Ecuador as the backdrop representing women's plight in a machista society.

This dissertation consists of a preface, seven chapters and an appendix. Chapter I is an introduction. Chapter II shows how Bruna, soroché y los tíos lies within the parameters of a feminized quest-romance. It also includes a study of the character's feminist leanings, and how the women characters are represented as secondary in relation to their male counterparts. Chapter III deals with the feminine consciousness, the coming-of-age of the protagonist. Special attention has been given to the initiation of the feminine consciousness and the maturation process. Chapter IV delineates how Yáñez Cossío exposes consumerism (capitalism) as the destroyer of both men and women alike. Special emphasis is placed the socio-economic order, and on women's role in the work force. Yáñez Cossío

examines the socio-economic condition of Ecuador, and the struggles women have to confront daily to combat ideological prejudice. Exploitation, dehumanization and injustice all play integral roles to show the inequality between men and women in Ecuador. Chapter V deals with the subversion of the patriarchal order in La cofradía del mullo del vestido de la virgen pipona. Yánez Cossío describes a town dominated by Doña Carmen Benavides, who demands adoration of the *Virgen Pipona* as a means to mask her own political, social, religious and economic ambitions. Chapter VI explores the use of prostitution as a means to maintain masculine lordship and feminine bondage in La casa del sano placer. Chapter VII is the conclusion. The appendix is a personal interview conducted by the author with Alicia Yánez Cossío in Quito, Ecuador, on October 6, 1993.

PREFACE

I feel it necessary to address certain concepts that relate to men in feminism. Various critics have pointed out the reluctance to accept male scholarship in feminism.¹ Cary Nelson has stated that: ". . . I do not think men realistically have anything unique at present to contribute to feminist writing" (157), but later she qualifies her previous statement, observing that: "This is not to say that individual men cannot make useful contributions to feminist writing" (157). Statements have been made suggesting that men are removed both intellectually and socially from feminism. I consider it necessary to argue that men can, if not predisposed to hostility, make a valid reading of a feminist book. To dispute that is to regress to a position that women have denounced for years.

My position is in no way radical from a critical viewpoint. While I do not pretend to share women's sense of alienation due to patriarchal pressure, I do intend to ground my discussions in knowledge of the history of discrimination and oppression of women, and in readings of feminist theorists. Each time I critique one of Alicia Yáñez Cossío's works, I consciously strive to distance myself (as much as possible) from the pathology of male power and pride. I do not quarrel with the position that feminism is essentially a woman's project, but I do reject the notion that a male critic, simply by virtue--or vice--of

gender, has nothing valid to add to feminist criticism. Assuming that every man is capable only of a "male perspective" is equivalent to denying that neither males nor females share any common characteristics. To reject appraisals of women's writing simply because the critic is male would reject women's ability to read male-authored texts and thereby throw the previous criticism done on masculine literature by women into disarray: "But just as feminism critiques the recurrent sexualizing of women by masculine culture, the effort to analogize feminism with women can displace and attenuate the critical force of feminism" (Warner 94).

I accept the notion that I learned to be a man and that this has shaped my experience. I do not dispute that the critical discourse of feminism is aimed at men in general. Nevertheless, I am convinced that it is possible for male critics who are not antagonistic or adversarial to critique various feminist works not from within feminism, nor from an antagonistic position outside feminism, but from a marginal position located on the border. My investigation takes as its point of departure the premise that neither men nor women have a rigidly fixed nature which is mutually exclusive or impenetrable. Through dialogue, with good will and openness, critical observations by both genders will help to expand the canon and create a collective understanding and social truth.

Note

¹For a detailed analysis, see Men in Feminism by Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds. New York and London: Methuen 1987.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, feminist literature has come of age and continues to be in vogue both in North and South America as well as in Europe, Africa and Asia. There has been a number of novels written with a focus on feminist issues. In Latin American Spanish language literature, especially in Argentina, feminist literature has much to offer the modern scholar. At the present time various countries stand out as having the most widely investigated feminist literature: Argentina, Mexico, and Chile. Despite the fact that numerous studies exist in other parts of Latin America concerning the feminist contribution, it is surprising that very few scholars have bothered to investigate the feminist literature of Ecuador. This, unfortunately, leaves the impression that there are no Ecuadorian female writers that equal the literary production of Rosario Castellanos, María Luisa Bombal, Elena Poniatowska, Silvina Bullrich, or Isabel Allende. However, Alicia Yáñez Cossío represents the same type of quality feminist literature that characterizes the feminist movement of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s: "Alicia Yáñez . . es una gran escritora digna de figurar en cualquier parte del mundo, inauguró una nueva forma de novelar en las letras patrias" (Carrión 11). Francisca Tobar García writes that: "Ha nacido una gran novelista en el Ecuador . . . Es tan

interesante, por primera vez, ver y sentir cómo una mujer descubre la realidad fantasmal del Ecuador" (3c). Aida González Harvilán wrote:

Creemos que la obra constituye un pilar en la literatura feminista de Latinoamérica. Lo original de la novela consiste en hacer un estudio de la posición de la mujer a través de los siglos, posición que se ha visto continuamente atrapada en el oscurantismo, la religión fanática, los convencionalismos, la superstición. (Bruna, soroche y los tíos 1)

The literary production of Yánez Cossío includes three collections of poetry: Luciolas (1949); De la sangre y tiempo (1964); Poesías (1974); a collection of short stories, El beso y otras fricciones (1975); one drama, Hacia el Quito de ayer unedited, 1951; five novels: Bruna, soroche y los tíos (1973), Yo vendo unos ojos negros (1979); Más allá de las islas (1980), La cofradía del mullo del vestido de la virgen pipona (1985), La casa del sano placer (1989), and Cristo feo, unedited; and one book of pedagogy, Niños escritores. Talleres de literatura infantil, 1988. Yánez Cossío won the Premio Nacional in Ecuador in 1975 for Bruna, soroche y los tíos.

Alicia Yánez Cossío has written four novels that express a vital concern for women's plight in modern society. Pedro Jorge Vera expressed the following after the publication of one of Yánez's novels:

. . . la mujer ecuatoriana ha dejado de ser la sumisa ama de casa que era hasta el primer tercio del siglo, ahora la vemos dinámica, creadora, rotunda lo mismo en la política que

en la administración, en la cátedra, en el parlamento, en la judicatura. (5)

Her novels express feminine worries that are both interesting and intriguing. The novels treat many different concerns which women face daily in Latin America, and, in reality, are universal issues shown in a microcosm with Ecuador as the backdrop. Yáñez Cossío proposes to expose the domination that has historically oppressed the feminine gender:

las mujeres están en lo que están por un simple proceso evolutivo, que la antigua posición de odaliscas era bastante cómoda y que duró tantos siglos porque ninguna mujer quería cambiar porque estaban sentadas en la casa engordando, con la mente flotando en el nirvana, acariciando a los hijos que crecían como matitas alrededor del árbol, sin más responsabilidad que la cocina que era complicada, pero como no había otra cosa que hacer sin calceta o jugar a las damas chinas o atisbar a los vecinos desde las ventanas o armar uno que otro lío pacíficamente doméstico. (Yo vendo unos ojos negros, 13)

The major theme in Yo vendo unos ojos negros is oppression of women and their subsequent difficulty in unburdening themselves. Yáñez Cossío as a writer who has more concerns than just the purely esthetic. The feminism of her contemporaries has broken many barriers in the social and political arenas, and, as a result, the feminine problematic has begun to be reflected in their writing. They felt the need to consider the tautology not only as a means of organizing a novel but as a method for analyzing the

"feminine message." In the narrative fiction of Yánez Cossío one sees the attempt to search through false representations, false images and false myths in order to "deconstruct male patterns of thought and social practice; and to reconstruct female experience previously hidden or overlooked" (Greene and Kahn 6). Yánez Cossío presents herself in her narrative as dissatisfied with the current characterization of women in fiction, attempting to go beyond stereotypes, and to move past mere abstractions that separate the traditional male dominated portrayal to a woman's experienced portrayal of reality. Yánez Cossío reveals an urgency to express the importance of individual perceptions.

This dissertation, "A Study of Selected Themes in the Feminist Novels of Alicia Yánez Cossío," will open the text and analyze the anti-masculine thoughts and perceptions of the characters using various defined guidelines. In each novel, the female character is the protagonist who serves as the voice for the creativity of the author and the reader sees the delineation of the female character's intellectuality. Specifically, this study analyzes how Yánez Cossío depicts her women characters as rebellious or resisting the traditional male-female relationship.¹ Also such topics as patriarchy, the feminine consciousness, the commodification of woman, the differences between men and women characters and prostitution will be studied.

This dissertation consists of the following divisions. Chapter I is an introduction. Chapter II will show that Yáñez Cossío presents Bruna as a feminized quest-romance, and how the women characters show feminine advancement. Through the use of the feminized quest-romance pattern, she shows the protagonist's desire to reconstruct her past and her identity. Chapter III will identify and define the "feminine consciousness" in Yo vendo unos ojos negros. Yáñez Cossío depicts each female character as aware of her sexual difference and her unique qualities and problems. Chapter IV delineates the position of women in a consumer society as seen in Yo vendo unos ojos negros. Furthermore, a capitalist society "contribuye a la deshumanización y cosificación de la mujer" (Handelsman 899), and this chapter will examine how the novelist presents that dehumanization. Chapter V examines the techniques and means whereby Yáñez Cossío subverts the patriarchal order in La cofradía del mullo del vestido de la virgen pipona. Chapter VI demonstrates how masculine hegemony has suppressed women ideologically, socially and politically through the maintenance of prostitution. Furthermore Chapter VI shows how La casa del sano placer demonstrates how prostitution is a means through which patriarchal society maintains masculine lordship and feminine bondage. Chapter VII is the conclusion. The volume ends with an appendix which is a

personal interview with Yánez Cossío done by the author in Quito, Ecuador, on October 6, 1992.

Without doubt the importance of feminist literature in the 1990s is great. The genre has continued to grow in Spanish language literature. The novels of Yánez Cossío offer a very personal interpretation of feminist themes and ideas, and justifies a deeper investigation. Up to this date only three articles have appeared concerning her entire fictional production. Nina Scott wrote an article entitled "Alicia Yánez Cossío: una perspectiva feminina sobre el pasado del Ecuador." In it she briefly overviews the novel and analyzes the manner in which Yánez Cossío creates a past for Bruna. Bruna's past is a conglomeration of fragments that exist in the memories of her relatives. Scott tells of this process and shows how Bruna successfully reorganizes her family history. Scott's analysis of the novel is exact and valuable inasmuch as she is concise and brief (six pages). The article questions Yánez Cossío's conclusion since Bruna "anda por el mundo sin destino o medios económicos aparentes" (628). Scott's sententious comments come across negatively since she sees the culmination of the narrative as a problem: "El problema con esta solución es que Yánez Cossío ha sido tan concreta en su mordaz denuncia de la historia de los Catevil que la nebulosidad de la nueva existencia de Bruna no es convincente, por lo menos para esta lectora" (628).

Michael Handelsman also has contributed to the sparse scholarship on Yánez Cossío with an article entitled "En busca de una mujer nueva: rebelión y resistencia en Yo vendo unos ojos negros de Alicia Yánez Cossío." Handelsman offers insight into Yo vendo by discussing how the protagonist rebels and resists the dominant patriarchal system. He shows how the author places in doubt traditional impressions of women. Furthermore he writes that the main problem with these women is their condition which is "injusticia, opresión, y explotación" (894). Handelsman's thesis is that María can break away from the present oppressive condition and become "una mujer-símbolo" (895). Handelsman shows how María comes full circle to "autosuficiencia" (898) while, at the same time, he discusses how women are exploited and oppressed in a capitalist world. He writes that the protagonist in Yo vendo "lucha contra todo un sistema deshumanizado y materialista" (899). The article shows how Yánez Cossío links two important issues in the novel: feminist personal fulfillment and the dehumanization of capitalism. He writes that Yánez Cossío's main idea is "la formación de una mujer nueva, que pueda realizar plenamente su potencial como persona total" (900).

Dick Gerdes has written an article entitled "An Embattled Society: Orality Versus Writing in Alicia Yánez Cossío's La cofradía del mullo del vestido de la virgen pipona." He shows how the reader must piece together the

narrations of the Pando brothers to form the history of the town. He discusses the fact that the novel's formation is done through the use of oral language instead of the usual written language. He writes that "Furthermore, psychodynamic elements of orality--proverbs, sayings, popular verses, even onomatopoeic sounds, form part of the linguistic scaffolding of Yáñez Cossío's novel. Over one hundred proverbs appear in italics" (51). He uses Walter J. Ong's Orality and Literacy to show how orality manifests itself on the level of ideological hegemony. Gerdes observes that "Yáñez' novel uses the conjunction *and* about 100 times in seven pages in order to tie together in mnemotechnical fashion the fragments of information" (52). Gerdes proves that orality in La cofradía is a conscious way for Yáñez Cossío to analyze the function of orality and writing in modern society by seeing the link between them as a link between literature and society as well as cultural tradition and political institutions.

I have chosen to study the entire corpus of Yáñez Cossío's feminist novelistic production while omitting Más allá de las islas whose theme lies outside the scope of this study. I have chosen to omit her poetry and short stories in an attempt to analyze only her feminist novels.

Note

¹The terms "rebelión" and "resistencia" were first used in an article published in 1988 by Michael Handelsman entitled "En busca de una mujer nueva: Rebelión y resistencia en Yo vendo unos ojos negros."

CHAPTER II

BRUNA, SOROCHE Y LOS TÍOS

In Bruna, soroché y los tíos, and in Yo vendo unos ojos negros all the events are filtered through the female characters so that a third person narrative is fashioned, and it tells the story based on the main character's thoughts and perceptions.¹ A narrative structure is constructed so as to convey the female character's reality as she perceives life from moment to moment. The point of view is restricted only by the powers of the female characters to see and to analyze their own lives.

By the time Bruna was published Latin American writers had rejected earlier literary movements and were experimenting with the stream of consciousness, cinematographical devices, and dislocation of time. However, in Bruna Yáñez Cossío has employed a kind of "feminine" realism. Although written during the years of the "boom" it is not a typical "boom" novel. I say that because through the novel the author makes a statement concerning the status of female writers in Latin America in which she rejects the "masculine" realism that had emphasized external experience, rationality, logic and hierarchical categorizing. Yáñez Cossío has presented the feminine consciousness as a vital part of the female characters in order to demonstrate a feminist mode of thinking. The narrative in all the novels does not appear

radical but rather distinct and personal. Yáñez Cossío does not try to show that her female characters are inherently superior to their male counterparts but rather desires to show differences based on gender. These differences are obvious and function in two ways. The first is to demonstrate the female's oppression by traditional, patriarchal societal conventions; the second is to show how males and females are different but, at the same time, the same, both human beings.

In Bruna, soroche y los tíos the narrative is structured around a number of female characters. Nina M. Scott has observed that: "Bruna, soroche y los tíos es una crónica que refleja simultáneamente un pasado nacional y particular" (623). An equally important theme is the struggle against the patriarchal system: "la protagonista, de la novela, Bruna, soroche y los tíos, . . . rompe con todo el sistema opresor," (Handelsman 895), and she comes to understand "que la vida era el supremo don que podía tener y por el cual valía la pena hacerse todas las magulladas posibles. Si se vivía una sola y única vez era necesario sentirse plenamente ser humano, persona, mujer" (347). Speaking of the difference between this novel and Cien años de soledad by Gabriel García Márquez, she states that "el enfoque narrativo de esta novela es netamente feminista, Bruna plantea problemas muy distintas de los de la obra de García

Márquez" (623). Sara Vanégas Coveña has come to an interesting conclusion concerning these two novels:

Y es que ciertamente, existen varios aspectos semejantes entre las dos novelas: una sola familia que representa la experiencia universal de una nación, denuncia irónica de la historia, lenguaje hiperbólico, etc. Aunque también se aprecian importantes diferencias; la principal: la novela de Alicia está escrita desde la perspectiva de una muchacha y se puede decir que, aún más que ella misma, es la mujer, en general, la protagonista de la obra. (23)

Bruna, soroche y los tíos as a Feminized
Quest- Romance

Questing, a woman dares to reinvent herself. Unfamiliar, indiscreet, she "lights out" into strange continents, collecting out of the darkness stories never heard before. She moves against the winds of great legends that recount the adventures of heroes, gallant men whose stories are deemed universal, timeless, and fundamental to our understanding of the historical conditions that gave rise to civilizations. (Heller 1)²

Against this definition of the classic female quest looms the ever present myths and rituals of the dominant Western patriarchal culture that forms the prevalent ideology for men and women alike. The Western patriarchal culture lauds masculinity as its prototype and model for the heroic adventure while

The feminization of the heroic quest has provided women writers a narrative means to acknowledge and accept indeterminate processes that the masculine myth attempts to determine through rituals of closure, aggression, exclusion, and individuation-- rituals that help preserve an exclusively masculine domain. (Heller 13)

According to Joseph Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces, there exists a male hero of masculine monomyths who plays out the quest cycle: birth, initiation and death. The process through which the quest must eventually pass requires that the hero journey away from the community and accomplish heroic deeds through the use of his aggressive libidinal drive and then return to his home after all oppositions are resolved:

The cycle of the quest equates an antagonistic process of individualization with maintaining the universal order. Competition guides the dialectic structure of the quest and defines male heroism as an aggressive destiny achieved through exercise of physical strength. (Heller 3)

The masculine monomyth is exclusive, observes Campbell, man is the only one capable of moving toward an understanding of knowledge since woman serves as his prize at the end of his quest. Furthermore, Campbell observes that women play only a marginal part in man's heroic adventure since she "can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending" (116). Nevertheless, the male hero at last realizes that he, all along, possessed the necessary capabilities to achieve complete comprehension.³

In traditional quest romances women serve as passive helpers in the masculine quest since "Self sacrifice and martyrdom is the standard way for a woman to achieve renown among men" (Pomeroy 109). Women's roles aid only in the

sense that they "may assist or hinder his progress" (Heller 2). Campbell states that woman "represents the totality of what can be known. The hero comes to know" (116). Heller writes that "the quest-romance represents the libido's search to embrace external reality, and at the same time salvage the inner self from anxieties that accompany that reality" (4). In like manner Northrup Frye positions woman as subordinate due to man's masculine libido because woman "achieves no quest herself, but she is clearly the kind of being who make a quest possible" (322-23). At the root of this quest lies the search for identity, and many affirm that the masculine myth demands that identity be incompatible with the feminine and be solely a masculine attribute. Campbell describes the Oedipal division of active and passive roles in the traditional quest plot when he observes that "the son against the father for the mastery of the universe, and the daughter against the mother to be the mastered universe" (136).

In the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century quest romances became an internalized journey. That is, the poet-heroes of this epoch began to wage war within themselves. The journeys of yesterday, the travel to exotic distant lands to explore the landscape and to reap riches through the masculine aggressive libido and physical strength, turned inward in an attempt to explore the hero's own ego. Harold Bloom in "The Internalization of Quest-

Romance," observes that: "The internalization of quest-romance made of the poet-hero a seeker not after nature but after his own mature powers, and so the Romantic poet turned away . . . from nature to what was more integral . . . within himself" (15). Heller observes that "In the internalized quest, the poet attempts to overcome the libidinal, feminine self by engaging it in locked battle with the imagination, or "Real Man" (5). In Harold Blooms' examination of the internalized quest, there appears nothing new since it echoes Frye's "ambivalent female archetype," which reaffirms the masculine monomyth. Edwards again reiterates this idea when he says that:

For if heroism is defined in terms of external action alone and heroic actions are confined to displays of unusual physical strength, military prowess, or social or political power, then physiology or a culture that limits women's capacities in these areas thereby exclude women from heroic deeds (11).

That is, life process is embodied in the hero's actions. Using Heller's last statement, one can assert that with this internalization process women can begin to reach out on their own to break the hold of being only images in male fantasies. An internal quest-romance liberates women from the Oedipal division of active and passive roles traditionally found in quest-romance plots. No longer is it necessary to possess the aggressive libidinal drive nor to journey in search of wars to become a hero. With a new type of heroism not bound by the masculine libidinal drive, women

now become part of the process in a step toward feminizing the quest-romance due to its intellectual and spiritual focus. Thus, "there would seem to be nothing to prevent women from becoming heroes themselves by virtue of possessing their own minds and their own imaginative faculties" (Heller 6).

Quite understandably there have been few female literary "heroes" to appear in the past two hundred years. Annis Pratt, in Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction, writes that woman, in order to achieve transcendence, needs to pass through and beyond sexual politics to a new environment, a new kind of quest (70). Traditionally female protagonists have remained entrapped by society's restrictions and definitions of female "goodness." Woman has had to forge forward all the while confronting conflict for her desire for self-sufficiency and society's traditional demand that she play the traditional roles as wife and mother. The long tradition of masculine monomyths in literature has been the cause of an absence of female heroes. Pratt states after observing quest patterns in more than three hundred novels that she found "acute tension between what any normal human being might desire and what a woman must become" (6). Consequently, no one has ever expected women to "light out" in search of a new feminized territory of self-creation in society since Western patriarchal society has always belittled and thwarted the effort. Females were supposed to

act properly which translates into submissiveness, passiveness and obedience. Furthermore, an acceptance of this dichotomy is "a recognition that society neither expects nor wants her to test her powers" (Heller 10). This relegation of women has been a permanent part of Western culture that privileges the myth of male flight while denying female protagonists the same experience. Many nineteenth-century women writers of the quest-romance did not write to have their protagonists drastically change the world according to feminine wants and values, but rather their struggle was to unite two conflicting imperatives: "her own desire to become a self-sufficient, self-realized adult and society's demand that she become a woman" (Heller 25). Thus, women's writing manifested itself in literature that portrayed the female quest as ending with illness, suicide, madness or other psychic deterioration. More common to nineteenth-century quest-romances was the marriage plot. Marriage marked a resolution that meant that the woman had to accept her social role as wife. Although the female protagonist began her quest, ultimately it would fail when she married since she was conforming to the oppressive patriarchal structures she so eagerly sought to transcend. "The conventional marriage plot ultimately serves patriarchal culture by maintaining its checks and balances" (Heller 26). Consequently, the female quester must begin anew; she must redefine her previously conceived notions

concerning her aspirations. Because of patriarchal pressure she has to confront her dilemma, and attempt to resolve it through socially acceptable terms.

Twentieth-century novels, on the other hand, while at times maintaining the established nineteenth-century tradition (through marriage or childbirth), seek to transcend the former traditions. Feminists disagree with the aforementioned paradigm since it adheres to the opinion that anatomy is destiny. The female quester who views marriage, motherhood and childbirth as basic components of her overall psychic development as a woman, and not as an end in itself, still can challenge patriarchal ideology.

The twentieth century has witnessed a greater interest in the quest for self-discovery. With the evolution of both social roles and expectations for women, along with feminist movements, the quest-romance has become a more important vehicle for expressing women's search for authentic selfhood. "The feminization of quest-romance has evolved slowly, assimilating influences from both male and female literary traditions" (Heller 13). Carol Christ and Annis Pratt also observe that male and female traditions share certain elements but that female quests have their own distinct problems, themes and motifs (Heller 9), and therefore, a new set of metaphors, patterns and themes are needed. Contradictory to male quests which:

develop characteristically through the male hero's flight from women and his resistance

to the influence of others, feminized quest plots tend to be more accepting of relationships with both men and women as integral to the female's process of realizing individual goals and fulfilling societal needs. (Heller 24)

The investigation into these problems and themes in women's literature has led to a new definition of quest-romance.

An ever present characteristic of the female quest-romance is that the protagonist is "thwarted of impossible journey, a rude awakening to limits, and a reconciliation to society's expectations of female passivity and immobility" (Heller 14). More often than not the female quest begins with a recapitulation of an experience of abandonment, abuse or injustice that justifies the protagonist's reason for initiating her quest and the need for self-affirmation and self-redemption. Thus, the pattern of the tale parallels the growth of the female quester's consciousness. Each step forward marks an apprehension of what was formerly forbidden and inaccessible. Orphanhood also often plays a pivotal role in quest-romance narratives offering special circumstances that allow the quester certain privileges for self-definition. Lacking concrete answers the female quester has a blank slate with which she can come to know. Not only is there discontinuity in the quester's life and circumstances, but also the narrative many times mirrors the

same fragmentation, discontinuity and digression. Heller observes:

At times, woman's quest may seem to be taking her in circles rather than in a linear direction. She may appear to be moving backward rather than forward, regressing rather than progressing, performing acts out of chronological order. (33)

Its style is appropriate to narrate the female subject since she is separated in two equal parts by a "phallogentric system, which defines her as the object, the inessential other to the male subject" (Stanton 15). Reminiscent of the Latin American "boom" novel, the feminized quest-romance employs multiple narrative techniques such as nonlinear discourse, fragmentation, multiple points of view and similar techniques. Not only are these recognizable when appearing alone, but they may also appear in any combination in order to challenge patriarchal constructed forms. Hence, "Clearly, these 'fragmented' histories appear truer to the Latin American experience than the orderly allegorical progression of the Balzacian historical novel or even the unifying force of the Tolstoyan epic" (Roa Bastos 268). Heller writes that:

In a effort to avoid the snares of traditional forms associated with male images, feminized quests often employ the implements of modernist or experimental fiction which emphasize the anarchy of the subconscious and the dislocation of the subject over the assumed stability of socially constructed "reality." (33)

Women's autobiographies or autobiographical narratives are fundamentally connected to quest-romance by the search for identity, and the search for their family bloodline as in Bruna. Often characteristic of quest-romance is an inner turmoil that manifests itself in the protagonist's uncertainty concerning her unexplained or unknown past. She confronts a conflict between attachment and autonomy, dependence and self-sufficiency. These very same elements and many more are obvious in Yánez Cossío's Bruna, soroche y los tíos.

Bruna is a novel that "merece más atención por ser un ejemplo por excelencia de lo que la historiadora Gerda Lerner denomina <<woman-centered inquiry>> del pasado ecuatoriano" (Scott 623). Bruna is a recapitulation of Bruna's family history and an analysis as seen through her feminist eyes:

La perspectiva predominante en la novela es la femenina, punto que Lerner subraya con gran énfasis: <<The central question is this: What would history be like if it were seen through the eyes of women and ordered by the values they define?>>. (Scott 623)

Her interest in family history is motivated by desire to better understand her present self. The novel is a chronicle of the Catevil family which:

renegotiates distinctions between truth and fiction, transforming the private search for the true self into a public confession of the gaps and absences in her life, and the marginal truths that work in collusion with creativity that present a unified past and a unified subject. (Heller 60)

Yánez Cossío's fictional biography of Bruna and her *tíos* is an important text in the feminization of a quest narrative.⁴ Yánez Cossío conceives of the quest as a feminine exploration to discover and invent the lost origins of female identity, and a call to heroic adventure which is characterized by a sense of dislocation, despair, and urgency. She also expresses the quest, as opposed to patriarchal myths, as an "internal growth that concentrates on the possibilities of *human* development and change" (Edwards 11). She seeks to make a home for her Bruna within the text. The quest leads Yánez Cossío to reconsider and reinterpret her inherited beliefs based on an objective reality a "reality" that is "gradually reorganized and modified by the interpretive processes of memory" (Heller 60). Joanne S. Frye says that: "As the needs of the present prompt narrative interpretation of the past, [a] narrator's memory can yield a different 'reality,' a different chronology: a subversion of fixity, a reopening of cultural 'truth'" (57). Bruna represents a woman's quest to find her lost past without using the normal "categorical representations of linear, coherent, truthful selfhood" (Heller 60). Instead she advocates "the possibility of at least retrospective control over experience--that control which women in their lives so often lack" (Meyer Spacks 46). Adrienne Rich observes that "Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes . . . is for women more than

a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (35). Yáñez Cossío has successfully written a novel in which:

the narrator-protagonist has claimed control over the telling and interpreting of her own experience. As her own narrator, she can explicitly examine the destructive power of the femininity text into which she is supposed to be growing and then to redefine the premises of representation in order to elude its power. (Frye 77-78)

Lee R. Edwards writes, that in contrast to nineteenth-century novelists,

By the beginning of the twentieth century novelists seem readier to abandon the project of entrapping the female heroic character and begin the task of inventing maneuvers whereby she can break out of familial, sexual, and social bondage into an altered and appropriate world. (16)

Yáñez Cossío describes the formation of her subject as a slow process which ultimately will gather dispersed pieces of information that relate to the protagonist's past that form her identity: "Se escondían con prisa los amarillos daguerrotipos donde aparecía un pedazo del tronco común vestido con un trajecillo mezquino que indicaba pobreza, o con los rasgos imborrables de la raza maldita y escarnecida" (21). "By writing in the gaps between truth and fiction, past and present, [the author] plays in the margins of uncertainty, timelessness and unreality" (Heller 61): "[Bruna] ya tenía veinte años y no tenía pasado" (6); "El pasado de Bruna estuvo ligado a tres abuelos que habitaron la vieja casa. Los tres fueron locos de remate, locura que

a su vez, la heredaron de otros antepasados" (17). These citations are representative of the attempt by feminists to refocus history on the psychosocial fragmentation of the female subject. Bruna's search for identity seeks not to resolve woman's historical absence but to acknowledge that the "true" history of the subject is always inscribed within her consciousness. Bruna's search for self leads her to feel and experience abandonment which then marks her quest for salvation through the pursuit of heroic destiny. Yáñez Cossío perceives that the feminized quest depends on the protagonist's need for a descent, a journey back into the past, into childhood.

The narrative sketches in Bruna are deliberately placed out of chronological order so as to create a multifaceted commentary of the self-writing process. To self-write is to admit to the possibility that one has "forgotten or altered the truth" (Heller 61). Thus, the process of composition juxtaposes two distinct phases in Bruna's life: there is the adolescent Bruna and the mature Bruna who appear and reappear in nonconsecutive chapters in the novel. This shifting of time enacts a merger of these disparate chapters of Bruna's life, suggesting that the quest is a lifelong process, rather than "a single, heroic episode or culminating occasion" (Heller 61).

Yáñez Cossío describes her attempt to reconstruct the fragments of the past as a kind of search, in which Bruna,

her other relatives and friends have all taken part, "Los niños espiaban anhelantes el momento de descuido para abrir el armario y liberar al empolvado abuelo que, desde el más allá de su ignominia le sonreía y les contaba cuentos y verdades acerca de los tiempos y de las narices" (22).

Here the social element of the feminized quest is emphasized; in contrast to the traditional male pattern, in which a hero's quest is a solitary achievement benefitting a community at large, women's quests shape--and are equally shaped by--community involvement. (Heller 61)

Bruna's search for identity is bound to her preoccupation with her ancestry especially where race is concerned. Society's racial biases have produced a fixation on her lost past and missing origins. Heller states that a woman's quest begins as a search for these missing names and facts that might help her to construct a unified portrait of the past with an equally coherent identity (62). Thus by unnamming herself the female protagonist psychologically removes herself from a patriarchal past that has kept her from achieving "a female-specific identity, history and inheritance" (Heller 19). Both excited and preoccupied, Bruna has to realize that her search "ultimately involves--and is fundamentally about--an acceptance of fragmentary knowledge," (Heller 62) or less than "absolute truth." Notwithstanding the narrative search allows the author to come to grips with the "truth," which like the self, "is always self-made, always a reinterpretation of images and

events, a process of reorganizing the past and of altering the present, using both public and private perceptions" (Heller 62).

Yánez Cossío's fictional biography of Bruna becomes a search to reclaim both her lost and forgotten past. The journey begins with a search for her family heritage and bloodline. Significantly, Yánez Cossío recalls that Bruna, at a relatively early age, noticed that no one bothered to tell her anything about her past, so it took some time for her to absorb the present circumstances. "This primary experience of loss" (62) of self amid the present has caused Bruna to become "immediately connected to silence, the unnameable loss, and becomes the experience which [the author] must now name through the narrative process in order to assert linguistic control over her past and present self" (Heller 62): "Bruna optó por callarse, como siempre, y no insistir más" (5), and ". . . como era difícil, humanamente imposible explicar lo inexplicable, optó por el silencio" (5). According to Hélène Cixous, man is a product of the hierarchical Western society that has ensnared him and victimized him on a psychic level, trapping him in his own "rigid law of individuation" (96). Woman, on the other hand has managed to stay in touch with her bisexual unconscious by "liv[ing] in dreams, embodied but still deadly silent, in silences, in voiceless rebellions" (95). By writing and, consequently, breaking this silence woman can "displace this

'within,' and explode it, overturn it" (95), externalize the private world of the feminine Imaginary and "spread values over the world, un-quoted values that will change the rules of the game" (97). Henceforth Bruna was on her own to experience life's travails and she intuitively felt that "era el producto de la fábula, de la leyenda, del tiempo estancado como un charco de agua sucia, de la tristeza, de las sensaciones, de las montañas, pero se buscaba a sí misma, hasta encontrarse" (52). Furthermore, the absence of a past allows the feminist more freedom to forge authentic female identities, and marks the rebellion against male-perpetuated gender codes. When women find themselves without a verifiable past they are not restricted by an inherent identity, and this facilitates a declaration of freedom that both defines and defies the dispossession that society imposes on them because of gender. Bruna is forced to reinterpret and redefine history from her own perspective all the while involving herself in a kind of internalized self-combat in an attempt to resolve her inner turmoil.

In Yáñez Cossío's narrative, the selective and collective memories merge to give an overall picture of reality according to Bruna Catevil. The novel is a familial history, a chronicle in which all the characters serve as sources of important information for the reinterpretation of Bruna's past. Yáñez Cossío has constructed a narrative that uses memory as the very source of information through which

she relates the events. The novel develops as the author gathers scattered details of Bruna's past, and with these accumulated bits of information she conscientiously forms a representation of Bruna. In the beginning, Bruna is confronted by an uncertain and indifferent past, what Heller refers to as "a history composed essentially of doubts rather than certainties" (64).

The novel begins in italics, used to indicate that the narrative represents Bruna's stream of consciousness. In these first eleven pages the reader begins to understand the thoughts and perceptions of the protagonist, but does not understand at first reading the completeness of these introductory pages which examine and overview the entire novel.

Taking into account that the novel is a quest for the family history of Bruna Catevil, one must not overlook the feminist perspective of the narrative. Yáñez Cossío satirically denounces the prevalent attitude of the patriarchal majority: "Las mujeres eran unos ovarios gigantescos, vestidos de negro, donde se gestaban hijos en serie y supersticiones en masa" (54). These two elements, Bruna's search for truth and the feminist perspective, are intertwined and create a narrative that produces a reorganized past from Bruna's memory and feminist outlook.

Bruna as a young girl lives among her maternal relatives since all of the fathers of her family die at an

early age. The tíos, as Nina Scott says, "alude[n] a un triste destino endémico a la familia: en generaciones sucesivas los padres suelen morir muy jóvenes, dejando a su hijos a cargo de parientes incapacitados para asumir el papel pater- o maternal" (624). One must not exclude the importance of this reference to Bruna's past, although it may seem only a minor detail, since Bruna's quest for self will be formed with the absence of strong masculine role models. It is important to remember that using orphans is frequent among women writers since it facilitates rebellion or being different and "explains" why they want to be independent. Heller writes that "Orphanhood allows [the female quester] to remain an object of sentiment and fascination, while becoming potentially a subject of radical discontinuity, self-possession, and *self-creation*" [italics added] (27).

In a sense Bruna grows up like an orphan, as she does not have a father/mother relationship: "En la familia de Bruna los niños estuvieron condenados a la orfanidad. Casi todos los niños se criaron y se hicieron adultos absorbiendo por ósmosis los defectos de los tíos" (61) and "Parecía una maldición de los Illacatu el que sus descendientes fueron huérfanos y los niños se criaron entre tíos" (82). One of the great handicaps that Bruna has when she attempts to recall the past is the fact that she was an orphan: "Cuando habitaron la casa, Bruna conoció a los tíos alrededor de los

cuales pasó su infancia y sus primeras rebeldías" (44). The past history is usually transmitted via the collective memory of a family or else one may say that the chain of recollection has been broken. For it is normally the parents who teach the children the family history, and it is also the parents who set the children straight concerning their own childhood recollections, telling them that *this* cannot have happened the way they remember it. Parents and other relatives maintain collective memories that are aided by photographs and videos.

Yáñez Cossío is successful in incorporating a sense of loss into her creation of Bruna's past. Without doubt orphanhood has proven to be "both a handicap and a blessing" for the female who tries to recapitulate her past (Heller 63). Hence, the author moves forward and breaks new ground since her incorporation of loss "involves a radical departure from conventions of the past and the burdens of tradition which assign women to passive, subservient roles in the perpetuation of family name and legacy" (Heller 63). She, by necessity, must become more independent than normal gender codes might require. Yáñez Cossío realizes that Bruna has only two choices: "hero or victim" (Heller 63).⁵ Thus, "the possibility of the woman hero is contingent only on recognizing the aspirations of consciousness as human attributes" (Edwards 11). If Bruna cannot change her self-image, ultimately, she will resemble the city of Quito of

which the narrator says: "Nada había cambiado en la ciudad dormida. Los niños habían crecido y los viejos se habían muerto" (83). If she does not change, she will mature and age and die without anything being different.

Another important aspect of Bruna's quest is her desire to find out the origin of her family name "because awakening is followed by a *new self* and reality that articulates the new orientation of self and world" [italics added] (Christ 13).⁶ Yáñez Cossío shows the preoccupation that Latin Americans sometimes may have concerning their bloodline: "Bruna descendía de una raza desleal a la que todavía le dolía y empequeñecía el mestizaje, con dolor y un complejo de pecado original" (20). Since Ecuador is a pluricultural society, it is especially difficult to ascertain one's ancestry. Bruna's family originated as a result of the coming together of a Spanish man and an Indian woman, María Illacatu, who is likened to Palla Chimpú Ocllo, the Inca Garcilaso's mother. Another analogy may be made here between María Illacatu and doña Marina since the former loses her land, language and family by force to a conqueror.

María Illacatu's children changed their last name from García to reject their paternal ancestry although "los hijos de María Illacatu fueron más hijos del padre que de la madre" (25). Later they changes it to Villacatu:

Tuvieron conciencia del prestigio que les daba el oro tan fácilmente conseguido y se cambiaron el inócuo García a Villacatu: Aquí en España todo el mundo es García . . . Es

nombre de hidalgos . . . A nosotros nos
llaman Villacatu. Nuestra madre era de
sangre real . . . (25)

Their decision was formalized when they "decidieron de común
acuerdo en una reunión de familia, el cambio de García a
Villacatu . . . " (35). Later they changed their name to
Villa-Cató in an attempt to conceal their mestizo heritage:

Los hijos de éstos crecieron en la tierra de
la madre, y por lo tanto, maldijeron el día
que sus padres se cambiaron de apellido. En
la tierra donde vivían todo estaba por
hacerse, entonces adoptaron la denominación
de Villa-Cató, y a su vez, los hijos de
Villa-Cató zanjaron la debatida cuestión del
abolengo llamándose Catovil.

--Villacatu es indio, quichua puro. . .
--Somos dueños de seis villas.
--¡Villa-Cató, no suena mal . . . !
--Suena mejor Catovil!
--¡Eso es! ¡Qué alivio, perdimos el
Villacatu! (25)

For Bruna all this information is yet unknown although the
narrator has already informed the reader that:

Así se perdió toda referencia a la abuela
india, hasta que Bruna hizo su entrada en el
mundo de su propia vida cogida de la mano de
la vieja mamá Chana, y años más tarde, en el
mundo terrible e insospechado de los archivos
donde los borrones y las supersticiones
estaban hechas con tanto descaro, que eran lo
primero que se veía al abrir los empolvados
libros. (25)

Bruna has been searching to find her and her family's real
name, "un apellido ilustre, un apellido sobre el cual se
podían reconstruir a su gusto un pasado brillante" (20).

This can be compared to Mary Daly's comments concerning the
Genesis account. She says that "Adam's naming of woman and

the animals is paradigmatic of cosmic 'false meaning' in which women and the world have been named only from men's point of view" (Christ 24).⁷ However, a person's name is not so much a magic way of getting hold of oneself as it is the profound meaning of one's being. To name someone or something is to show one's superiority over him/her or it. Moreover, naming means asserting oneself as subject and designating the other as object.⁸ It is the greatest spiritual and personal virtue. Thus, being master of the words about oneself is in reality claiming to be one's own subject and completely autonomous. Bruna discovers where she came from and who she is when she opens "los empolvados libros" (25), and she "estremeció al descubrir su propia raíz; no era hija de sus padres, ni nieta de sus abuelos, ni sobrina de sus tíos. Era un ser en el aire" (26). She exclaims in a loud voice, "¡Por fin! Encontré lo que buscaba . . . Algo acerca de mis antepasados . . ." (26). Although excited and somewhat confused at finding out who she is not, she realizes the great discovery she has just made when she says, "Eso buscan muchos" (26). Even more to the point the narrator states that:

Desde que [Bruna] escribió a su nombre el apellido que en realidad le correspondía, sintió que sus pisadas en el mundo tenían más firmeza. Que no era un pájaro loco en el mundo volando a ras de tierra, como una hoja desprendida de cualquier árbol, sino un ser concreto. Descubrió el por qué de sus secretas rebeldías y se trazó su propia ruta como el único capitán de su propia nave; podía tener un árbol genealógico y olvidarse

que lo tenía. Podía recostarse a dormir a su sombra sin que se le cayeron las hojas, ni se doblaran las ramas. (26)

Here one sees the culmination of the quest for Bruna in discovering who she is. She realizes where she came from and more importantly that she is the "único capitán de su propia nave" (26). This statement is a milestone in the mind of Bruna since she now realizes that she will determine her own life. Nina M. Scott has offered a good explanation of this when she says that:

Como consecuencia de haberse familiarizado con el pasado, Bruna cambia su nombre, no como Camelia Llorosa, por un apodo que la hiciera más interesante, sino por sustituir el apellido <<Catevil>> por <<Illacatu,>> un acto que acepta y reivindica a la antepasada indígena. La autora nunca enfatiza la etimología de <<Catevil,>> que se podría traducir algo como <<mal mirar,>> característica que ejemplifica uno de los problemas fundamentales de la familia y otra razón para que Bruna se libre de este apellido. (628)

As Bruna learns of her new self she develops an awareness of her female identity, and it is "incongruous with conventional patterns and images of female representation" (Heller 73). Her identity is based on both race and gender since she also identifies with her Indian blood; not Spanish, not mestizo. Renaming herself, reclaiming her Indian last name and ancestry, she performs the symbolic act by which women free themselves from entrapment in narrative forms and social codes. "As women begin to name the world for themselves not only will they

create new life possibilities for women, they will also upset the world order that has been taken for granted for centuries" (Christ 24). Bruna did not invent a new name for herself as had Carmela de Villa-Cató (Camelia Llorosa) but found her answer in her past.⁹ Thus, Bruna rejects her surname Catevil in favor of her grandmother's name Ilacatu. Her true identity allows her to shake off her old made-up name and begin anew, to proclaim her freedom from the demands of external order as seen in this citation:

--¡Soy tu padre y me debes respeto!
 __¡Soy tu madre y me debes obediencia!
 __¡Soy tu jefe y me debes consultar todo lo
 que hagas! ¡Soy tu confesor y me debes decir
 tus más secretos pensamientos! (45)

Bruna, first freeing herself from external order, can then successfully free herself from an "internal psychic structure that no longer accepts an inappropriate self-image" (Heller 73). Therefore, it is obvious that "Patriarchal oppression bears heavily on individual women's possibilities for self identification" (Frye 62).

This quest narrative demonstrates two very important things. First, it indirectly underscores the power of language, especially phallogentric discourse, and shows how significant it is when a woman takes the first step toward renaming that which the text as a whole represents. By retelling the past from a feminist point of view, as does Bruna, the shaping of a new self-image and independence not based on patriarchal models becomes possible. Second, by

viewing the multiplicity of names given in Bruna, it is possible to acquire a new self identity since it suggests, as Ragussis explains an

individual's history requires a set of names, or a series of renamings that signal the different stages of a life story or fictional plot. The true "name," then, often functions as a series of names, a composite name . . . one must take them all . . . to have one's history. (10)

Remarkably, different names in a text allow the author to write up a life story, and to understand the way in which various acts of naming organize entire plots (Ragussis 11). However, plots of fiction are seldom resolved when the protagonist successfully finds out her original name, though sometimes a plot seems designed along such lines. This biography of Bruna's family conceptualizes history and is a quest to reevaluate and retell women's history. It is a feminist response to male-dominated history's claim to speak of universal experience. The feminization of quest does not use the same phallogocentric process to describe the process by which women are molded to fit expected patterns, but rather endeavors to transform patterns to make them more suitable and harmonious with developing female psyches.¹⁰ Thus, in Bruna, soroche y los tíos, the object is "to reclaim and renovate the landscape of memory, to create identity through rebirth by renaming, to set a precedent for women's power to make and choose the self" (Heller 75).

The Women Characters in Bruna, soroche
y los tíos

The men and women characters in Bruna occupy separate planes of experience, and they have opposing ideas of what it means to be either male or female. Several women characters exhibit behavior contrary to the traditional established norm in Ecuadorian society. Nina M. Scott has stated that:

La época histórica que les corresponde vivir a estos últimos--principios de este siglo--es, en la opinión de la autora, <<la época más impersonal y oscura de la ciudad dormida>>, especialmente *para las mujeres*, cuya única salida era <<el rezo y la tertulia>>. (627)

Yáñez Cossío has systematically shown the advancement of women in Bruna through the actions of the women characters:

Se trata de arquetipos femeninos que dan como resumen histórico de los roles limitados de la mujer. Son personajes que rechazan patrones sexuales establecidos, la debilidad y pasividad tradicionales; restricciones que por largo tiempo (hasta hoy incluso) se han mantenido en Ecuador y latinoamérica. (Vanégas Coveña 32)

These women characters, members of Bruna's family, have distinct attitudes and opinions of what it means to be a woman in their own lifetime. "Tres personajes son fundamentales en esta historia: María Illacatu, Camelia Llorosa y Bruna, como ejemplos de actitud valiente y definida en contra de la discriminación, la sumisión y la dependencia" (Vanégas Coveña 33).

María Illacatu, the despoiled Indian, cannot cross the culture gap between Spanish and Latin American life: "María Illacatu fue una adorable criatura petrificada en el medio de dos culturas que ni siquiera lucharon entre sí, porque se desconocieron siempre" (29). Yáñez Cossío makes some strong comparisons and implicitly criticizes the Spanish point of view: "--No se les puede querer, porque son indios." "--Hay que tratarlas duro, para que aprendan" (29). In response to the antagonistic attitude, María Illacatu rejects the Spanish culture as the narrator explains: "[María] Aprendió el idioma de los blancos pero se negó a hablarlo, las palabras le nacían en la garganta con un significado diferente" (31). Scott has written that: "Negándose a hablar castellano, María erige un muro consciente entre sí misma y el hombre que funciona para ella como <<su dueño y su verdugo>> (30)" (625). To her the new language and customs were oppressive and uncomfortable: "Los indios son brutos por naturaleza. El idioma de Castellano no se ha hecho para ellos" (33). There is a subtle comparison, I believe, inferred here between racial oppression and gender oppression. The author does not make the connection in so many words, but the idea is not out of the question. Furthermore María Illacatu not only has to deal with these racial disparities but also with gender disparities.

A striking similarity exists between María Illacatu and doña Marina, the mistress of Hernán Cortés. Like doña

Marina, whose lover took their son and returned to Spain, all the while rejecting her because of her Indian blood, María Illacatu experiences comparable maltreatment as her husband abandons her in favor of a *criolla*. María's erstwhile husband:

enriquecido con el oro de la ñusta que mantenía a su lado, volvió a cruzar los mares para acrecentar la leyenda de los indianos que encontraban tesoros en todas partes. No se llevó a la mujer porque pesaba demasiado, ella y su pena no cabían en ningún barco, ella y su soledad estaban pegadas a la tierra. (33)

Via a powerful metaphor the author tells of the separation of the children from their mother since the husband has all the power and makes all the decisions: "Pero se llevó la sangre de María Illacatu al quitarle los hijos" (33). Later the husband returns to "la ciudad dormida" but this time without the children: "Cuando el marido volvió, no traía a los hijos. Los había dejado al cuidado de los abuelos paternos" (33). The author demonstrates patriarchal abuse of power, undermining and negating the woman's parental right to raise her children. María defends herself and becomes the first in the line of women characters in Bruna who rebel in an attempt to counter mistreatment by men. María's life, however, does not end as she would have wished. She takes a pair of scissors and stabs her husband: "Las tijeras siguieron cortando y cortando hasta que alguien las arrancó del que hacía tiempo era cadáver" (35). After María kills her husband she commits suicide which is, as

Nina M. Scott calls it, an "arma emblemática de las dos culturas irreconciliables que la han destruido" (625).

Carmela Catovil, the second woman character, further widens the feminist vision of the author. "La primogénita, Carmela Llorosa" (62) must accept her uncle's wishes. Her life is the result of her uncle's understanding of the stratification of society based on social position. Carmela is not considered an individual but rather an object to be traded in exchange for monetary gain and social privileges. Carmela does not wish to journey to Spain on the back of a mule but she has no choice:

Carmela no pensó nunca en rebelarse, por entonces estaba incapacitada para autodeterminarse por sí misma, los principios con los cuales había nacido estaban fuertemente adheridos al sexo, tardaría mucho en comprender que, las condiciones de inferioridad en que había nacido por el hecho de ser mujer, no eran tales. (63)

Carmela's arranged marriage, *por poder* (65), to the count don Emiliano de la Reguera y Soria is not consummated because he is so old he dies before she arrives. Carmela decides to remain in Spain rather than undergo the hard journey back to her homeland. She slowly attains freedom and becomes totally independent at sixteen years of age when her old nanny dies. Her psyche is transformed as can be seen in this citation: "La niña se quedó sola en un mundo totalmente desconocido. Lo que equivalió a un segundo nacimiento sin padre, sin madre, sin nodriza, sin camisitas bordadas y sin canciones de cuna" (65). Carmela begins to

experience life far from her ever present guardians, and truly becomes ". . . una mujer libre y sin prejuicios" (65), able to "autodeterminarse por sí misma" (63).

Carmela as a free woman experiences life's pleasures: "Carmela de Villa-Cató se abrió paso a la vida, obedeciendo a los impulsos de su corazón que latía con un ritmo acelerado, fortificada por el dolor, la soledad y las adversidades esperaba la oportunidad de conquistar el mundo" (65). Yáñez Cossío thereby establishes that even one who was destined to follow tradition can overcome those barriers with a little luck. Due to the death of Carmela's husband, she is considered "viuda, soltera y casada al mismo tiempo" (68) and, hence, she gains a social position that affords her economic independence. Through this fortunate circumstance "se hizo mujer entera, absoluta, dueña de sus decisiones y sus actos . . . la primera y la única mujer de este tiempo que lanzó su grito de independencia en la ciudad dormida" (66). Carmela understands her position of independence and, as a consequence, changes her name to Camelia Llorosa. Her symbolic name change exemplifies what Adrienne Rich calls "el privilegio masculino de renombrar" (Scott 626). The apogee of Camelia's potential as a feminist thinker appears in her realization that other women might also be free: "se puso a pensar en que casi todas las mujeres eran como ella, o podían llegar a serlo, si se proponían" (67).

Camelia Llorosa's fortunate life takes a turn for the worse when at forty years old she decides to marry, choosing a spouse who is at best eccentric and at worst, psychoneurotic. Scott observes that: "cuando cumple cuarenta años Camelia por fin se casa con un pretendiente fogoso" (626). This marriage changes Camelia, as Beth Miller has observed, "marriage is a classic form of defeating the emancipated woman" (2). Furthermore, Heller observes that "Marriage offers [women] a point of rest, stasis, and implicit closure, however illusory or ambiguous the sense of an ending conveyed" (25). Camelia's husband tells her that: "juraba por todas las musas que se había mantenido soltero en espera de un amor apasionado y torrentoso, como sólo Camelia Llorosa podía ofrecerle" (76). Their marriage proves to be a disaster due to Camelia's husband's childish mannerisms and actions.¹¹ She finally leaves him, burns her books and enters a convent to escape from him, a decision that once again makes her "monja, viuda, soltera y casada . . ." (81). But Camelia has a strong spirit and refuses to be beaten, especially by a man. When her husband dies, she agrees to raise her sister's children, Francisco, Catalina and Clarita, and her independent air intensifies. Her experiences have made her "silenciosa, austera, y fría" (83), and she behaves excessively, acting out her strong anti-masculine attitudes:

Los accesos de Camelia Llorosa era temibles,
no podía vivir en una casa donde dejó de ser

quien era; la vida le pedía demasiado, aún no se había perdonado el haberse dejado engañar por un hombrecillo insignificante; y su desatino no paró allí, pues habiendo experimentado por sí misma la inconsecuencia masculina, generalizó en su desprecio a todo lo que implicara el sexo fuerte. De este modo llegó a obligar que sobrino Francisco se vistiera de niña hasta el día en que entró al colegio . . . No quiero en esta casa nada masculino. (84)

The rest of the cast of women characters, besides Bruna, have unique characteristics but contribute little to the feminist struggle for freedom. In fact, most of them opt for passivity:

Dentro de la familia de Bruna, las mujeres --a excepción de Camelia Llorosa que se independizó del ambiente-- todas fueron víctimas, o juguetes de las circunstancias, por la cobardía que las mantuvo atadas a los hombres y por el egoísmo de ellos, que nunca quisieron soltarles de la mano. Entre los hombres existió más variedad que entre las mujeres, quienes vivieron aferradas a los convencionalismos y se dejaron influenciar por el mal del soroche. (69)

Although no other character reveals feminist leanings, besides Camelia, and Bruna with her quest for self, several characters do reject patriarchal pressures. Among them is Bruna's aunt Catalina, an over zealous Catholic who spends her entire life counting "la gran acumulación de indulgencias" (156-57). So extreme is her obsession that "se vio obligada a contratar los servicios de un joven versado en teneduría de libros para que le ayudara a llevar el negocio de su salvación" (157). Her rejection of males and complete disassociation with men makes her extremely

misanthropic. Like Camelia before her, she develops an aversion to masculine attire and, makes her young employee dress in girl's clothing although:

el joven enrojeció ante la propuesta y amenazó dejarla plantada con la carga de números. Entonces consiguió, después de muchos rodeos y tira y afloja, que el joven se vistiera durante las horas de trabajo con un delantal azul-negro que le tapaba los brazos y le llegaba hasta los tobillos. (158)

Tía Catalina "no toleraba la presencia de hombres en torno suyo porque los consideraba más concupiscentes y más en armonía y con más entendimiento con el demonio que las mujeres" (158). Especially interesting in the presentation of tía Catalina is her antagonistic attitude toward men since her beliefs are not based on experience but come from second-hand sources. She never was married but can see and does, in fact, make some valid comments concerning men's and women's roles in the family relationship. For example, the narrator explains that:

Le era difícil admitir la existencia de mujeres que tuvieron que vivir solas, abandonadas a la lascivia de los hombres, y consideraba necesario para el respaldo de la familia un ser masculino, aunque su presencia fuera sólo de estampa como fue el respaldo que tuvo en el hermano maniático. (157)

Tía Catalina's mania has something of Freudian apprehension and puritanical fear (often attributed to spinsters); her negative predisposition toward men is a reaction against their lasciviousness and what she perceives as a generalized lack of moral self control. In family structures where the

men are immoral, she questions the value of the traditional male support that society requires. The male should be a role model for both wife and children, both emotionally and spiritually. Yáñez Cossío thus reveals the degradation of the traditional man/family relationship, and tía Catalina's mania is directly attributed to the gap between the ideal and reality.

Bruna comes to understand the distinction made between the male and female gender when her brother Gabriel is expected to study in Paris to fulfill his masculine destiny. Gerda Lerner says that this is an example of male hegemony over the symbol system and it took two forms: educational deprivation over women and male monopoly over definition (129). Octavio Paz states concerning this that: "En un mundo hecho a la imagen de los hombres, la mujer es sólo un reflejo de la voluntad y querer masculinos . . . La feminidad nunca es un fin en sí mismo, como lo es la hombría" (32). Bruna must resign herself to the female role. Bruna's traditional family thinks of the offsprings' future only in terms of the male position in society:

Los padres de Bruna se incomodaban cuando oían a la tía el deseo de que uno de sus hijos fuera perito contador. María 23 y su esposo querían que sus hijos fueran profesionales, y no les gustaba la idea de que tía Catalina se hiciera cargo de ninguno de ellos, a pesar de que ella había prometido que la educación correría por su cuenta y que sería en un país de más allá de los mares. (167)

Taking into account that this decision-making process follows patriarchal models, Catherine McKinnon says that: "Male power is real; it is not just what it claims to be, namely, the only reality. Male power is myth that makes itself true" (28). The decision is made concerning Gabriel not because he possesses more intellectual promise than Bruna, but because he is male: "El destino de Gabriel se solucionó de una manera casual el día en que se encontraba toda la familia reunida con padres, abuelos, tíos, y nietos" (167). Furthermore the family decides the career he will pursue: "De hecho, sin ninguna discusión de las que acostumbraban a celebrar para aligerar el peso de las horas estancadas, los mayores se pusieron de acuerdo: el chico no sería abogado, ni perito contador, sería ingeniero" (168). Gabriel himself is overwhelmed that his destiny is planned for him: "El chico sobre cuya cabeza se había hecho el pacto, se entretenía en urgarse las narices, ajeno a lo que sus progenitores trazaban sobre su futuro" (169).

Bruna undergoes a crisis in which she questions the validity of traditional family norms. She laments while seated on "la pila" (169):

--Un chico puede ir a Paris, o al fin del mundo. No tiene una virginidad que cuidar, ha nacido con el privilegio de ser hombre. Mientras ella no puede ir sola del colegio a la casa que dista pocas cuadras. Ha nacido con el estigma de ser mujer, está condenada al ghetto. Contra su virginidad atentan los que pasan por su lado, los pájaros que están parados en los alambres de la luz, los árboles con sus brazos alargados, los montes

cuando hacen sus juegos de luces y juegan al
escondite, el arco-iris y todas las personas
y seres . . . (169)

Bruna sees the discrimination against herself and favoring Gabriel as based solely on gender, clearly understanding it as sexism, and she intellectually and morally rejects the arrangement. Society is constructed around a masculine hierarchy that inevitably delegates women to a lower status. Brunna points out the freedom males concede to one another, and their oppression of females under the guise of protection against others like themselves. Unfortunately Brunna lives in a society that has inherited and continues to perpetuate Spain's long tradition of placing the burden of familial honor as the embodiment of honor for the house and the entire patriarchal geneology. From the time of the Renaissance, woman's rights were seen as marginal or non-existent while men were the measure of all things. Woman was a possession, something to be owned and guarded, a hallmark of masculine pride. The feminine gender had few rights as the Fuero Juzgo of 1291 states:

If a father kills a daughter who commits adultery in his house, he will not be tried or sentenced. But if he does not want to kill her, he can do whatever he wants to her and to her adulterer, and it is all in his power. And if her brothers or uncles find her in adultery after her father's death, they can do whatever they want with her and the man. (Sternbach 272)

Bruna finds herself in a comparable position because from at least colonial times Latin American women have had their

roles stipulated for them, including a combination of Spanish and indigenous moral values that became the norm for womanhood. Paz says that these morals are "una gama que va desde el pudor y la 'decencia' hasta el estoicismo, la resignación y la impasividad" (32). In Bruna the heroine must assume a role that she was born into, one in which she has no control whatsoever. Yáñez Cossío clearly reveals the discriminatory and unequal circumstances resulting from rigid gender rules. Thus Bruna is assigned her role, as Latin American women were assigned positions by a system that devalued them and forced them to play submissive roles in the Spanish tradition: "Pero la mujer no sólo debe ocultarse sino que, además, debe ofrecer cierta impasividad sonriente al mundo exterior" (32). Bruna, the offspring of the Spanish and Latin American systems, is considered, since she is female, to be vulnerable, delicate, subject to all dangers, particularly from men who seek her downfall. Thus she sees men as privileged since they have freedom and rights to education and self-determination. Bruna has no other manner to judge the conditions of her life because she, from as far back as she can remember, has received very strong moral indoctrination. She was taught that women are to be pure, obedient, submissive and monogamous. Bruna sees nothing inherently wrong with this belief system since, after all, it comes from the Bible, but feels that men have abused their God-given right as head of the household.¹²

She understands the system to be one-sided and oppressive, so construed as to make one gender more powerful than the other. Patriarchal domination is pervasive due to the fact that it has been in control for centuries. Only in the last thirty years has this patriarchal control been questioned since it is so ingrained into society's values and behavior.

Bruna's realization that she "ha nacido con el estigma de ser mujer" (169) would agree with Octavio Paz's statements concerning woman as *el Enigma* since man does not understand her: "La mujer, otro de los seres que viven aparte, también es figura enigmática. Mejor dicho, es el Enigma. A semejanza del hombre de raza o nacionalidad extraña, incita, y repele" (59-60). Men have long continued to foster the masculine agenda at the expense of the female. Bruna questions such attitudes from an extremely commonsensical point of view. Important in Yáñez Cossío's novels is the complete feasibility of the reader's understanding the message. Nothing is left to conjecture; readers can scarcely help but conclude that Bruna is unfairly discriminated against because of gender.

Another character appears only as an incidental component of an event that occurs to Bruna's uncle Panchito. While a minor episode in the novel, it offers an excellent picture of woman's marginal place in Latin American society. Uncle Panchito, who is searching for a buried treasure "decidió apoderarse del tesoro haciendo los preparativos con

minuciosidad que indicaban los libros de la época sobre los desenterramientos de tesoros" (87). The unearthing of the treasure is complicated by the unexpected intrusion of Uncle Panchito's wife. Upon finding the treasure, Uncle Panchito shouts and awakens his wife, who comes running to see what all the commotion is about: "Los gritos fueron tales que despertaron a la mujer de Panchito, a quien se le había prohibido asistir al desenterramiento del tesoro por el hecho de ser mujer (Las mujeres impedían el buen éxito del trabajo)" (89). The parenthetical comment ironically spoofs the alienation men desire in certain areas, especially work. Also subtly undermined is men's notion that women should obey them without question. Panchito's superstitious fears are realized, although his wife is clearly not to blame. The episode ends with the death of Uncle Panchito: "Los doctores dijeron que antimonio del tesoro había penetrado en sus pulmones, introduciéndose por la ternilla izquierda de la nariz que estaba negra, como si hubiera sido chamuscada" (89).

Still another woman character plays a marginal role that offers more than a marginal message. She is married to Bruna's brother Gabriel, and is a dancer:

La jovencita bailarina también tenía su historia: sus padres habían muerto en la guerra y fue recogida por unos vecinos que la metieron de novicia en un convento de monjas. Un día oyó música gitana al pie de las tapas del convento. Trepó los muros para ver de lo que se trataba y vio bailar a los gitanos. En ese mismo momento adivinó que el mundo era

grande y abierto, y sin pensarlo dos veces se arrancó a tirones los hábitos que llevaba, saltó la tapia y se unió a los gitanos para seguir bailando por el mundo, hasta el día en que se topó con Gabriel y vio en el fondo de sus ojos una soledad tan intensa que la dejó pasmada, y uniendo su destino al del muchacho, rompieron juntos un cántaro y mezclaron unas gotas de sangre que se sacaron con el filo de una hoja de Gillette. (174)

She is the catalyst that awakens Bruna's consciousness regarding women's rights. In *la ciudad dormida* women were unable to break the hold that had enclosed them for years rendering it almost unthinkable to do anything unconventional. Agustín Yáñez's Al filo de agua describes the problem facing women in Mexico:

El deseo, los deseos disimulan su respiración. Y hay que pararse un poco para oírla, para entenderla tras de las puertas atrancadas, en el rastro de las mujeres con luto, de los hombres graves, de los muchachos colorados y de los muchachillos pálidos. Hay que oírla en los rezos y cantos eclesiásticos a donde se refugia. Respiración profunda, respiración de fiebre a fuerza contenida. Los chiquillos no pueden menos gritar, a veces. Trepidan las mujeres. ¡Cantaran las mujeres! No, nunca, en la iglesia los viejos coros de generación en generación aprendidas. (5)

Agustín Yáñez describes women members of the pious society *Hijas de María Inmaculada* "whose black-robed young women exercise a rigid discipline over dress, movements, speech, thought and feeling" (Yáñez/Britton intro). Clear similarities exist between women's position in Mexican and Ecuadorian society. Bruna faces some of the same problems as portrayed in Al filo del agua when she states, when fed

up with the town's sententious comments concerning Gabriel and his wife, "¡Estoy harta hasta la coronilla de tanto rezo!" (175). Her companion warns, as anticipating the relatives' reaction, "¡Bruna, te vas a condenar!" (175). As a consequence the narrator makes an extremely valid comment concerning people's attitudes:

La cumbre de la civilización debería ser que cada uno viviera su propia vida como le viniera en gana. Los demás, deberían aceptar los gustos de las gentes con una tolerancia más inclinada al amor que a la indiferencia, buscando en las fallas y debilidades ajenas las implicaciones, no las causas. En la ciudad dormida nunca se llegaría a eso, pero valía la pena vivir, tan sólo para intentarlo. (175)

As can be seen in the last phrase, *tan sólo para intentarlo*, the author is suggesting that women do, in reality, have a purpose in life and that purpose is worth living for. Bruna personifies the possibility of change:

Bruna pasaba el tiempo, se entretenía, se aburría y hacía de todo un poco con las chicas de su edad que vivían encandiladas bajo la luz de sus convicciones, las que nunca se habían atrevido a ponerlas en la tela de juicio por temor de que un rayo de luz le cayera del cielo y castigara la osadía de atreverse a pensar por sí mismos. (227)

Thinking for oneself is exactly what the author is advocating. She is rejecting the passivity and acceptance of the male-dominated hierarchical ordering of things.

In Bruna "la protagonista lucha por salir de un medio estático y anacrónico, cuyos prejuicios y tradiciones amenazan destruirla" (Handelsman 894). Thus Bruna

successfully tears herself away from the oppressive system she so avidly dislikes when she fully understands that "la vida era el supremo don que podía tener y por el cual valía la pena hacerse todas las magulladuras posibles" (234). At the same time Bruna only is successful in the sense that she has freed herself from the *soroche*, "pero [she feels] al final íntegra y contenta de sí misma . . . plenamente ser humano, persona, mujer" (234). She has not, however, achieved economic and emotional independence as María does in Yo vendo unos ojos negros. Scott writes that there is a problem with the end of Bruna since "Yáñez Cossío libera a Bruna de esta herencia pero acaba por relegarla a una especie de limbo, tierra de nadie. Bruna anda por el mundo sin destino o medios económicos aparentes. Su vida se limita a entregarse a experiencias siempre nuevas" (628). Thus the last impression left on the reader's mind as the novel ends is Bruna's thoughts: "Sabía que el mundo es grande, que los seres humanos tienen mucha más estatura de la que se ve, y que el hombre y sólo el hombre es la medida de todas las cosas . . ." (235).

Notes

¹Soroche refers "al fondo quiteño de la novela" (Scott 624). The word *soroche* is used in the novel to refer to a sickness that overcomes one due to Quito's high altitude. Vanégas Coveña writes: "Sin duda estamos ante un término simbólico, relacionado con el fondo quiteño en el que se desarrolla la trama. El soroche: los efectos corrosivos del colonialismo, los prejuicios y complejos que van dando forma a la vida pasiva, retraída y falsa de los personajes" (24). When Camelia Llorosa is affected by it, the narrator says that: "Empezaban los primeros síntomas visibles del soroche, tenía una venda de cemento puesta sobre los ojos" (76). Symbolically, however, the *soroche* represents social injustice.

²The feminized quest romance lies in contradistinction to men's version of history. Men's history has been legitimized as the "universal truth" while it has marginalized women to civilization and made them victims of the historical process.

³Annis Pratt in her article "Women and Nature in Modern Fiction," Contemporary Literature, 13 (1972), pp. 477, 484, describes Joseph Campbell's delineation of the hero's goal: The "hero comes to 'know' woman through her the natural world, which the heroine already possesses as an extension of herself. Campbell's hero, perceiving this feminine phenomenon of coextension with nature, uses the woman as a portal through which the green world is perceived." In the male *Bildungsroman*, the quest for reunion with nature through woman results in the progression of the young protagonist from one woman to another until he discovers the one who fulfills his requirement that "his heroine and the green world [be] coextensive parts of each other but rightfully subordinate to him."

⁴A feminized quest-romance narrative "does not describe the process by which women are molded to fit expected patterns, but rather attempts to transform patterns to make them more appropriate and compatible with developing female psyches" (Heller 31). Edwards writes that "Heroism . . . is a human necessity, capable of being represented equally by either sex" (11). Heroines, like heroes, are not normal people. While in a repressively patriarchal culture most women submit docilely, but some heroines adopt characteristics of the dominant sex to achieve their goals. Womanly behavior was characterized then, as now, by submissiveness and modesty. Heroines who do not exhibit "normal" female behavior and act outside the stereotype are classified as masculine. Remember that Aristotle judged it

inappropriate for a female character to be portrayed as manly or clever.

⁵Dana Heller states that women represent the totality of what can be known, and the hero is the one who comes to know (2-3). Her departure from the traditional usage of the terms "hero" and "heroine" is her starting point. She writes that traditionally "Women's roles remain significant only in relation to the heroes whose identities they strengthen: they have no desires except to be chosen and adored by heroes (4). She makes the woman into a hero since she is the master of her own self discovery.

⁶"Women's new naming of self and world suggests directions for social change" (Christ 14).

⁷Genesis 3:20 states that "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living" (NIV). Notice also that throughout the Bible, a person's name always tells of his spiritual reality. This accounts for Jacob's destiny as much as for the mystery of the act in which God reveals his name to Moses--YHWH--: the one who is (Ex. 3:14). He causes to be, He is He. This Word's meaning is unfathomable, yet through it God reveals himself to humanity. The pattern applies to the new name to be received at the end of time by one who has conquered, the one who will be written in the book of life. These names are only words, but it is not possible that the word be any one taken at random, or that its meaning fluctuate with the wind. We cannot create an arbitrary language for ourselves that would not matter, so that we could after all replace the Word with a drawing and someone's name with a picture or a registration number.

⁸Things are designated because they are lacking.

⁹"El nombre de Camelia Llorosa le venía de sus largas y espesas pestañas, ennegrecidas con pomadas elaboradas con la médula de huesos humanos y el pabilo de las velas de sebo--que eran el alumbrado corriente de la gente pobre de la ciudad (74).

¹⁰The use of the term "phallogocentrism" is employed here, as Toril Moi uses it: "[to] denote a system that privileges the phallus as the symbol or source of power. The conjuncture of logocentrism and phallogocentrism is often called, after Derrida, *phallogocentrism*" (179).

¹¹Carmela's nameless husband continues the line of male characters who are without purpose in life (as García in Yo vendo). They are often weak and ambivalent to family problems. Nina M. Scott has written that "los varones de

la familia Catevil exhiben características débiles o desagradables, entre ellas la brutalidad física, el fanatismo religioso, la arrogancia clasista, la excentricidad y hasta el retraso mental" (624). Also Vanégas Coveña writes: "Los personajes masculinos, generalmente, caen en la locura, víctimas de alguna manía ridícula (cultivar rañas, coleccionar cajas de fósforos, tejer una alfombra infinita" (33). Here Camelia Llorosa's husband is absolutely out of touch with reality. One may question Camelia's reason for marrying him since Yánez Cossío does not offer any explanation (it apparent that only one masculine character in Yo vendo is capable of sustaining a healthy man/woman relationship, Bruna's brother Gabriel). Thus it is a curious situation since Carmela was so independent and romantic ("Era un Quijote femenino en busca de una quimera") (80), that she would choose a man like him. On their wedding night he had her sing "una ronda infantil" (78) all night:

--"Buenos días mi señorita,
 --Matan-tirun, tirun-lá.
 --Qué deseaba su señorita.
 --Matan-tirun, tirun-lá.
 --Yo deseo una de sus hijas.
 --Matan-tirun, tirun-lá.
 --En qué oficio la pondría.
 --Matan-tirun, tirun-lá...". (78-79)

One of the best examples of the author's perception of men is when she states that: "Pasaron otras noches y Camelia Llorosa empezaba a desesperarse y a intuir el mundo subdesarrollado de su marido" (79). Yánez Cossío's masculine characters are often seen as underdeveloped both intellectually and morally.

¹²The term "head of the family" comes from the Bible. It is used in Ephesians chapter five to denote the relationship between God, Christ and man. In the economy of God, Christ is the head of man, man is the head of woman, and God is the head of Christ. There is a misunderstanding of the concept of *headship* as it relates to man and woman. In order to understand this relationship it is necessary to see Christ's role. Christ has a responsibility toward the church because He has been given headship over it to see to its needs and to minister to it and to care for it. In the same way a husband is the head over his own wife. The idea is not that he has a right to physically and emotionally abuse her because later on in the same chapter of Ephesians chapter five, the apostle Paul says that the husband and wife are to be in subjection to one another. So each man is subject to his wife. He must listen to her ideas and concepts of things. The husband and wife are to make

decisions mutually. The fact that man is the *head* over her indicates the fact that man is responsible for her care, her keep, and ministering to her needs. Thus this *headship* referred to here carries the idea of responsibility rather than being able to quash woman. The term head implies that man has the responsibility of sustaining, giving aid, and assisting woman. In the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians one reads that when woman fulfills the purposes of God for her life she glorifies Him. Now simply because woman occupies this position does not mean that she is not any less intelligent nor does it mean that her position is not important, nor does it mean that she can be abused by man either in or outside the marriage relationship.

CHAPTER III

THE BIRTH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
FEMININE CONSCIOUSNESS IN YO
VENDO UNOS OJOS NEGROS

There are without doubt two distinct types of conception of literature: literature of evasion and the other, the literature of transformation.¹ Ernesto Sábato once said about writing that:

Hay probablemente dos actitudes básicas de ficción: o se escribe por juego, por entretenimiento propio y de los lectores, para pasar y hacer pasar el rato, para distraer o procurar unos momentos de agradable evasión; o se escribe para buscar la condición del momento, empresa que ni sirve de pasatiempo, ni es juego, ni es agradable. (30)

Therefore feminist literature has as an end, as Françoise Perus states, "la transformación de ideas, imágenes y representaciones y [it operates], por lo tanto, a nivel de la ideología" (29). If one accepts this idea, following Perus' line of thought, it is possible to assume that the literary act of writing at the ideological level is either done consciously or unconsciously by the author as an activity of social consciousness. The feminist author wants to remove her characters from the society intellectually in order for them to overcome patriarchal society's oppressive nature.² Yáñez Cossío creates a feminocentric novel that empowers and transforms female experiences. Raúl Olmedo affirms that "El individuo solo no existe: existe rodeado

por una sociedad, inmerso en una sociedad, sufriendo en una sociedad, luchando o escondiéndose en una sociedad" (12).

One must take into account that the author is an intellectual, like any other intellectual, who plays roles that transcend the social environment and that are differentiated from those of the common individual precisely through transcendency. It is this responsibility that the author carries: "de organizar y dirigir el trabajo manual, pero al mismo tiempo cumple el papel de mediador [. . .] entre las clases dominantes y las dominadas" (12). Olmedo continues in the same essay with these thoughts:

No existe un intelectual inocente. Sin embargo, el intelectual puede tomar consciencia de este papel que cumple y puede luchar, organizando con otros trabajadores, intelectuales o manuales, para combatir o para sostener más activamente al sistema de dominación que funciona gracias, en parte, a él. (12)

From this perspective, how can one classify the literary task of Alicia Yáñez Cossío? Does her work contribute to sustain the mechanisms of the dominant system or, on the contrary, does she combat them? What is her position with respect to women's rights? This chapter will attempt to analyze her function as a writer, and as a woman as it relates to the feminine consciousness. It is possible to discern the presence of traditional attitudes about the feminine psyche at the same time as one observes how those attitudes provide the basis for a new form of literature and a new method of character development. Yáñez Cossío sets a

new foundation of traditional attitudes in her literary work. Her characters share in a conflict which is an inescapable part of their attempts to defend the feminine consciousness by defining it, clarifying it, and even perhaps idealizing it. The conflict results from their need to retain the traditional division of consciousness--masculine reason and feminine intuition--and yet assert the equality of the feminine component. William Beatty Warner has said that "Woman can begin to exist in a new way through a process or method called 'consciousness raising'" (99). Yánez Cossío's narratives develop through this same type of consciousness-raising, with their main theme being the development of the "feminine consciousness." Her narratives continue the revolutionary tradition in fiction with a shift in perspective by shifting from a "masculine" to a "feminine" method of exposition. The definition that I wish to employ of the "feminine consciousness" in this chapter is a limited one. I shall show how Yánez Cossío creates and develops the feminine consciousness as the faculty of awareness or the faculty that perceives that which exists. The novels of Yánez Cossío demonstrate that the "feminine consciousness" is not a passive state, but an active process. She shows how woman is a product of a consciousness derived from her awareness of the external world dominated by masculinity. Virginia Woolf put it this way:

The ancient consciousness of woman, changed with suffering and sensibility, and for so many ages dumb, seems in them to have brimmed and overflowed and uttered a demand for something - they scarcely know what - for something that is perhaps incompatible with the facts of human existence. (204)

Yo vendo unos ojos negros is a novel in which the author does not rely on the historical theme of love in order to give meaning to the female characters. This is significant because in European and Latin American literatures, a major element has traditionally been the theme of love that has defined the female character. In other words, feminine existence in Europe and in Latin America has been in large part determined by the success or failure of the love relationship with the other sex. From this paradigm one can see the philosophical position of Simone de Beauvoir.³ Yáñez Cossío breaks the mold and goes beyond this feminine problematic. She does not, in any sense, define women as dependent on men nor does she make the narrative structure revolve around masculine activities:

Tal vez llegue un día en que las mujeres caigan en cuenta de lo que significa ser mujer: algo más que ser humano con la misión de dirigir la vida que tan fácilmente se desliza cuando se ama, y no objetos ávidos de llenarse con las bagatelas que se ocurren a un diseñador cualquiera para acelerar la producción de un panzudo fabricante. (47-48)

On another occasion Yáñez Cossío makes a statement implicitly questioning society's traditional idea, "Que la función de la mujer en el mundo es casarse y tener hijos"

(76). She places the statement among other traditionally held beliefs in an attempt to show how one accepts things without questioning their validity. Yáñez Cossío proposes that the feminine consciousness cannot be sought through the sexual nature of femininity at all but through an "awakening" that describes the experience of enlightenment. Carol Christ observes that this "awakening" is "the movement from conventional notions of the meaning of life to a more direct experience of the 'really real' or ground of being, from ordinary to extraordinary consciousness, from bondage to freedom" (18). This process "involves a transition in consciousness and a new perception of reality" (Christ 18). This can be seen in one of the questionnaires that María is asked to fill out. The question is: "¿Cuál es la función de la mujer en el mundo actual? (75). Yáñez Cossío wants individuals and especially women to question the epistemological system that they have inherited from society. The novel recreates reality to show how and in what manner the prevalent epistemologies have neglected women as individuals and as a group. Yáñez Cossío believes that woman must not conform to the inherited oppressive situation because if she does she will never "descubre sus necesidades" (Handelsman 895) and more importantly if women do not "insisten en cultivarlas, el único futuro que le[s] espera es el de su propia anulación" (Handelsman 895). In

Female and Male in Latin America Jane Jaquette points out that:

A whole generation of North American women have become convinced of their powerlessness relative to males and have moved to destroy the role differentiation they perceive as its cause. The Latin American woman correctly perceives role differentiation as the key to her power and influence. Even the notions of 'separateness' and 'mystery' of woman, which are viewed in the North American context as male propaganda chiefly used to discriminate against women, are seen in the Latin American context as images to be enhanced, not destroyed. (20)

Thus Yánez Cossío advocates a new direction in which all individuals must begin to question their beliefs and assumptions concerning a woman's position in society ("role differentiation"). In order to bring this out in Yo vendo, Yánez Cossío, through María, shows the uncertainty in the feminine consciousness toward this new mindset as María reflects upon her decision to leave her husband, "y hasta se arrepintió de haberse separado de García porque en el fondo lo único que era, era una mujer absurdamente tímida e inútil" (52). However, María is a symbol of female self-awareness and potentiality on the eve of a new era. Hence there is a rejection of "the sweet and submissive role" (Steiner 51). There is also the prevalent idea, which has much to do with women's decisions, that "una mujer no amada es una muerta en vida" (Gnutzmann 93).

This timidity and uselessness that María feels in her heart is unwarranted, but it is the only state of mind she

has experienced (this conception is partly due to the societal conditioning she has received). Her dependence on García is an inborn concept that has been a part of her life since she was a child. Her youth was spent getting ready for marriage, having and raising children, not working or making a living outside the home:

le educaron sólo para casarse con un García,
ni siquiera con otro, porque creyó
ingenuamente que si esperaba un año más se
iba a quedar sin pan ni pedazo, en la percha,
sola, solterona, sañuda, sin apoyo, sin el
cambio de su apellido, intacta, indefensa,
indeseada. (35)

Actually María notices something that has been a part of Hispanic society for a long time. First, she sees that without a husband she is worthless and that her value as a human being is measured by her ability to get a husband. Second, considering the type of instruction females have historically received, it is not surprising that they have remained in the position in which María finds herself now as a result of her separation: "sola, sin apoyo" and "indefensa" (35). The prevailing ideology is summarized by De Leonardo when she says that women are adorned with "ropajes míticos destinados a mantener a la mujer enajenada en la función de madre-esposa" (4). María Rosa Fiscal has observed that this kind of treatment supports the thesis that "la mujer está destinada a conservar la especie . . . debe limitarse a desenvolverse en el seno del hogar y en el cuidado de la familia" (35). It is this mentality that

María is rebelling against. Therefore she finds herself in a real dilemma. Should she stay with García because it is expected of her, because it is something that is more economically comfortable or should she rid herself of this weak man and move ahead to self-sufficiency and economic independence?

María decides in favor of the latter, which marks external and formal change, when "Se quitó el 'de' de su apellido de casada y lo tiró por encima del hombro . . . porque la mujer no es la propiedad de nadie" (17-18). Henceforth María has a new vision for her life. Immediately Yáñez Cossío relates this rejection of name to the rejection of domesticity and its chains: "Al caer, el 'de' produjo un estallido de cacerolas de aluminio rodando por las escaleras de la casa: pram pata pram" (17-18). Her new situation produces a sense of panic in María because:

sin el apellido de casada se sintió desnuda como si acabara de nacer y sin los pañales adecuados para su estatura y sin sus padres que hace tantos años le ayudaron a dar los primeros pasos en el trillado camino de ser mujer para casarse y tener hijos, casa y marido, marido hijos y casa, hijos casa marido. (18)

The reaction is entirely reasonable, under the circumstances, but it calms her initial excitement, as she realizes her journey will not be an easy one: "Entonces, así desnuda y con frío, se armó de un valor netamente femenino que consistía en dejar a un lado un corazón entero y totalmente domesticado, un corazón cosificado y tibio" (18).

With the realization firmly ground into her consciousness she understands that she must earn her living as a woman in a man's world (actually it is more than that since it refers to the psychic and emotional repercussions that result from this experience), "ahora debía educar a su nuevo corazón que a veces le saltaba como un sismógrafo asustado" (29).

Alone, needing some means of supporting herself, she must begin anew, "María estaba seca y limpia de las aguas de la charca y en cierto modo había saldado cuentas con la vida" (29), and María "Debía solucionar el problema vital del sustento" (29). These practical considerations give María the initiative to "salir del charco" (Handelsman 896). The difficulty lies in the fact that María finds herself at a disadvantage due to her background and educational limitations. The phrase from the previous citation "en cierto modo había saldado cuentas con la vida" actually conveys the notion that her account now has a zero balance. María has paid dearly with her life since she has lost part of it caring for her husband who married her looking for another mother: "Metió la ración en un biberón y empezaron a comer en un silencio quebradizo, absurdamente humano, brutalmente humano, brutalmente real como comer y tragar llorando" (102), but she rejects him "devolviendo al hijo que no quería crecer al regazo de la madre" (29).

Until this point in María's consciousness all the changes that she must undertake have been like a dream,

something unreal and imaginary. Now she finds herself existentially "la propietaria de sus actos pero estaba sola entre noventa y nueve mil gentes quienes le ignoraban por completo" (29). This new independence is completely new to her as she begins looking for a job by asking herself "Y ahora, ¿qué hago"? (29). She is described at one point as "en suspenso, sin saber por dónde empezar" (51). María then requests help from *la mala amiga* but she knows little more than María: "Entonces la "mala amiga" que era experto en lanzar ideas, pero que no tenía ninguna experiencia en soluciones prácticas, le puso ante los ojos las páginas de anuncios clasificados" (29). Yáñez Cossío implicitly calls attention to the absence of a unified women's movement that can counsel women like María who are just beginning to liberate themselves as the narrator says: "Y qué limpia, íntegra y cabal sería la nueva mujer liberada de esas miserables cadenas!" (48). Echoing this same thought twelve years later Yáñez Cossío states that "Cuántos de los movimientos feministas se quedan en nada, por ejemplo, ahora entre la gente de mi generación, cuántos matrimonios deshechos, cuántos problemas y generalmente ¿por qué? porque se mete de por medio una mujer" (Angulo 48). Furthermore she observes that:

Yo pienso que si nosotros tenemos eso de que todavía somos un grupo que estamos tratando de superarnos porque hemos sido oprimidas, hemos sido vejadas, no hemos tenido las mismas oportunidades que ellos, ¿cómo es posible que entre nosotras no hay ese sentido

de solidaridad que debe haber entre los oprimidos? (Angulo 48)

There is no doubt that Yo vendo is a novel that from the outset lays the foundation for a feminine consciousness so that women may become aware of their exploitation under patriarchal rule. The feminine characters in Yo vendo establish a slow independence from masculine domination, in which the narrator expresses in these terms: ". . . que el mundo era mundo para reinar como faraones natos" (8). Women must not only overcome their own conditioning and lack of professional preparation, but must combat male complacency with the status quo. Being "macho" is the ultimate achievement for the male in the Hispanic society of Quito as seen in Yáñez Cossío's generic picture of men which is both humorous and sobering⁴:

. . . que el macho de biceps desarrollados que pif paf en la cara de las mujeres, del mujeriego con una amante en cada puerta y del que se jacta con sus amigos cervecedores o futboleros que él no está pintado en la pared porque él es quien lleva los pantalones y en su casa manda él. (10)

This passage provides us with two interesting ideas. The first is the idea that man is the all-powerful beast who acts on his instinct without regard for loyalty and love. Yáñez Cossío states in her interview with María Elena Angulo that: "Antropológicamente, la conquista es parte del hombre, es función masculina" (52). The second is the chauvinistic manner in which man sees family life and his own wife.

Clearly, the author deplores the present state of male/female relations. A central theme of the entire novel is encapsulated in the phrase "él es quien lleva los pantalones y en su casa manda él" (10). The novel provides a progressive demonstration of woman's self-liberation against her own inclination to follow the traditional norms of conduct, or to accept the stereotypical roles placed upon her. Yánez Cossío wants to point out that only a cave-man could think in such a chauvinistic manner.

The development of the narrative at the beginning of the novel is two-fold. The first is the discourse that takes place between María and her companion *la mala amiga*, and the second is the symbolic language employed. The discourse describes the maturity of the protagonist, María, with regard to her feminist inclination, and the symbolic language produces imagery that represents reality. Michael Handelsman states that "Desde los primeros momentos de Yo vendo unos ojos negros, Yánez Cossío pone de relieve la vida estancada en que se encuentra la mujer" (895). The author is likening the world in which women live to a stagnant pool of water without change or movement forward. Handelsman continues to say that the images portrayed are actually "agua sucia, la pestilencia y una modorra" (896). It is not by mere chance that Yánez Cossío chooses these terms to describe reality as she sees it:

Todo estaba tranquilo como un charco de agua sucia brillando y oliendo bajo la modorra del

sol, mientras miles de paracaidistas ensayaban sus saltos acrobáticos sobre el agua y se complacían contemplando sus imágenes invertidas. De repente, alguien, un ser extraño a la charca, tiró una piedra y las natas verdes se abrieron como cortinas aterciopeladas y viejas dejando ver intimidades: montones de larvas dormían flotando en el agua podrida. Los caballitos de San Vicente, asustados, dejaron a un lado sus maniobras y volaron a esconderse en sus cuarteles vegetales. (7)

The reader must interpret this collage of words that appear in the first paragraph of the novel in order to see the web of symbolic images created here and throughout the novel:

El charco es la sociedad; las larvas dormidas son las mujeres que todavía no se han descubierto; los caballitos representan a los hombres; <<y la piedra que vino a revolverlo todo>> es María--la de todas las mujeres--, que, al cuestionar el status quo, busca nuevos derroteros en la vida. (Handelsman 896)

These images make the reader create varied mental pictures or images in the mind depending on the reader's background.

There appears another character, besides María, at the beginning of the novel that serves as the catalyst for the awakening of the feminist in María, *la mala amiga de María*. *La mala amiga de María* serves as the initiator for the feminist "coming of age" of María. *La mala amiga de María* is described thus: "era más que una mujer, la pura y escueta idea que estaba infiltrándose dentro de los llamados puros de corazón y que era quien revolvía los charcos y clamaba desde el abismo de su actual impotencia que todo el mundo andaba mal a causa del machismo" (8). *La mala amiga de*

María serves as a pioneer and free thinker who looks into the differences and tries to convince *María* to see the disparities in gender roles and the problems they produce. The protagonist of *Yo vendo* acquires her own notion of the world through other women, especially her *mala amiga*.

La mala amiga de María tells her various inaccurate but symbolic and subversive parables or stories in order to open her conscious mind to different ideas and possibilities. The first story has to do with homosexuals and the supposed reason why they are in the position they find themselves. The importance of this theoretical story lies in the tongue-and-cheek comparison of the homosexual and the "real" man. The descriptions of the two are startling at first glance but quite understandable within the context given. According to the narrative the homosexual is handicapped like a blind man because he is different, visible, and therefore, stands out in society. Thus, he is made to feel separated from society. *María's* friend makes two valid points here, the first being her analogy between the situations of the blind man, the homosexual, and woman. She says that the blind man is respected and is allowed to live a respectable life free from discrimination while the homosexual does not receive the same rights: "debía hacerse a un lado para que él [homosexual] pasara suavemente con su problema a cuestras y que no debía reírse nunca ni complacerse en el morbo porque era un ser humano triste,

tímido y preocupado" (9). The analogy becomes clear when she says: "que era un ser que se buscaba a sí mismo y que estaba condenado por una sociedad calculadora y fría que se gozaba en quitarle su palo de ciego y hacerle zancadillas en cada esquina para hundirle más en la intrincada selva de sus glándulas y de su siquis" (9).⁵ This critique of the mistreatment of the marginal members of society is applicable to women in a subtle way. Yáñez Cossío indicates that the homosexual comes closer to the original, balanced or measured concept of "true" manhood because: "podía ser en el sentido ontológico, más cerca del verdadero concepto del hombre que el macho de biceps desarrollados" (10). The author believes that men in general have lost their former manliness by becoming macho playboys. María immediately understands the meaning of the story, "agarrándose a las yerbas de la orilla para salir del charco" (10). The yerbas represent her first insight into the gender problem.

La mala amiga de María explains that the problem is "que los hombres están y no están, que los hombres son y no son" (10).⁶ Symbolic language appears when the friend's story is almost shouted: "lo dijo en una voz tan alta y estridente como para que los caballitos de San Vicente le escucharan" (10) (remember, the *caballitos* represent men). But she harbors no false expectations concerning progress or the impression that she had just made: "pero ellos ni se enteraron de su presencia, ni tampoco iban a darse por

aludidos porque estaban preocupados en sus vuelos y piruetas y allá ellas con sus sartenes y cacerolas y aquí nosotros con nuestros trabajos" (10). The reader follows the development of María's nascent feminist consciousness through the friend's narration of these stories as they cause María to begin asking questions.

The second story or parable supposedly explains physical attributes and the reasons why men are physically different from women. This story derives from cave man tradition, and theorizes that man has developed differently physically because of his need to travel, hunt, and work. Simone de Beauvoir discusses this idea in terms of what she calls existential ethics, affirming that the history of the development of the human species is an ongoing task in which man has always been an inventor, a hunter, a conqueror, and a builder. In the beginning man and woman functioned as equals in the procreative process, but man in addition to maintaining life, superseded it, attempting to create the world and to mold it according to values he creates. Yáñez Cossío adapts these ideas as is evident in the following:

la historia de la edad del músculo, el hombre se hizo más alto que la mujer porque necesitaba de sus piernas y de su fuerza física para poder andar las largas jornadas del cuaternario con el fin de poder cazar y alimentarse con la carne palpitante y cruda, y que por eso se acostumbró a mirar todo desde arriba como si él hubiera engendrado y dado vida a todo lo existente y por existir, y que como era de esperarse, de esta manera desarrolló su dominio de amo y señor. (10)

This entire description has a sobering effect on María's conscious thought. She has begun to question society's assumptions and begins to question her own. Yáñez Cossío states that man is "torciendo su instinto de protección, paso al papel de poseedor" (11), insinuating that woman had no choice in the matter and that she was oppressed from the beginning because of man's drive to control and possess. Attributes given to each gender in these parables follow the traditionally established norms of masculinity and femininity. Not only is man's development determined but also woman's: "la mujer se hizo más pequeña que el hombre, porque para tener hijos era su fin específico, no necesitaba ser larga sino ancha, y que ocupada en la vida que había salido de su vientre" (11). Yáñez Cossío suggests that consciousness itself, in this context, is limited to one's own consciousness of his/her role.⁷ Again De Beauvoir maintains that it was woman's lot in primitive time to be limited to childbearing and childraising and only domestic tasks in which she was not allowed any freedom to use her own creative will. She also maintains that man has created humanity's values through action; woman in merely acting as a procreator of life and, consequently, she is given no meaning.

Yáñez Cossío suggests also that one's consciousness is not a completely isolated phenomenon with each human being locked into his/her own limited consciousness. The novel

proposes that women look inside and outside themselves to locate an androgynous point of view. Women can no longer place themselves in the feminine category alone but rather must expand into a wider realm of understanding. The female characters in Yo vendo all reach a point, although at different times, in which this realization becomes evident in their consciousnesses. Yánez Cossío thereby achieves a collective unity through the common consciousness of the characters.

The narrator develops this same idea through an explanation of woman's secondary status based on cave-man thinking^a (an ironical analogy, because this attitude is considered "Neanderthal"):

y se acostumbró a mirar las cosas y a los seres desde abajo desarrollando una actitud sumisa, y quede de esta posición de parado y de sentada, posición de apariencia inofensiva, nació la supuesta inferioridad de la mujer, una inferioridad de fuerza física.
(11)

The burlesque theory presented by *la mala amiga* assumes that males develop biologically much as do females in the early stages being physically identical to females until the fifth or sixth week of pregnancy when they receive "un regalo de la naturaleza . . . un miembro accidental que ni siquiera se determina" (11). Some influences of Freud appear in Yánez Cossío's mock history with the mention of the *miembro masculino*. Freud's penis-envy theory relates to the parodic history. Freud says that the little girl, glimpsing the

penis of the little boy, instantly recognizes her own inadequacy. As she matures she becomes reconciled to her inevitable condition of inferiority, and learns to replace the desire for a penis with the wish for a baby.

Furthermore, motherhood is the correct manner for girls to develop, although he believes that motherhood is really a manifestation of the desire to be a man. Freud's appraisal of a woman who rejects this role maintains that those women who seek masculine pursuits such as independence and self-reliability are neurotic or feminists, to use current terminology. Yáñez Cossío's mock history subverts Freud, since men "*tiraban por la tierra el insignificante y añadido miembro masculino*" (11). Thus the novelist suggests that males and females cannot be so different if the fetus is morphologically identical at conception. But *insignificante* in the previous quote usually represents the female, maintaining male superiority versus degradation and inferiority for the female who lacks the *regalo* of the *miembro masculino*. Furthermore, one has only to consult the encyclopedia to find that "woman is an underdeveloped man." In fact all authorities seem to assume that "civilization" is man's province.⁹ No wonder Yáñez Cossío responds to men's belief in their own superiority with both irony and despair.

María's subversive attempt to move beyond the prevalent belief in women's inferiority is complicated insofar as, in

a sense, she defines herself based on "masculine" attributes. Although María never directly refers to herself as something between man and woman, she nevertheless indicates an attitude of "looking both ways." Her supposition that men and women were the same in the womb reflects her confusion as to gender roles, and her rebellion against society's organization based on patriarchal models. María has experienced first hand what some call sexism, the "unwarranted differential treatment of the two sexes" (Caine 93). Perceiving misogyny within society, María has come to feel it surrounding and enclosing her. In a certain sense, María's hostility is directed against herself, the other side of herself (the masculine part, the patriarchally conditioned submissive self, or that part inherited from societal conditioning). The opposition is the other half of humanity, and implicitly all the forces which suppress women.

The third story or parable more accurately echoes today's chauvinistic traditional beliefs. According to *la mala amiga de María* women are in the position they are in because of:

un simple proceso evolutivo, que la antigua posición de odaliscas era bastante cómoda y que duró tantos siglos porque ninguna mujer quería cambiar porque estaban sentadas en la casa engordando, con la mente flotando en el nirvana, acariciando a los hijos que crecían como matitas al rededor del árbol, sin más responsabilidad que la cocina que era complicada, pero como no había otra cosa que hacer sino calceta o jugar a las damas chinas

o atisbar a los vecinos desde las ventanas o
 armar uno que otro lío pacíficamente
 doméstico. (12)

It is in this context the "Evil Friend" informs María of the Women's Liberation Movement and its battle for suffrage. She maintains that the invention of the nursing bottle was a great discovery on the same level as "el descubrimiento de América o la Toma de la Bastilla" (13) and reveals that years later women became really brave and wore long pants and smoked. During the same time period the pill proved to be for some "una verdadera obra de misericordia y para otras una hipotético pasaporte a la poliandria" (13-14). Yáñez Cossío continues to explain the evolution of feminism through the mouth of *la mala amiga* who informs María of other developments of women's liberation, with the result that, "se hizo necesario que la mujer saliera a trabajar dejando la intelectualmente pútrida casa, y vino el profesionalismo femenino en el cual va rindiendo y dando frutos y que ahora ¿quién era el que podía detener la marcha?" (13-14).

María becomes conscious of her femininity through the parodied theories of *la mala amiga* and develops a feminine consciousness, coming to understand her situation because:

Las palabras de la "mala amiga" había
 producido en María y en la envoltura de su
 esqueleto un sin-número de nuevas sensaciones
 que se fueron enquistando en su ser, pedacito
 a pedacito, como se hacen los mosaicos, hasta

que un buen día se volatilizaron en
pensamientos y luego se hicieron proyectos.
(17)

Yáñez Cossío explains that the change in María was not "de la noche a la mañana" (17), but rather "tomó su tiempo de incubación y entonces saltó la pólvora y reaccionó de una manera increíble" (17).

The comic theoretical stories of *la mala amiga* and María's separation from García are only part of the complex force that cause her to create a feminine consciousness. Other factors that come into play include García's inability to give her a child. Yáñez Cossío turns the tables on men when she shows that masculinity also contains its own vulnerabilities. Like García Lorca's heroine, Yerma, María is prevented from having a family due to her husband's impotence, but the blame falls on the wife: "Una mujer tan sosa e inútil que ni siquiera ha podido darme un simple nieto" (27). María is made to think by her mother-in-law and García that she is not a whole woman because she cannot fulfill her traditional role as mother. Evidently, to be complete is to be pregnant. María's patriarchally conditioned consciousness embraces her body's natural function by repressing something that she wants on a deeper level, her independence. Social mores, conformity and her fear of rejection by society affect her ability to accept her own autonomy.

María's awareness of society's strangeness and crudeness increases in her search for a job. Surrounded by others like herself, she feels as if she has had her destiny decided by society and its conventions: "Si hubiera ido a la Universidad, no estaría allí sentada en la cola de cesantes, pero la suegra habló por boca de los convencionalismos diciendo que era criminal abandonar el hogar que es el santuario de la verdadera mujer" (44). She had let patriarchal values, represented by García and her mother-in-law, convince her that she should "colgar los estudios en la escueta percha de ama de casa" (44); later she thinks of what she could have been only "si hubiera estudiado" (44). María has come to see the world of women as potentially boundless, if not limited by masculine conventions. Yet women are perceived as so fragile, so unpredictable, so flighty, that men usually infer that they need conventions: ". . . la mujer tiene que cumplir una misión social que era ineludible, intransferible y necesaria" (106).

Yáñez Cossío uses María's process of discovery as a means of educating her readers, illustrating the disastrous consequences that occur when one is relegated to second-class citizenship without questioning society's beliefs and assumptions. Yáñez Cossío urges the opportunity, through education, for all women to acquire the power enjoyed by men so they may perform as equals in the creation and elaboration of Latin American middle-class values.

When María and the other female characters are faced with the problem of self-sufficiency, they immediately begin to question their individual value, as María did when she left García the first time. They are put on the defensive by societal conditioning which has imparted a sense of inferiority as is seen in Yo vendo when María reads an advertisement for a job that pays *diez mil sucres*. Spurred on by the large amount of money, she makes an appointment for an interview. Her uneasiness begins before the interview:

Vengo por el anuncio que estaba al revés y no decía PRIVADO sino ODAVIRP y se quedó pensando que estaba en el periódico . . . O mejor, para que no adivinaron y se dieron cuenta de la necesidad de trabajo que estaba y le abusaron de mujer sola y desamparada.
(51)

During and after the interview, she feels inferior to other applicants and especially the male interviewer: "Al salir, sintió el pinchazo de las miradas de las otras mujeres esperando en la sala. Volvió a sentir la humillación de buscar trabajo y la sensación de fracaso de tantas anónimas competidoras" (59). Nervous and ill at ease, she soon felt her search for a job was hopeless, and that she herself was ridiculous and conspicuous: "Habría jurado que a través de las ventanas de los edificios cercanos, miles de miradas de personas conocidas entre las que estaban García y su madre, se estaban riendo a carcajadas" (60). María felt "Estúpida-estúpida--estúpida-estúpida" (51), because of her being

unaccustomed to the interviewing process: "El hombre seguía preguntando y preguntando, armado de un lente de aumento le inspeccionaba como a una insecta, y ella sin defensas, respondiendo a esa voz afable, paternal, medical" (55). She liken it to rape when she says: "de todas formas se sentía que estaba siendo violada y no tenía el suficiente coraje para escaparse" (55). María gains some insight into her situation in the moment when she: "Sabía que las sensaciones que estaba sintiendo las sentía por primera vez en su vida" (61). At this point she genuinely understood her position and identified herself with others because: "había millones de seres humanos que las venían sintiendo desde que nacieron porque no tuvieron otro mundo que la mendicidad, de la mano extendida, del ruego, de la súplica" (61).

María comes to experience a sense of freedom through poverty of her own independent life; she observes how restricted life becomes for most women who live with their families without the drive to make changes. At the same time she resents men's lack of appreciation for women's values, for their inner qualities which are equal to men's. María is a model that calls attention to the unequal treatment of women in Ecuador. She separates herself from the frivolous and superficial feminine stereotype that so powerfully predominates in society. In the beginning of the novel María's sole desire, like that of most young women, is to be fulfilled by her husband and a good home life.

However, García is socially lethargic and unable to communicate effectively in his marriage relationship. Every afternoon after work he would arrive home: "Entonces se sentaba a leer el periódico amurallado tras las páginas deportivas, reviviendo los goles, los pases, los quites, las apuestas y las cervezas" (24). María would cook his dinner and attempt to have a conversation with him, but "él se la comía de la misma manera sea buena o mala, sin decir una palabra, con un silencio que congelaba la sopa, hablaba un poco, pero era ella quien estiraba la prolongación de un diálogo" (24). María considers this an original problem since she believes that García has lost his personality recalling Dorothy Richardson's comment that men's loss of personality is not due to their experiences in the world, not to environment, but to something essential: "It is original. Belonging to maleness; to Adam with his spade; lonely in a universe of things" (280).

Having lost faith in her youthful aspirations, María ventures forth into the unknown masculine dominated world. Once there she realizes that men are slaves also of something beyond themselves: "Los hombres son esclavos de reflejos condicionados creados por la costumbre, pero la esclavitud de la moda a la que están sometidas las mujeres es más aberrante" (46). The message here is that women are subjected to an existence that is artificial, something unreal, based on masculine idealizations. Moreover, Yáñez

Cossío considers that both sexes are trapped in "el círculo vicioso de una civilización domeñada por el sexo y el dinero" (46). The novel urges women to be themselves, not what they think men expect, and to dress "no para halagar la líbida masculina, porque si las mujeres se visten y arreglen para los hombres y no para ellas mismas, cuando estén enamoradas sólo podrán producir almíbar, cáscaras, trapos, figuras de maniquí envueltas en celofán barato" (84). Yáñez Cossío explains in this passage the necessity for women to avoid frivolity so that they can combat stereotypical views of women. She argues that: "sólo la mujer esencialmente femenina puede reclamar y combatir situaciones tan arraigadas como la violencia y el machismo" (84). Yáñez Cossío's view of masculine civilization's domination by sex and money and women's domination by style provides us with an underlying statement about what she sees as the very central difference between the thinking process of the sexes--that is, men's obsession with things and women's with people. Men's rigid categorizing, their putting of ideas into order in hierarchies of importance, places a material value on them (she is referring to Capitalism). Yáñez Cossío treats this topic extensively in Yo vendo, attempting to alert humankind to social realities that have and will continue to affect society unless as a group all try to re-evaluate themselves and the established patriarchal system. According to the author, man has been the procreator of

society and has done so due to his desire to escape his feeling of loneliness.

The stereotypical view embodies society's convictions based on an established value system. The reason why María and the other female characters have such a difficult time results from their inherent desire to be a part of the same system that will exclude them if they choose to go outside of it. While María is achieving some sort of independence, she is psychologically bombarded from within by values taught to her since birth. She sees herself as "un ser atado a su compasivo instinto de mujer" (113).

All the females that have been called to work at *la firma de Christine Farrow de Nueva York* have been, in one way or another, separated on the physically intimate level from masculine dominance. Not all possess the same characteristics as individuals, but they have similar perceptions of life in that they come from patriarchal value systems. The narrator suggests that women in this position have to refrain from judging themselves by masculine standards:

Y las mujeres solas, sin el lenitivo de la familia, llegaron a la soledad de sus cuevas, caladas de angustia y de abandono, ansiando engendrar una larvita para tener compañía, ansiando que las aguas estancadas de la charca iniciaran un curso, tal vez hacia la libertad del océano, tal vez hacia el sentido de una vida que se cansaban de buscar sin encontrarla. (80)

This citation implies that women without a family life

become something strange and subhuman, lacking meaning outside the traditional family unit (men are not seen in the same light but then men were not raised to justify their existence via motherhood). María views marriage as a means of existing. To María the traditional concept of marriage was good and honorable in the beginning until she recognized the unfairness allotted her. María realizes the advantages of the traditional relationship: appreciation for physical beauty, protection, economic support, and, some limited, circumscribed room for her own individuality that are exclusively of a "woman's world." If the roles were differently demarcated, there might very well be certain freedoms within these roles. María recognizes the dangers behind her temptation to accept such a situation. Her internal freedom would be bought at the price of isolation and loneliness. What María really wants is a man that could accept the feminine consciousness--accept its difference--and at the same time understand it. What she would most like is for men to think like women, to become feminine in their thinking. Then there would be no more isolation. Women are already able to think masculinely; they learn that method through all their contacts with education. But men have not made a similar excursion into the world of the female mind. The way to reconcile the differences between men and women, according to the novel, is for men to understand women's special attributes and therefore concede

equal importance to her skills. Men automatically expect that women should accede to their demands of submission, loss of identity, and loss of self. Yáñez Cossío suggests that women cannot accept the affronts of an alien consciousness, and for María the male consciousness seems totally alien.

When the female characters in Yo vendo find themselves alone they experience anguish and loneliness. They must fight the status quo because it hinders their accomplishing something worthwhile. Already the female characters who have taken the first step out of the home and into the workplace suffer from solitude. In the previous citation with the phrase "ansiando engendrar una larvita para tener compañía" (80) refers back to the opening pages of the novel--the stagnant pool of water full of sleeping larvae (women whose consciousnesses have not been raised). The "engendrar una larvita" refers to having offspring, even as a single parent, "para tener compañía" because it is hard going home to an empty cave--"la soledad de sus cuevas"--or a home that is not (because that is the price of freedom). So the reference to *charca* means desire for change, wanting to reach their goal quickly (which is not happening), which is the reason for María's despair. Thus the narrator has a greater picture in mind when she refers to "las aguas estancadas de la charca iniciaran un curso, tal vez hacia la libertad" because any progress leads the feminist movement a

little farther along, but there is the ever present timidity in the voice of the narrator revealed to the reader by the use of "tal vez."

A primary way in which men identify themselves is by their occupations. Women have generally identified themselves in relation to their husband and family. With the collapse of the family unit these women have been thrown into an identity crisis, forcing them to seek other forms of self-identification. Psychologists tell us that without an identification mark the individual feels useless and may lose hope and fall into deep depression. This same thing has happened to María, who desperately needs encouragement and a sense of self-identification to save her from despair. Descriptions of María both before and after receiving the news of her job which is relayed by her boss, Santos de León: "Encantado de saludarla. Tengo el placer de comunicarle que usted ha sido seleccionada nuevamente. Felicidades. Le espero en nuestras oficinas" (81). Before obtaining employment, María despairingly grasps at straws:

Cuando María estaba de las espaldas a la vida y se ponía a coquetear con la muerte, con ganas locas de dejar de existir, bastaba la sonrisa de un Don Nadie, bastaba una llamada por teléfono, bastaba la amistad de un libro, bastaba una flor, una ventana, un sol, un niño para que se diera la vuelta de cara a la vida (82).

However, the news inspires hope for the future:

María volvió a sentirse feliz. Chapeaba en el agua de la charca. Nadaba y se zambullía hasta el fondo buscando compañía, tratando de comunicarse con cualquier mala amiga, poniéndose combativa como si continuamente estuviera escuchando la sinfonia número 2 de Sibelius. Entonces se dedicó a barrer a escobazos el polvo de la casa y los temores del alma, la basura y las penas, y poco a poco fue cambiando y ya casi era otra mujer, aunque a sus espaldas quedara el inmenso rebaño de mujeres para quienes la Nueva del siglo XX se iba a quedar--y se estaba quedando--en los libros de los sociólogos. . . (83)

Although the "puddle" metaphor is sustained (a probable reference to absence of fundamental social change), María has become conscious of a new and altered status. She realizes that she is no longer the same woman even though many others--perhaps the majority--will never experience self-actualization, "aunque a sus espaldas quedara el inmenso rebaño de mujeres" (83).

Eight women were chosen by Santos de León as new salespersons for the Cristine Farrow Cosmetic Company. Initially they respond to their new job with extreme caution since they have no confidence in their skills having been housewives or blue collar workers. They cannot guess what kind of a job would pay *diez mil sucres*. When María arrives at the office on the first day: "estaban reunidas unas ocho mujeres revueltas en la sala de lo anodino. Ya no había entre ellas ese aire de rivalidad de uñas afiladas y de lenguas largas, ese quítate tú para ponerme yo" (84). Their common situation unites them as these eight women from

diverse backgrounds begin a search for self-sufficiency and economic independence. Each believes that success means a salary that will allow her the income to live. However not everyone will come to that conclusion at the end of the novel.

As the training process proceeds a new feeling of sisterhood emerges: "Era un grupo de mujeres hermanadas por la necesidad de trabajo que es la peor hermandad que existe, todas ansiadas de sobresalir sobre las otras" (97). Through the training process María and the other women characters establish a gradual independence from masculine domination, proceeding from passive acceptance of the authority of the male supervisor to seeing the necessity for self-improvement and training, in spite of his patriarchal authoritarianism: "Y otra vez empleó el 'nos' como para buscar una sombra bajo el paraguas de una autoridad más grande, más sabia, más preponente y como para repartir entre dos o más personas la responsabilidad de una misión importante" (67).¹⁰ Yáñez Cossío's disapproval of this tyranny is evident:

Entonces ellas obedecieron, como vienen haciendo desde hace siglos, calladas, sin cambiar miradas para ver si se gestaba un rebeldía, sin protestar, como quienes nacieron sólo para recibir órdenes, como quienes perdieron la iniciativa desde el momento en que les contaron el cordón umbilical, y el médico diagnosticó indiferente que era una niña, y la cogió por los pies y la tiró al fondo de la charca para que con el tiempo y la costumbre fuera reproduciéndose en eslabones de cosa insignificante, mezquina y abreviada por no tener un miembro externo por el cual sonaron

veinte y tantos cañonazos en lugar de los cuatro, sólo cuatro, que sonaron cuando nació la princesa, la pobre princesa que no iba a ser rey. (68)

María receives first-hand experience with the social power structure. She knows that men control the power positions in society but her feminine consciousness has not achieved realization that women can become vital parts if they themselves begin to understand the process and the 'game'. María observes the subordination and subjugation of Santos de León's secretary, becoming aware that power distinctions are not based on one's intellectuality but rather one's gender: "El jefe llegó con su secretaria particular que portaba las prolongaciones de sus manos, de sus pies, de su lengua y de su oído y naturalmente era una mujer subordinada y mínima, porque si no fuera así, habría igual número de secretarias que secretarios" (84). Even more exasperating for María and the other women who are trying to combat this gender discrimination is their initial belief that this treatment results from being judged according to their outward beauty. They feel humiliated and abused by the process and Yáñez Cossío makes this dramatic statement:

Se explota la eficacia y el rendimiento de la mujer subalterna porque para muchos hombres la hermosa muchacha es un pisapapel de lujo en la oficina y un timbre de prestigio cuando dice: --Pregunta a mi secretaria. Haga una cita con mi secretaria. Dígale a mi secretaria. (84-85)

The masculine practice of "rewarding" beauty rather than

achievement is illustrated by one of the supporting female characters, Pilar, who is poor, and without basic necessities, but continues struggling in order to try to survive. Her comments about becoming a secretary are indeed enlightening. She always has desired a job as a secretary and has mastered all the appropriate skills but finds herself at a disadvantage due to her poverty, age, and worn-out looks. For some women the job as a secretary is not enough but to others, like Pilar, it would be a dream come true: "Estaba Pilar, una secretaria que buscaba trabajo desde hace años. Un trabajo estable, con un sueldo que cubriera las mínimas necesidades de un hogar modesto" (93). The narrator tells of what has happened to all the secretary jobs available:

Dijo que todos los puestos de secretarias estaban ocupadas por niñas bien que trabajaban mal. Y trabajaban mal porque era admisible que señoritas con posibilidades económicas y demás aspiraciones derivadas de un escaló social colocado encima de otros, tuvieron verdadera vocación de secretarias.
(93)

Yáñez Cossío compares the occupation of the secretary to housewifery: "El secretario es una ocupación humilde, es la violeta de las ocupaciones: pásese, tráigame, cópieme, súbame, llámame, recuérdese, muéstreme, guárdeme, hágame..." (94). She suggests that usually why women occupy the position as secretaries instead of men is because the work resembles so closely that of housemaids:

Sólo pueden tener verdadera vocación de secretarias las mujeres que han sido empleadas domésticas, y por un deseo de superación quieren trabajar en una oficina entre papeles limpios y bien archivados, con máquinas de escribir que no hacen ruido como la aspiradora, contestando el teléfono en lugar de ir a abrir la puerta a cada rato.
(94)

The analogy is a clever one since it has two edges, with the sarcastic suggestion that only servants could have *verdadera vocación de secretarias* and the equally ironic implication that they have only superficially changed their lot by *un deseo de superación*. The first relegates women (secretaries) into a generic class as second class beings; but still more appalling is the idea that only those that have worked as domestic laborers fit the job description. *Un deseo de superación* reflects a drive forward from the *charco* and signifies a change in feminine consciousness since women realize the need of *superación*. Pilar, like so many other women, had not been allowed to utilize her ability to overcome her lowly status. And sadly Pilar will not succeed because of her unattractiveness: "nunca llegará a ser la secretaria de un ministro, tímida y humilde a pesar de su eficiencia, ni siquiera sabía mover las caderas, ni vestirse a la moda, ni contestar el teléfono con aplomo" (97). Pilar's "failure" is a failure of the system which prefers beauty to real efficiency. Yáñez Cossío seeks re-evaluation of the status quo in the minds of women as a group in order to bring about a feminine consciousness.

Another secondary female character, Lupe, is also thrust into the working world due to the failure of her marriage: "Lupe pensó que para ella sería un lujo imposible dejar el Trabajo. Ahíta de maternidad, hermafrodita y androgina por las circunstancias, sabía que tenía que seguir adelante, hi ¿quién iba a mantener a sus hijos si ella era el padre y la madre?" (130). Lupe's feminine consciousness does not develop until her world collapses around her. Furthermore the use of the adjectives *hermafrodita* and *androgina* signify the possession of both male and female characteristics at once.¹¹ Albeit impossible for women to possess fully developed male biological characteristics, they are called upon to perform both maternal and paternal roles for their children. The author blames the materialistic society for emphasizing possessions rather than human beings, stressing the irrationality of such values. Lupe represents woman *en masse* in Latin America, abandoned with children and all the responsibilities thereof:

Cuando los hombres están cansados de afrontarlas y no pueden más, levantan un airoso vuelo y asunto concluido, pero las mujeres no, las mujeres se quedan firmes como los robles hasta que las ojeras hagan su casa propia en el terreno bien regado por las lágrimas, afrontando situaciones para las cuales nunca fueron preparadas, improvisando juegos con todas las inseguridades, y con los hijos que dejan de ser hijos para convertirse en cargas, en cargas demasiado pesadas para levantar el vuelo porque están demasiado amarradas, demasiado. (41)

This powerful statement in an attempt to enlighten Latin American women as to the gross neglect and mistreatment they and their children have been subjected to for years and years, a repressive situation which is perpetuated partly by women's fear of change and of reprisal. Women have become unconscious participants in and collaborators in their own repression maintained by patriarchal society.

Full feminine consciousness, as presented by Yáñez Cossío in Yo vendo unos ojos negros, involves the complete rejection of feminine passivity. As the feminine consciousness emerges in Yo vendo the primary focus is on the search for reality, reality as it can be perceived only by a woman. The major struggle with María, as well as the other women characters, is to become herself. And that "self," a feminine self, can be found only when she shakes off the passivity assigned to her. A profoundly realistic interpretation of life lies beneath the surface of this novel which addresses the rejection of women's extreme feminine role. María achieves "reality" only when she is able to see herself in a new light, achieving her own identity: "De vez en cuando, la mala amiga de María volvía a su lado, pero su compañía ya no era necesaria" (290). The course for least resistance for women who have been patriarchally conditioned for a specific gender role is to renounce the changes María endures. María spends her life fighting for self-respect and independence of mind, but only

when her feminine consciousness evolves into maturity does she achieve her goals of self-sufficiency and freedom of thought. Although she achieves her own place in society and realizes society's needs for improvement, she reflects that "El hombre era la solución de todos los problemas y las larvas que tiritaban de angustia necesitaban de él" (290). In other words, given the society into which they were born, women were supposed to depend on men and conditioned to need them. For the vast majority of woman--larvae who have not matured to adulthood--this continues to be the case. (It is not clear whether Yáñez Cossío is aware of the Latin root of larva, but it is doubly appropriate, as it comes from LAR, meaning household spirit.) Yáñez Cossío fulfills what Carol Christ proposed in 1980 when she wrote that: "Women need a literature that names their pain and allows them to use the emptiness in their lives as an occasion for insight rather than as one more indication of their worthlessness" (17). In the novels of Yáñez Cossío her main concern is to find ways of reconciling the warring opposites. As a practical feminist she seeks equality between the sexes, a dynamic balance between the two halves of mankind which will lead to social regeneration.

Notes

¹I think that Sábato's first type is what is termed *literatura de evasión* or *engagement*. This appears to be the purpose of or end of such writing while the *transformación* refers to the use of literature to transmute ideas that inherently downgrade women and help sustain the patriarchal establishment. Yáñez Cossío does not write to uphold established traditions or beliefs, but rather to transform ideas, images and representations into a new mode of expression that rejects the former in favor of the latter.

²This individual degradation of one-half of humanity is based on socio-biological grounds. The lower prestige assigned by the patriarchal societies must therefore be carefully distinguished from the personal degradation of each individual woman who, under the guise of sex, is forced to compete with men. See Natalie J. Sokoloff, "Bibliography of Women and Work: The 1970s," Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la recherche féministe 10 (Toronto, 1981): 57-61.

³See on the theme of love in feminine literatures in English and French the following works: "French Women Writers: A Problematic Perspective" in Beyond Intellectual Sexism: A New Woman, a New Reality. Joan Roberts ed. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1976, 196-209; Elaine Showalter, "Women Writers and the Double Standard" in Women in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran eds. New York: Basic Books, 1971, pp. 243-323.

⁴According to Marcelo Coddou in "Dimensión del feminismo en Isabel Allende," the term machismo comes from "un modo de conducta que la sociedad española de siglo XV asignó al varón, cuya virilidad, precisamente, quedaba demostrada por su capacidad para seducir y conquistar mujeres--origen del famoso don Juan . . . El caso extremo lo constituiría el caudillo. Así, hombre, verdadero hombre, es en Hispanoamérica, el que muestra ser capaz de la seducción erótica, poseedor de fuerza capaz de dominar la naturaleza y con dotes de conductor de pueblos o grupos humanos" (41). See also Manuel Jesús Guerrero, El machismo latinoamericano (Madrid: Plus Ultra, 1977); Rosa Marta Fernández, "Sexismo una ideología," in Imagen y realidad de la mujer (México: Secretaria de Educación Pública, 1975), pp.62-79; Ann A. Pescatello, Power of Pawn: The Female in Iberian Families (London: Greenwood Press, 1971).

⁵Yáñez Cossío speaks of the division between the sexes when she says that "Hay otro tipo, el de las lesbianas y también los homosexuales, que tienen su vida íntima,

personal y nadie tiene derecho de atacarlos porque es algo personal" (Angulo 51).

⁶This idea is brought out in more detail in the description of García who appears to be a man at times and other times a baby who relies on his mother for everything. Also significant is the phrase "están y no están" which insinuates that men are not responsible enough to be at home when they should but rather at the bar with their friends or at the soccer games.

⁷Consciousness here refers to one's awareness of his/her biological function in society. Society has culturally created a script for one to follow.

⁸Webster states that cave-man is "one who is crude or brutal, especially toward women." Also the term is used colloquially to refer to "A crude, boorish, or old-fashioned person" (Morris 876).

⁹For examples of these attitudes, see selections in R.E.L. Masters and Eduard Lea, The Anti-Sex: The Belief in the Natural Inferiority of Woman: Studies in Male Frustration and Sexual Conflict. New York: Julian Press, 1964.

¹⁰The other uses of "nos" are the following phrases: "Para la calidad del trabajo que nos proponemos hacer, debemos someterlas a una nueva selección" (66) and "Se trata de un test que nos dará a conocer cuáles de ustedes son las más aptas para realizar el trabajo que proponemos hacer" (67).

¹¹The term hermaphrodite refers to one having the sex organs and many of the characteristics of both male and female. Also "it is anything comprised of diverse or contradictory elements" (Morris 617). Thus, having to fill two roles in the family makes Lupe a hermaphrodite.

CHAPTER IV

WOMAN AS A COMMODITY IN A CAPITALIST

SOCIETY IN YO VENDO UNOS

OJOS NEGROS

When Yánez Cossío speaks of Ecuador, she offers the reader a complete panorama of the decomposition of traditional society, an overall vision that permits her to reconstruct all the levels of determination. The backdrop of this novel acquires precise contours that are manifested even through dialogues that appear insubstantial yet contain, in reality, an exact picture of woman's exploitation based on gender. The exploitation of the poor woman is an important theme in Yo vendo as well as the theme of "women's oppression."¹ Hence Yánez Cossío shows how women are exploited and discriminated against by patriarchy and capitalism:

La tensión, el odio, la injusticia, el deseo de encumbrarse pisoteando los cuerpos y las almas de los semejantes son las consecuencias de estar atrapados en las telarañas de un sistema de vida ajeno al ser humano. Pero el mundo está hecho así, y cada vez serán más espesas las telarañas, por la cobardía de quienes no quieren ceder un poco de terreno para que los otros puedan poner la huella de su pie sobre la tierra. Por la cobardía de los que han llenado su medida y, sin embargo, no estallan, arrasando con su estallido hasta los cimientos de las montañas más altas. Por la cobardía de los que no piensan, porque el pensar implica meterse dentro de sí mismo para barrer toda la basura y pobredumbre que se sabe que hay, pero duele admitirlo. Por la cobardía de no querer aceptar el ser humano o mujer frente a la vida. (98)

The author is strongly criticizing the consumer capitalist system, seen as the destroyer of society. Yáñez Cossío states that "En Yo vendo unos ojos negros hay un ataque a la sociedad de consumo, yo estoy cada día en contra de eso, y se refleja en lo que yo quisiera" (Angulo 47). Not only does she see "la tensión, el odio, la injusticia y el deseo de encumbrarse pisoteando los cuerpos y las almas" (98) as consequences of capitalism, but that everyone becomes a victim, caught up in "un sistema de vida ajeno al ser humano" (98). Thus, those who live by the precepts of Christian morality are bound to be trampled on by the ruthless pursuit of power. She believes that man has corrupted nature by his greed, creating a system that encases humanity in its snares. However, her thesis in Yo vendo is that "The destiny of mankind is not decided by material computation" (Morris 358). She shows that such a system will lead society into deeper trouble as it grows: "y cada vez serán más espesas las telarañas" (98). The "telarañas" represent the intricacies within a capitalist system that entangle one into a mode of supply and demand. She does not reject supply and demand per se, but rather the demand placed on the individuals to accept the mind-set that exists for its desire for more and more; hence, the lure of consumerism and capitalism for the masses. One problem is the Western conceptions of success ("the haves") and failure ("the have nots"). Success, in a capitalist society, is

derived from the amount of one's accumulation of things.² Failure is a consequence of not possessing all that one desires. The author questions the prime definition of progress: How can I get ahead? Where are the advantages?, concluding that capitalism produces materialism and conformism in all social stratifications: from the elite to the poor. Evidence suggests that this malady shall never end since greed becomes the driving factor for production at the expense of the laborer. Frederick Engels has said that ". . . every step forward is also relatively a step backwards in which prosperity and development for some is won through misery and frustration of others" (187), and this appears to be also the position of Yánez Cossío who believes that capitalism changes people and makes those in control cowards and paranoid while the subjected are dehumanized and made materialists in their pursuit of riches. In fact,

Technological, material changes stimulate myriad alterations in social institutions and in roles, personal lives, and social positions of society's members. Once set in motion, these material forces exert continued pressure for further changes in the society in two ways. First, they generate tensions and contradictions because of the unevenness with which they affect various institutions and different aspects of individuals's lives; these tensions constitute independent pressures for material changes for change, as members of society attempt to resolve them. (Mandle 207)

Furthermore, Marx believed that the same dialectical forces that created capitalism will also destroy it,³ arguing that

capitalism requires a large body of propertyless workers, the proletariat, to exploit. Underlying the problem presented in Yo vendo are Marx's ideas concerning the economic dynamics of capitalism.⁴ As Marx saw it, the economic dynamics of capitalism will necessarily lead to a society in which the proletariat are more and more numerous, and more and more exploited. Capitalist societies become more and more productive, but wealth becomes more and more narrowly distributed. Eventually the concentration of wealth leads to a society in which more is produced than can be purchased; overproduction leads to unemployment and more suffering. At last the proletariat will be forced to revolt. Thus, in the phrase "Por la cobardía de los que han llenado su medida y sin embargo, no estallan, arrasando con su estallido hasta los cimientos de las montañas más altas" (98), Yáñez Cossío maintains that if it were not for cowardice and people's tolerance of the oppressive conditions they would destroy even the foundations of the highest mountains, echoing Marx's idea on proletarian revolt. For Marx the revolt of the proletariat will differ from any previous revolution. In the past, one social class overthrew a rival oppressing class and became in turn its oppressor. He believed that the proletariat would, however, be the majority, not a minority since they had no vested interest in the old order of things. Therefore, it would be in their own best interest to abolish the entire system of

class oppression. I believe that Yánez Cossío has accepted some of Marx's ideas since she also proposes in the narrative that the material abundance created by modern technology makes this a real possibility for the first time in human history. Although previously without such abundance, struggle, competition and oppression would inevitably break out in new forms. Marx and Yánez Cossío hold the view that greed, competition and envy all arise because of social divisions and poverty; an ideal society will eliminate these evils. Thus, Yánez Cossío now portrays reality in a different manner: "Por la cobardía de los que no piensan, porque el pensar implica meterse dentro de sí mismo para barrer toda la basura y podredumbre que se sabe que hay." Because change is risky and uncomfortable, people are voluntarily ignorant and, therefore, deceived concerning the oppressive situation for one reason or another. Nahum Megged characterizes a woman in this position as, "Víctima de ignorancia y víctima de todos" (164). The last citation from Yo vendo is imbedded within a paragraph that describes María's struggle against a dehumanized and materialist system. Handelsman says that the novel: "no se limita a una serie de exigencias personales ni se define estrictamente en términos de *personal fulfillment* . . . [sino] . . . contra todo un sistema deshumanizado y materialista" (898-899). The author's main objective is to show that living is not for the sole purpose of working and abusing others in order

to make a spot for oneself. Trampling people to become more wealthy is not all that life should be:

No existe el hombre malo. Existe la maldad abstracta para equilibrar el bien supremo. No existe el hombre perfecto, tampoco existe el hombre enteramente malo, el que quiere el mal del otro, así de gana, sin una causa justificada. (98)

Again one can see the obvious influence of Karl Marx. Of course one must question the plausability of Marx whose economic theories have failed three-quarters of a century of testing in Russia. But is it plausible to believe, as Yánez Cossío proposes, that selfishness and greed are solely a product of scarcity and class division? Is it really possible to make human beings fundamentally good if we have the right environment for them? Yánez Cossío indicates that socialist societies teach that humans are very inventive in finding ways to manipulate any system for their own benefit. Perhaps the problem with human nature lies deeper than Marx thought, perhaps of limitations of his view of human beings: Are they purely material beings? Yánez Cossío has apparently relied heavily on Marxist theory to formulate Yo vendo since one of her main objectives demonstrates that materialism is deceptive. However, she also shows that although economic factors and work are important to all, there is more to human life than economics. Although Marxist theory inspires many of her narrative situations, she also finds meaning and purpose for human lives outside

of Marxism. Marxism, like all forms of naturalism, has a difficult time providing meaning and purpose for human beings.⁵

Another of Yánez Cossío's main themes in Yo vendo is how women are oppressed within materialistic systems. She directly points to the exploitation and misuse of women in a capitalist society resulting in the utilization of the female body and, therefore, in female consumerism:

Tal vez llegue un día en que las mujeres caigan en cuenta en lo que significa ser mujer: algo más que ser humano con la misión de dirigir la vida que tan fácilmente se desliza cuando se ama, y no son objetos ávidos de llenarse con las bagatelas que se le ocurren a un diseñador cualquiera para acelerar la producción de un panzudo fabricante. ¡El mundo de economía, finanzas y producción que se vendrían abajo si dejara de existir la moda. Y qué limpia, íntegra y cabal sería la nueva mujer liberada de esas miserables cadenas! (47-48)

Handelsman says that "Esta última cita pone de manifiesto la tesis central de Yánez Cossío" (900). From a feminist perspective, however, which appears to be that fashion is the root of all evil, the main idea in this citation is "Tal vez llegue un día en que las mujeres caigan en cuenta en lo que significa ser mujer" (47), since women must recognize the erroneous position in which they have been placed. Hence, the author delineates her thesis at the expense of all the female characters who serve as examples of exploitation with a capitalist society as the backdrop. She points out that the most important thing in this type of

society is to make money, and she shows that exploitation of the poor and women are just an integral part of that process. Handelsman says that:

Al leer Yo vendo unos ojos negros queda claro que la explotación y la opresión sufridas por la mujer son sintomáticas en un mundo capitalista, cuyos modos de producción han creado un sistema socioeconómico que depende de dicha explotación y opresión. (898)

Echoing Handelsman's statement, Nancy Hartsock's paper "The Feminist Standpoint" discussed in "Women's Work: Women's Knowledge" states that: "The focus on women's subsistence activities rather than men's leads to a model in which the capitalist (male) leads a life structured completely by commodity exchange and not at all by production . . ." (Rose 176).

Important is the fact that Ecuador was, at this time, going from essentially a latifundist society to a capitalist society, from rural to urban, from agriculture to industry. Yo vendo shows that the new modes of industry and capitalism have caused a loss of human identity. Man, throughout history, has created a society that uses others to make capital. As society develops technology, greater division of labor occurs. Hence, the use of human labor has created an oppressive machine by and through which one individual exploits another based on one's economic power. Some people in society control the tools or resources which society depends on; this gives them the power to exploit others. Man has become the oppressor and woman the oppressed since

men have dominated the world outside the home.⁶ Woman's entry into the workplace, an area considered to be exclusively masculine, demands that woman be subjugated to a menial status since, according to male standards, she does not belong.

Setting the mood for the novel, Yánez Cossío introduces and uses the theme of prostitution early as a means of encasing women in a predefined state within society. Referring to woman as "mujer de la vida" (45), she explains that "todas las mujeres son de la vida por el hecho de estar vivas, o quienes propagaron la expresión quisieron malévolamente significar que todas las mujeres son prostitutas" (45). She indicates that all women are prostitutes (not necessarily selling themselves for sex) since they are being prostituted in one way or another by the precepts of a capitalist society. Yo vendo delineates the plight of women as victims due to patriarchal society's desires, needs, and values sexually and otherwise.

Yánez Cossío expresses through María women's struggle to combat the continuation of stereotypical female roles invented by men: "el arquetipo de mujer creado por la literatura masculina era más fuerte que los esfuerzos de su imaginación . . ." (48). María's constant self-examination, leads her to believe that she cannot do anything worthwhile, and must prostitute herself because surely she has nothing to offer but her body and sexual favors.

María and the other women are poor and find themselves without economic equality in the workplace. When María responds to an advertisement, she muses: "El anuncio debió haber sido leído por muchas mujeres y posiblemente ninguna debía estar enterada de la clase de trabajo que se solicitaba" (37). A great number of women are drawn to a job that pays "diez mil sucres mensuales" (143). María feels inadequate because she does not have any skills:

En la entrevista que le harían, seguro que le iban a preguntar lo que sabía hacer, y ella tendría que confesar que no sabía inglés, ni mecanografía, ni taquigrafía. Presentía la humillación de buscar trabajo, sintiéndose colocada en una categoría inferior a la de una prostituta . . . (35)

A sense of how humiliated María feels is conveyed by the words: "sintiéndose colocada en una categoría inferior a la de una prostituta," but the reader does not fully understand her sense of degradation until she describes these women: "ya que el oficio está monopolizado por mujeres ignorantes, que no han podido educarse, por mujeres hambrientas, mercenarias y hasta sucias" (90). María feels filthy and ignorant since she has not prepared herself to work outside of the home. In anticipating the nature of the job for which she has applied, since she "no sabía la clase de trabajo que le iban a dar" (64), she cannot rid herself of suspicion that she is applying for "el trabajo de cabaret" (77). Unable to understand the questions asked her in the application process, she challenges the system:

¿Qué derecho se tiene a hacer preguntas a nadie? ¿Con qué derecho el empleador urga en las secretas intenciones de la conciencia y de la vida íntima del que pida trabajo . . . Por qué se acepta un sistema basado en la comodidad de unos pocos y en la costumbre? ¿Por qué tanta opresión, tanta ignorancia de lo que es un ser humano? Por qué los poderosos están tan convencidos de que pueden pisotear principios tan sagrados? (76)

These rhetorical questions are followed by the answer:

"Paradójicamente las leyes hechas por los hombres no son para los hombres" (77). The author alerts her readers to the unfairness and the double standard mandated by the laws, and the reason they are legislated as they are. María suggests that men want women to remain prostitutes when she says that:

Porque, para qué diablos una prostituta debía tener conocimiento de vitaminas y de pararrayas? Aunque, tal vez con la cantidad de nuevas técnicas que a diario se estaban inventando era necesario que supieran de todo para que rindieran más. (77)

She automatically associates the interviewer's personal questions with the exploitation of women through prostitution since, as far as she knows, it is the only reason men would consider women for a job that pays "diez mil sures mensuales" (143).

María and the other women feel the same way due to society's influence on them since the prostitute is a manifestation of a capitalist society:

La prostituta resulta el producto quintaesenciado del capitalismo por ser simultáneamente "vendedora y mercancía" [. .

.], actriz y teatro en que se desarrolla por una cantidad fija un espectáculo para un cliente que tiene el privilegio, no concebido a quienes asisten a la comedia, de ser el principal participante. (Pacheco 24)

Clearly Yáñez Cossío shares this view. The whorehouse is the scene where prostitution is represented as a "Psicodrama en que el hombre deja a las puertas respetabilidades e inhibiciones, y puede actuar o hacer actuar sus fantasías, [donde] el comercio carnal es un intercambio que deshumaniza y cosifica la más humana de las relaciones" (24). This portrayal of prostitution constitutes the underlying theme of the novel, and is important because one of the central characters is a prostitute still using her skills in conjunction with her new job. Although Yáñez Cossío makes a case for the legalization of prostitution, Yo vendo shows Gilda as a prostitute, a degraded woman sold for money and treated as an object, as merchandise. The author offers sententious comments concerning prostitution in a capitalist society:

En una sociedad bien organizada debería haber cabida para todas las apetencias, entonces Gilda sería un eficiente y digna prostituta, tendría su diploma en la sala de recibo de su casa y su tarjeta de identidad sin nacionalidad, ni estado civil, ni edad, sino con un corazón rojo atravesando por la flecha. (90)

Here the relationship between man as oppressor and woman as the oppressed is most clearly visible. Women are relegated to this role due to men's power in the economic sector since

they buy women's services with money which is precisely the source of power in a capitalist society. Pacheco says it in this way: "En la prostitución los hombres usan a las mujeres como las metrópolis a las colonias, la capital a las provincias, el hacendado a los peones: como algo a un tiempo necesario e intrínsecamente despreciable" (24). Also "prostitution expresses aloud the economic nature of sexual relations in bourgeois society" (Coward 150). The traffic of women (the title of Emma Goldman's tract on prostitution) can also be referred to as Lenon did, as the "traffic in flesh."

Because of her trade, Gilda is repudiated by society, and Yánez Cossío views her with a mixture of sympathy and contempt as she contributes to her own debasement. The narrator describes Gilda's feelings thus:

En sus momentos de soledad, cuando no le quedaba más remedio que entrar dentro de sí misma, se sentía una mujer fracasada porque sabía que no podía desempeñar el oficio con dignidad ni comodidad debidas, mientras andaba con el agua tibia de decir que era modelo profesional para poder ubicarse en una profesión sin sonrojos y sin escándolos, ya que el oficio está monopolizado por mujeres ignorantes que no han podido educarse, por mujeres hambrientas, mercenarias y hasta sucias que odian su trabajo. (90)

Yánez Cossío insists that capitalism and its predication of money's importance submerges women into a hopeless state since they have been squeezed out of the mainstream occupations and must rely on prostitution: "[las mujeres] no nacieron para eso, sino que les dieron el empujón al charco

del cual no logran salir" (90). This being true, the narrator argues: "Si dicen que la prostitución no puede erradicarse de la sociedad por miles de motivos, la sociedad tiene la obligación de ennoblecer el oficio" (90). Women are objects for sale whether through marriage or for money (prostitution). Historically women have been used as a token in male transactions:

The 'exchange of women' is a seductive and powerful concept. . . Women are given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favours, sent as tribute, traded, bought, and sold. Far from being confined to the 'primitive' world, these practices seem only to become more pronounced and commercialized in more "civilized" societies. (Coward 175)

Families have for years arranged marriages in order to assure financial success (as in Bruna), and the token for exchange has always been the woman. Gayle Rubin states that: "As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are beneficiaries of the product of exchange" (174), and women remain products of commercialism. The author believes that dignifying the profession of prostitution by legalizing it will never come to happen since men make society's laws: "Paradójicamente las leyes hechas por los hombres no son para los hombres" (77).

Yáñez Cossío makes the occupation of prostitution analogous to the position of women in the work force as a whole when Gilda carries her skills from her former occupation into sales for the *firma de Christine Farrow de Nueva York*. Unlike the other women characters who are shy

and uncertain of themselves, she uses her experience to turn the tables and take advantage of men.

The entire novel is structured around the women's need to find a job, be trained, and execute their training. Upon obtaining their jobs at the cosmetics company of *Christine Farrow de Nueva York*, the women begin to learn the aspects of business in a capitalist society. In order to convince them of the importance of their new job their boss, Santos de León, describes their great opportunity in this way:

Luego contó --dijo que confidencialmente-- innumerables historias de innumerables ciudades del mundo . . . Les dijo, con la misma convicción con que declararon su fe los primeros mártires del cristianismo, que la profesión de vendedor era la profesión más noble de todas las profesiones porque en ella se trabajaba con la inteligencia y con las ideas, con el corazón y con los sentimientos. Dijo que no había nada mecánico ni de monótono, que todo era un trabajo intelectual. Que no era una profesión para hacer dinero como la gente vulgar creía, que para un verdadero vendedor el dinero era lo de menos, que era una profesión apostólica porque vendiendo los productos de Christine Farrow de Nueva York se podía arreglar un matrimonio deshecho, se podía llenar vidas vacías y sin rumbo, solucionar problemas vitales entre los sexos enderezando caminos torcidos que iban al fracaso, salvando existencias aniquiladas, dando el mejor aporte a la sociedad actual. (154)

As salespersons they are required to learn all the ins-and-outs of *los productos de belleza*. The training incorporates both understanding the use of the products as well as how to sell them. Emphasis is placed on the need to sell the product and not on the needs of the buyer. During the

training process the Christine Farrow Company brings "una supermujer" (114) to show them how one should present herself as a salesperson, impressing on the women's minds the need for sex appeal and seduction to aid in the selling of the products since capitalism depends on advertising as a means of seduction. The *supermujer*:

. . . pareció que hubiera nacido así, para llevar ese vestido, calzada con esos zapatos hechos a la medida exacta de sus pies y con esa peluca hecha para esa cara y para ese atuendo, desparramando sexo a borbotones a pesar de haber dejado la juventud hace muchos años, maquillada hasta el mínimo poro, escondiendo cualquier resquicio de humanidad, era la propaganda de producto en carne viva.
(114)

The last phrase is the key to understand the reason why the Christine Farrow Company has hired women as salespersons. They intend to exploit their bodies and sexuality to make money. Santos de León says that: "La mujer es el eje del mundo, alrededor de ella gira toda la vida" (117).⁷ In truth, teaching them how to use their sex appeal is part of the training process: "Paulina coincidía con el jefe, estaba convencida de que las mujeres tenían la obligación de estar impecables para agradar a los hombres, para aflojar sus tensiones, contentarles y sacarles el mejor partido" (155). Gilda concluded that "sus éxitos personales eran el resultado de saber explotar su sex appeal" (154). Lola also realized the usefulness of her sex appeal: "Lola había experimentado la verdad que le presentaban, desde que empezó a arreglarse con más esmero y a levantar algunos centímetros

el dobladillo de sus vestidos, el jefe cayó en las redes de sus encantos" (155). The basic premise of Christine Farrow and Santos de León is that physical attractiveness will arouse sexual interest on the part of clients for the salepersons: "Nosotras debemos estar muy bien presentadas y arregladas para poder colocar las ventas" (215). The desire to sell has caused one of the largest companies in the cosmetic business to use and abuse women to make a profit. Santos de León trains the women exhaustively to learn exactly what to say in each situation: "Y ustedes van a ser perfectamente entrenadas" (141). High pressure sales techniques take advantage of all perspective clients. María questions the need for beauty products when the country is in economic crisis: "¿Cree usted que en las actuales circunstancias hay mercado para esto? Hay desempleo, crisis, escasez de dinero . . ." (142). The narrator's cynical explanation reinforces the theme of this chapter: "Si ustedes motivan debidamente a un cliente, ninguno se resistirá a comprar. Este es un plan científicamente calculado" (142). Yáñez Cossío make a subtle comparison between the plan (seduction) and capitalism since each one is calculated to exploit the consumer.

Santos de León looks into María's eyes and reads her reluctance to buy into the Christine Farrow sales philosophy: "Era un trabajo inicuo porque a ella no le interesaba convencer a nadie, estaba en desacuerdo con todo

el plan" (126). Thus he reverts to capitalist temptation extolling the amount of money she can earn: "El jefe atisbó las vacilaciones de María, vio que se le iba la vendedora en potencia que podía ser y esgrimió el arma todopoderoso por la cual estaban allí presentes y anhelantes. Volvió a hablar de los fabulosos ingresos . . ." (143). María experiences guilt when she sees that she is exploiting others. Her job is a means by which a large company increases its profit at the expense of the poor. Cristina implicitly shares the sense of guilt: "Cristina estaba en el desamparo. En su libreta de direcciones no había ni un mísero cliente a quien embaucar" (187). Cristina sees herself as a swindler and thief ready to take advantage of anyone unfortunate enough to come along and believes that she has dedicated herself "a la vida alegre y licenciosa, yendo de puerta en puerta en busca de oportunidades fáciles para venderse a los hombres . . ." (187). In reality she is only selling cosmetics, but inwardly she feels like a pawn used by men's businesses to become larger and more powerful. Moreover she feels like she is selling herself to men.

These six women salepersons have served as instruments to maintain the exploitative nature of a capitalist system. Their products are "creados por la absurda sociedad de consumo, tan absurda como ponerse de espaldas a la vida normal y suicidarse poco a poco sin motivo y sin saberlo . . ." (144). Now, through the sales process, they recognize

the artificiality and superficiality of what it means to be a working woman. Handelsman says that: "María se hace vendedora de cosméticos y poco a poco se da cuenta de lo artificial y de lo superficial que es el mundo de la mujer" (899). The novel exposes women's preoccupation with beauty and its seductive abilities, but Yáñez Cossío also believes women have been manipulated and tricked into accepting the stereotypical image of the beautiful woman: "the European woman has been invented by the male who has formed his image of her, proposed to her, and, to a large extent imposed upon her his role in life, his projection or his figure of such a woman" (Junco Meyer 210). As the women sell their *productos de belleza* they realize that in effect they are deceiving the public, suggesting that the only thing that is important is to look good--an outer beauty--like that of the *supermujer*. María's inner thoughts reveal her revolt:

No se podía decir ni siquiera a la más horrible de las mujeres que se pasara dos horas diarias frente al espejo tratando de embellecerse para agradar a los hombres . . . las mujeres debían ser hermosas para solazar la vista de los hombres . . . (126)

In the preceding citation Yáñez Cossío has inverted her earlier remarks about women's role in society when she said that women "no se atreven a presentarse ante los ojos masculinos sin el respaldo de un afeitado para un eco de complacencia de ellos" (64). Now she denounces the "pintarse, arreglarse el pelo, parecerse a las modelos fotografiadas en las revistas de modas [que] hacen a la

mujer insensible ante sus verdaderas necesidades, ya que vive eternamente enmascarada" (Handelsman 899).

Moreover, María's impression of the Christine Farrow Company is contemptuous as she reflects:

Era tan perfectamente artificial que hasta tenía la tristeza y la ausencia de las cosas muertas, de la mujer-objeto que se prodiga gratuita, que se vende y se prostituye a cambio de nada. Bajo su deslumbrante elegancia, quedaba lo de siempre: un sedimento de soledad y de tristeza. (115)

Yáñez Cossío expresses the main point in this chapter when María sees woman as something that is squandered freely, an object without a place in a man's world.

Thus, according to Yáñez Cossío, capitalism and its economic system "obliga[n] a toda una sociedad a trabajar y trabajar como esclava, amarrada a la noria de la producción, condenada sin remedio a comprar todo lo que vende" (161). Capitalism does not simply reproduce the physical existence of individuals, "Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life on their part . . . [and this coincides with] both what they produce and how they produce it" (Marx and Engels 114).

In summary, Yáñez Cossío sees women's manipulation as a form of exploitation based on capitalism's desire to make more money. The author probably does not agree on every point with Marxist feminists who say that "The women's movement is important only insofar as it can enlighten a

particularly backward part of the labor force to the evils of capitalism" (Ferguson 8). But there is a link between Yánez Cossío's portrayal of women workers in capitalist society and the feminist movement since she shows exploitation in Ecuador in the 1980s. It is obvious in Yo vendo that men have reduced women's importance to what Sheila Rowbotham and Juliet Mitchell call "simple use values." Yánez Cossío pictures women's plight in a "dog eat dog" world where women are exploited both as producers and as consumers in capitalist society, producing a situation prolonging their traditional economic dependence which has so often left them powerless and silent "en un mundo tan mal concebido y manejado" (144).

The author has taken a literary form, the novel, and transformed it into a vehicle for presenting an ugly picture of capitalism and patriarchy, but also the passivity of woman. The important thing is that she has not left woman without a means of salvation. She has called for freedom and defended women's rights because she has the ability to define women's position and subserviency in society. She believes that freedom enriches women's experience by expanding and diversifying the possibilities for self-development. Without an understanding of capitalism's hold on women she questions any advancement. The novel proposes many questions and offers many solutions, yet the author understands that women can avoid defining their own

situation and instead embrace the definition of the situation others supply. Yánez Cossío offers the information and begs her readers to choose to deny subordination and affirm freedom.

Yánez Cossío uses the "woman as commodity" theme to underscore a vital part in the universal condition of humanity. Man cannot purport to have a highly developed society while consciously relegating women to a subservient role. However, a woman might evaluate her options and consciously choose her traditional role accepting as her own, the definition supplied by the patriarchal system in which she lives. But, Yánez Cossío advocates that such decisions be examined closely, because a woman may choose without having seriously questioned. The novel was written because the author believes they are: "los miles de mujeres que aún no habían despertado y permanecían roncando en el fondo de la charca por años y años" (143-44). Finally, women are beginning to take a small step in what some refer to as a man's world, a phrase which is in itself sexist, derogatory, and discriminatory. Yánez Cossío's Yo vendo exemplifies Marysa Novarro's observation in 1979:

The main objective of most Latin American social scientists working on women was to analyze Latin American social organization, to understand how the capitalist mode of production in its dependent form operates (Bonder 135)

Notes

¹Here we are talking about class and gender but not "women as a class"--it is the various social classes--poor women, rich women, middle class women that Yáñez Cossío addresses.

²Identity is specifically related to the material (I am wealth and wealth is me!) (What I have is what I am.)

³Dialectical materialism refers to a Marxian interpretation of reality which views matter as the sole subject of change and all change as the product of a constant conflict between opposites arising from the internal contradictions inherent in all things.

⁴The history of capitalism illustrates these truths, according to Marx. Medieval societies created modern industrial society, which is its dialectical opposite. For a long time, the feudal aristocracy tried to hold onto its power, but in the French Revolution, Marx saw the triumph of the new middle class, who controlled the means of production in capitalist society.

⁵I use the word naturalism here as would Marx to mean that matter exists eternally and is all there is. God does not exist. Furthermore in naturalism it is the nature of the cosmos which is primary, for now, with an eternal creator-God out of the picture, the cosmos itself becomes eternal--always there though not necessarily in its present form, in fact, certainly not as it is in its present form.

⁶Also out of division of labor and consequent control over the means of production emerge social classes.

⁷The narrator describes María as she analyzes Santos de León's comments: "María se puso a la defensiva, sabía por instinto que cuando los hombres hablaban así, era cuando se tornaban peligrosos, porque se estaban enfrentando a la verdad pero cubriéndola con cataplasmas de sofismos" (117).

CHAPTER V

THE SUBVERSION OF THE PATRIARCHAL ORDER
IN LA COFRADIA DEL MULLO DEL VESTIDO
DE LA VIRGEN PIPONA

The concepts of patriarchy and patriarchal relations hold great interest for writers of fiction today. Patriarchal relations form the basis for many novels and short stories the world over. The numerous interpretations of patriarchy have given rise to a wide variety of representations of male dominance. There appears in literary works a multifaceted representation of what patriarchy stands for since it is impossible to assign a single definition to the term. Therefore, out of necessity, one has to use and interpret the term with care since it can be confusing and misleading. There have been various definitions ascribed to patriarchy.¹

It is obvious that women writers have adopted the use of patriarchal relations into their novels and short stories, and have treated them in a wide variety of ways. Whether treated in terms of the individual family unit, or of the structures of society as a whole, patriarchy lends itself to criticism by women writers. Writers differ greatly in their treatment of the concept but one thing remains constant: their denouncement of its unfair practices toward the weaker parties. Yáñez Cossío depicts patriarchy in a different manner in her novelistic production. In

Bruna, soroche y los tíos it seemingly appears as a consequence of life, no more, no less; being a woman automatically has its consequences. Although the author criticizes the one-sidedness of life, she does not make overt statements that counteract and undermine patriarchy's authority, but she does subtly make critical inferences. She changes her approach in Yo vendo unos ojos negros when she implicitly places man against woman in the home and in the workplace. Yáñez Cossío seeks to describe the ubiquity and force of male power upon womankind. Not only does she write a symbolic narrative, she openly denounces man's superiority in both attitude and action. She does what Lucía Guerra Cunningham has proposed when she states that:

one observes a belligerent intention to tear up the garments of patriarchal power as a transcendental effort not only to liberate a repressed Female Subject but also to deconstruct the mechanisms and myths of the dominant system. Thus, the feminine in these texts is both an alternative and an aggressive challenge to phallogocentrism.
(10)

Furthermore, a feature of Yáñez Cossío's novel which at once strikes the reader is the focus she places on the all-encompassing nature of male power. In Yo vendo the device of accumulation--of episodes and events--is, in fact, the major strategy which Yáñez Cossío employs to emphasize the all-persuasive nature of male power. The application of this device allows the author to substantiate the radical feminist indictment, central to the novel, that, to quote

Millet, "the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office and finance--in short, in every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of police, is entirely in male hands" (25). The novelist moves from describing acts of abuse and exploitation perpetuated by individual men in the home to depicting analogous ones carried out in public life (i.e., *The Christine Farrow Company* of New York). Emphasis is placed on the way male-dominated institutions support and back up men in general in their attempts to subjugate women. María, trained to see life through male eyes by her husband and mother-in-law, is coerced into believing that what they say is reality. Thus her acceptance to forego a good education is still another part of her backward social condition. The interest that Yáñez Cossío reveals in demonstrating the grasp exerted by male power in every area of life is her main concern in this novel as it relates to patriarchy. She vividly demonstrates that:

The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other; by restraint and outright coercion; by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women (Lerner 217)

In La cofradía Yáñez Cossío subverts her former treatment of patriarchy with great vigor and talent. It is

possible to see that "Within this subversive context, the inversion of meaning serves the purpose of underscoring a feminist position which is dissident to hegemonic values in the patriarchal system" (Guerra Cunningham 10). Thus the author gives a devastating exposé of its cunning, hypocrisy and ruthlessness (all shown in microcosm in the character of Doña Carmen Benavides). To emphasize these particular attitudes, she uses not the simple strategies of accumulation, but those of an intrigue plot.² She intentionally reverses the source of power from men to women. In her previous novels she shows how man manipulates family, education, politics, society and religion to fit into his grand scheme of things. The entire patriarchal system is for his sole manipulation and benefit as he deems appropriate. The traditional use of the term patriarchy describes the political and social subordination and control of women by men, but in La cofradía the patriarchal establishment is maintained by the opposite gender.

The patriarchal system is one that has been preserved throughout the ages, from generation to generation. It is a mindset, a belief that is ground into both society and humanity. There has been much discussion and controversy concerning its origins and development to its present state. Most will agree, however, that a patriarchal culture is carried over from one historical period to another in order to protect the sexual hierarchy of society.

Alicia Yáñez Cossío, in La cofradía del mullo del vestido de la virgen pipona ["The Sisterhood of the Sacred Vestments of the Plump Virgin"] brings to life the feeling that many women must have experienced at one time or another in their lives.³ That is, the overwhelming feeling that they are the victims of a conspiracy of male dominance either at home or in the workplace. La cofradía gives the distinct impression that these women have been abused in the past and are now willing to fight back. Women, undoubtedly, have felt victimized and relentlessly suppressed. How else could such a revolutionary attitude occur in a group of devout religious women? Many times women have endeavored to revolt against the status quo and have been demolished because they were divided among themselves. In actuality, in order to survive, many women uphold the male hierarchy because they depend on it for survival, preferment and social recognition.⁴ However, in La cofradía, the women are bound together heart and soul against anyone that threatens their purpose in life, that is, having power and freedom to make their own decisions and control their own destiny.

Yáñez Cossío's novel attempts to move beyond standard portrayals of patriarchal dominance. Adrienne Rich says that "[women] are confronting not a simple maintenance of inequality and property possession, but a pervasive cluster of forces, ranging from physical brutality to control of

consciousness" (12). The "pervasive clusters of forces" points to the all-encompassing tentacles that predominate not only outside the home but also within it.

In fiction patriarchy can be seen in various ways. The most frequent seems to be the popular radical sense, and it refers to male domination of women. Another is the patrilineal system of kinship that bases itself on the Law of the Father. And finally there are the psychoanalytic interpretations such as the reproduction of male supremacist structures in the arena of the family, and the "patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole" (Moi 33).

In La cofradía Yáñez Cossío subverts the patriarchal order. She overthrows the old masculine established order of patriarchal representation. Patriarchy has traditionally been seen as the oppressor of women and other minority groups with the rich man holding the power. Dick Gerdes has said that this novel resembles Agustín Yáñez' Al filo de agua [The Edge of the Storm] since:

It takes place in an isolated provincial town where life is regulated by Catholic dogma and ritual, a way of life threatened by impending social change. . . Like The Edge of the Storm it creates the image of a repressed and closed community, antagonized by institutions and social forces that, in turn, are bolstered by other cultural forces. (50)

In like manner, Rosario Castellanos describes these types of conditions when she comments on Al filo del agua:

La historia es la de un pueblo, cualquier pueblo de México, en los últimos años de la dictadura Porfiriana. Aislado,

supersticioso, oprimido por sus rígidas normas morales y por sus esclerotizadas instituciones económicas; un pueblo de mujeres enlutadas en el amor, aún el legitimado por la bendición eclesiástica, es como un enigma que averguenza a quien lo padece; en que la felicidad no es más que el preludio de la catástrofe. (224)

It is extremely curious that Yánez Cossío would invoke such an oppressive situation for the background of this novel. One must ask him/herself why the author would choose to do such a thing? It brings back to her mind all the negative memories, and causes her to relive the events that relegated her to subserviency for so many years. One must ask himself/herself, is the author using reverse psychology to urge her readers to see the obvious? Interesting also is the fact that in both Al filo del agua and in La cofradía the women impose and perpetuate upon themselves the oppressive nature they so straightforwardly condemn. Also in both novels, one or more female characters choose[s] to defy the norm and the town's vengeance is imposed upon the guilty party.

In choosing to represent the town as oppressive and dogmatic, there remains no doubt that Yánez Cossío desires to show the town's political and social backwardness.

Gerdes has written that:

. . . Alicia Yánez Cossío's novel is preoccupied with the town suffering from social and political repression, ethnic and social discrimination, political abuse, destructive authoritarian forces, unenlightened thinking, an absence of freedom

(of thought), all of these the result of many years of internal corruption and abandonment by disengaged politicians in distant Quito. (50-51)

The typical representation of patriarchy shows that male dominance is the reason for women's oppression. However, in La cofradía, the narrative reveals the continued mistreatment of individuals even though a women's organization, the *Cofradía*, controls all the power structures in the town. With the lack of any governmental representatives in the town, Doña Carmen Benavides, who heads the *Cofradía*, becomes the leader of "an organization that fills the political, religious, and social void created in the town with the absence of official institutions of government and religion" (Gerdes 51). In other words, she becomes the matriarch. In such a state, the matriarch is the woman who rules a family, clan, or tribe.⁵ In La cofradía, the term refers to Doña Carmen Benavides who dominates almost all the town's groups and activities. She plays the role of the matriarch in this novel, and she is the center of the narrative action throughout. Gerdes describes her in this way:

Under the guise of cultivating popular devotion among the town's inhabitants, Doña Carmen, supported by a group of old maids, controls the town as though everyone were a part of her Marianist cult. She enslaves the town with her conservative, indeed reactionary, ideas in order to maintain the economic and political hegemony of the Benavides clan. (51)

It is interesting that Yáñez Cossío creates the *Cofradía* since a "Sisterhood and women's community are generally regarded by feminists as providing both a refuge from and a challenge to the oppressive facets of a patriarchal society" (Palmer 126). Indeed it is the author's purpose both to confront the oppressive elements within society and to form a separate place for womanly interaction and communication. "This sense of the community of female experience . . . conveys a message of female empowerment that subverts historical stereotypes of submissive women and mocks androcentric individualism" (Meyer 361). The *Cofradía* is initially formed in adoration to the Virgin Pipona and has no extracurricular intent. Her miraculous works create a following by a group of women whose leader is Doña Carmen Benavides. One well-known miracle that was attributed to the Virgin Pipona was that "cuando no dejaba de llover por más rogativas que se hicieran, cuando al poste de la esquina de la Catedral le salieron retoños de ramitas verdes y todos dijeron que no era la humedad ni la fertilidad de la tierra, sino un milagro de la Virgen Pipona" (35).

Slowly the *Cofradía* becomes a power structure for the designs of Doña Carmen Benavides. Her initial aspiration, to be rich, is stated in an innocuous manner as she relates principles to her fellow sisters of the *Cofradía*: "Afirma que no es un pecado ser rico" (80). The reader begins to understand Doña Carmen's avaricious attitude as the

narrative develops. Later the designs of *la presidenta* (74) become entangled with other more elaborate structures, such as political power and male dominance:

Y [Carmen] aclara que habla de este desagradable tema de la riqueza porque el pueblo que antes era cristiano está empezando a descarriarse por la nefasta influencia del comunismo ateo y prevaricador, y que para combatirlo, la Cofradía ha elaborado sus planes, y cuando va a exponer sus planes . . . (81)

In actuality the term *presidenta* carries more significance than merely the obvious since she becomes not only the president of the *Cofradía* but also the president of the town which includes political, religious and social power.

In the beginning of the novel, the *Cofradía* is overly pious and creates an oppressive environment that condemns a line of young women to religious service. The young women's freedom of choice has been preempted and abolished by the *Cofradía*. One of the young women, Magdalena, must participate in the undressing and dressing of the Virgin Pipona. She is a part of the blond-haired tradition established by the *Cofradía*. In fact, Doña Carmen forces her third granddaughter to marry a *gringo* to conserve the tradition: ". . . la tercera nieta de Doña Carmen . . . tuvo que casarse con gringo para conservar la tradición del pelo rubio" (75). Thus the application of the tradition is witnessed by the dedication of young women to the service of the Virgin Pipona:

Magdalena va con una mano en las riendas y con la otra tratando de quitarse de los ojos la dorada carga de manzanilla y de retama de su pelo rubio, porque si no fuera rubio no sería Benavides ni tendría que cuidarlo tanto para el día que le toque cortarse a mate en la temida ceremonia, para regalárselo a la Virgen quien tiene que cambiar de peluca cada cinco años, y este año le toca a ella, que las otras Benavides también tienen que cortarse porque, por lo menos, han de tener una vez en la vida ese terrible privilegio. .
 . (10)

The patrilineal system of kinship can be seen here in reverse. Instead of the male child marrying to produce a male heir to carry on the family name, the female must marry a gringo to maintain the blond-haired tradition. Magdalena rebels against her forced role and represents women's liberation *en masse*. She wears pants like men and is criticized sharply: ". . . pero al ver a Magdalena con ropas de hombre, hace un gesto de asco porque [Miguel la cura] no está de acuerdo que quien es camarera de la Virgen Pipona monte como monta Magdalena que debería estar bordando o leyendo el Año Cristiano . . ." (24). Consequently, Magdalena cannot enter the church until she removes her pants and dresses like a woman: "No puede seguir hasta el interior del templo, peor acercarse al altar de la Virgen, porque las miradas de los cuatro Pando la tienen amarrada, y está con pantalones, y ninguna mujer puede entrar en la iglesia vestida como hombre" (13). As she rides to the Cathedral on horseback, "Magdalena va galopando hasta la

misma plaza del pueblo. . . " (10), the author shows how the environment responds to her presence:

El caballo castaño oscuro, parece que volara cuando pasa extendiendo las patas a nivel del cuerpo. Las calles enteramente desiertas en la hora más indecisa del día, cuando el sol está rodando por detrás de la montaña y las sombras se alargan para acoplarse con la noche, se despiertan con el repiqueteo de esa carrera loca que repica a piedra milenaria y desempedra, y no se sabe si es día tarde o tardenoche. (10)

And then as she leaves the church refusing to take off her pants, the environment again resumes its somber, backward, repressive ways:

[Magdalena] Retrocede. Baja las gradas con la tristeza acumulada de todas las vestales e hijas del sol y de la luna de los templos del Oriente enigmático y del Occidente antiguo . . . Y cuando Magdalena ha ido, verdaderamente la tarde declina y el sol se resbala tras del monte, y llega de golpe la tristeza que habita desde siempre en las plazas de todos los pueblos andinos contruidos con las piedras y las penas. (13-14)

The pathetic fallacy, so common to the nineteenth-century Romantics, is again employed here in order to reflect the town's inner spirit. Magdalena's powerful personality and will make her the representative of feminine freedom to all. Thus, in the overall context of the novel, her rebellion points to a possible women's liberation in Ecuador. When going to the Cathedral to do her assignment for the *Cofradía*, she has another reason in mind: "Déjame abandonar este pueblo maldito. Ten misericordia de mí Madrecita Pipona" (13). The significance of these two actions are

important if taken in the context of the overall novel. First, she wears men's pants to represent her defiance and rejection of the strength of the *Cofradía*. By wearing men's clothing she represents another source of power and strength not present in the town since no significant male role model is furnished. But there is a connection, symbolic even if perhaps unconscious, between horseback riding and manliness. Furthermore, there is often a mental connection between horseback riding and virility. "But another more deep-seeded explanation has to do with patriarchal values: the horse is the symbol of mobility; therefore, being able to control a horse suggests adherence to patriarchy's ethic of directive and mobility" (Dixon 194). Second, the horse represents the phallus and denotes power and a renunciation of women's control. Third, her prayer in a Godforsaken town "captures the feeling of entrapment and rebellion of the townspeople" (Gerdes 51). Thus, the purpose for which Magdalena is performing the act of devotion is seemingly perverted into worthless and vain adoration. There is no doubt that the author is making a vital point concerning the forceful act of making one do or think in a prescribed manner. Since women have traditionally been assigned certain roles, she suggests, I think, that they may carry them out because of a sense of duty or necessity and not out of desire. Therefore what profit, she posits, does the oppressor reap when the oppressed does not do it of his/her

own free will? Yáñez Cossío questions the validity of the oppressed/oppressor system, and shows the futility of such a dichotomy.

Magdalena reacts against the oppressive control of the *Cofradía* when she takes advantage of an opportunity offered by Doña Carmen Benavides. She does so when she is ordered to remain in the Cathedral while Figueroa repairs the Virgin's finger: "Doña Carmen no puede consentir que el extraño artista ponga sus manos en el cuerpo inmaculado de la Virgen, por eso obliga a su nieta Magdalena que se quede en el templo todo el tiempo que dure el trabajo" (115). Unknowing to Doña Carmen, Magdalena is afforded the usual forbidden opportunity that she has longed for; that is, to be alone with a man. Thus Magdalena has no choice but to stay: "la pobre camarera Magdalena obedece de mala gana porque no tiene más remedio" (115). It is interesting to note Magdalena's attitude before she meets Figueroa which expresses her rejection of her unfortunate circumstance: "Si fuera libre como cualquier mujer del pueblo, estaría galopando en su caballo y corriendo carreras con el viento" (115). However, Magdalena is unlike the other women of the town and her reference to "galopando en su caballo" is used to express her rebellious nature. Yáñez Cossío has a two-pronged argument with regard to this last phrase, the first obviously being her rebellious nature and the second being the reference to galloping horseback "corriendo carreras con

el viento" which denotes complete freedom from any authority, and refers to men's ability to go like the wind without constraint or burden. Also men, like the wind, have no one to constrain them.

The obvious backwardness of the town has both positive and negative consequences for the author. It is a help for her feminist thesis since it allows her to show that women can be responsible enough to be in charge of political, social and religious institutions. On the other hand, it is a hindrance since they seem not to be very good at controlling any of them. Another side effect of this type of control is that women, who have criticized and maligned men's power strategy, have committed the same errors that they have condemned for years.

The condition sustained by the *Cofradía* is a difficult one to describe. Therefore, Yáñez Cossío employs a technique called metafiction to enhance her description of the Benavides women: "Las Benavides son mujeres lorquianas, hijas y nietas de feroces Bernardas, desesperadamente yermas, sacrificadas en aras de una tradición inquebrantable" (26). Of course, the reader must have first hand knowledge of La casa de Bernarda Alba and Yerma to fully appreciate and understand the comparisons made here between Carmen and Bernarda, and the reference to "desesperadamente yermas." The character resemblance is overwhelming and gives a succinct impression of Doña Carmen

without requiring further description. The two characters are both spiritually hardened against men, and want to control everything around them. The phrase "desesperadamente yermas" refers to Lorca's Yerma and the protagonist's inability to have a child. Interesting in Yerma is the fact that the blame belongs to Yerma's husband and not Yerma, but in La cofradía the blame lies with the women who are unable to withstand the overbearing nature and power of Doña Carmen and *La Cofradía del Mullo del vestido de la virgen pipona*. As seen in this citation the women's future is predetermined: "que esta Magdalena y todas las Magdalenas han de permanecer solteras sin *haber tocado varón* . . . [emphasis mine]" (25). Thus the sacrificial and conventual nature of the tradition upheld by pious old women is obvious to all, especially with the reference to the "mujeres lorquianas." Although not alluded to directly, Magdalena has certain characteristics and attitudes similar to the bride in another Lorca play, Bodas de sangre. While not knowing if the author has purposely used the bride as a model for Magdalena, it is nonetheless certain that the two women are indeed similar. In Bodas de sangre the bride runs off with Leonardo, her former lover, to the forest in an attempt to escape their oppressive situation. In like manner, in La cofradía, Magdalena runs off to the city with

the sculptor Figueroa for whom Doña Carmen had searched country wide:

La Cofradía . . . manda a poner un anuncio en todos los periódicos del país, a excepción-- como es natural--de la Voz Del Pueblo, solicitando un artista de probada honorabilidad, célibe, católico y sin vicios para que restaure el dedo de la sagrada imagen. (113)

Interesting is Yáñez Cossío's choice and description of the man that they would like to come to their town. It is obvious that he must fit into the mold that the *Cofradía* has established and maintains which just happens to parallel the "mold" established by the patriarchal establishment: the only requirement that counts is virginity or chastity. Therefore, one thing remains altogether humorous, the fact that no one man, at least in any of Yáñez Cossío's novels, could live up to such a description (but women are expected to). The religious inference to "célibe" is a requirement since the word signifies "one who remains unmarried, especially by religious vow" (Morris 216); therefore, the women would not be under any masculine enchantment or wooed by his *vicios*.⁶ Furthermore such a man would not pose any threat to the power of the *Cofradía*. Engaging a religious man to do the repair on the Virgin Pipona would assure them of his passivity. Such a reversal shows the subversion of male/female roles. It is apparent that the author, at the same time, is showing the discriminatory mind of the women of the *Cofradía*, since the reader understands that anyone or

anything out of their line of thinking will be run out of town (like the priests, as will be seen later). Thus instead of the two dying physically in their flight to be together, as in Bodas de sangre, the two go to Quito as the Pando Brothers tell: ". . se montaron en el 'Kleiber Alfonsito' que hace diez minutos salió camino a Quito" (120). However, the two die metaphorically, as the narrator explains: "Doña Carmen arde de indignación y de coraje, que no puede más con el bochorno y con la mala nueva, que quisiera morirse en ese instante . . ." (120). Also the narrator says that Doña Carmen "Sufre porque entiende que [Magdalena] se ha muerto en vida" (121). Hence she has died in two ways, both related to Doña Carmen. First, because Doña Carmen says so (she is dead to the townspeople because Doña Carmen tells them that she cannot return) and second, because she has been with a man. Evidently being with a man corrupts her and ruins her value to the *Cofradía* (just like the patriarchal establishment!), and therefore to all. Later Magdalena writes to Doña Carmen and tells that she and Figueroa have married, and that she is happy with him. It is possible to see Doña Carmen's matriarchal leverage when the narrator says that: ". . . [Doña Carmen] le manda lo que pide, y decide perdonarla, aunque la prohíbe que vuelva por el pueblo" (138).

Doña Carmen Benavides, who is the embodiment of the patriarchal system, learns to manipulate both individuals

and groups. She has an uncanny ability either to convince people to do what she wants, or she psychologically bewilders them into complying with her wishes.⁷ For example, Doña Carmen, in a sense, psychologically determines Jorge Washington Pando's motive for traveling "a la capital y traer propagandas y ensuciar las paredes escribiendo bobadas" (157) when she deceptively questions him. The narrator describes Doña Carmen's talent when she states that: "Comentan las damas de la Cofradía que no tienen los alcances psicológicos de Doña Carmen quien impone silencio con la mirada que ellas bien conocen" (156). Furthermore Doña Carmen has perfected the art of manipulation: ". . . atisba el alma, no con un catalejo, sino con una lupa . . ." (157). Also the author shows how she can employ different manipulatory techniques when she compares her to a loving mother which is again just like the patriarchal establishment, "only doing it for your own good":

Y su voz tiene trémolos terriblemente
maternales y un acento de afabilidad que se
dan ganas de echarse en sus brazos, y tiene
una sonrisa que es todo promesas, y pone en
juego todas las astucias y todos los poderes
de la hembra que quiere seducir al macho
saltando las barreras de las edades y las
convicciones, y le mira con los ojos del lobo
de Caperucita Roja, que ella es maestra
graduada en relaciones públicas y humanas . .
. (153)

This is the reason why she, and the women of the *Cofradía*, are referred to as *unas viejas explotadoras* (150). Doña Carmen, who represents the church, has no scruples. Thus

there is a lot of resentment toward the *viejas explotadoras* since they are seen in the same light as the the secular government officials. They have taken on the same detestable characteristics that have always characterized patriarchal governments; that is, the feeling that they are a separate entity, above and beyond reproach both morally and otherwise: ". . . las oficinas de la Cofradía del Mullo del Vestido de la Virgen Pipona, que no es una oficina pública, sino privada y exclusiva de ellas" (150).

Therefore Yáñez Cossío has achieved her subversion of the traditional order when she leaves the unmistakable impression that the *Cofradía* has the exclusive right to rule. This is a subversion or supplanting of the patriarchal system that women have battled for years.⁸

Doña Carmen Benavides and the *damas* of the *Cofradía* use another manipulative form that also serves their purposes to retain power. As a response to political insurgencies Doña Carmen Benavides anonymously writes subversive graffiti (which is similar to García Márquez's in El Coronel no tiene quien le escriba) to undermine and scandalize the liberal factions in town. The initial graffiti supposedly written by members of the communist party is, in reality, reactionary to Doña Carmen's own platform. Doña Carmen Benavides supplies false clues in order to throw all suspicion away from her. Her subversive activities are indicative of her cunning and manipulative ways. But, in

order to support her own ideology, she and the sisters of the *cofradía* must anonymously write more seemingly illiterate graffiti. Her handiwork is ingenious since she purposely misspells and destroys the letters of the alphabet:

Avajo el PCR por Traidores y Bendidos . . .
 La A, parece que hubiera sido descuartizada;
 La B, parece embarazada de dos frutos
 simultáneos; La J, dislocada de un mal golpe;
 la O, es ovario reventado: La E, tiene las
 costillas arrancadas a pedazos; La L, son
 como los palos de matar un burro depeñado; La
 P, es el perfil de Raquel Welch decapitada;
 La C, la medida luna con dolor de muelas . .
 . (189)

This form of illiterate literacy is another way in which *Cofradía* controls the town's cultural, social and political institutions. Dick Gerdes writes that:

Similarly, conservative hegemony becomes even more exposed as it finds itself threatened by writing and, by extension, change, modernization, and technology, to the point that it becomes necessary to literally deform the alphabet that makes up our system of writing. (57)

There are other instances of the reversal of the patriarchal order in the novel. For example the *Cofradía* delegates positions throughout the area which reveals a parallel of the church-state intrigues of the patriarchal establishment for centuries:

. . . el poder de la Cofradía del Mullo del Vestido de la Virgin Pipona que quita y pone alcaldes cuando le da la gana, que nombre y destituye a los tenientes políticos de todos los pueblos que están bajo la devoción de la Virgin Pipona... (42)

Also another example is Doña Carmen's complete control of the police force. The first *teniente político* (178) is described as someone "sin poder, ni autoridad, aunque sea sólo de nombre porque en definitiva él no es más que otro lacayo de los Benavides" (178). The *teniente político* knows beforehand his situation as the narrator says: "que ya se dio cuenta de que Doña Carmen y las viejas de la Cofradía estaban en su contra" (178). Yáñez Cossío is portraying the complete lack of any opposition by the normal political situation in small Latin American towns, where the church is also usually a political force (but a masculine one), since the police chief usually is the sole power figure.

Furthermore, the *Cofradía* as well has the power to appoint who they deem appropriate for the job: "[Nicasio Duque Pando] Usted va a ser el próximo teniente político" (192).

Moreover:

Doña Carmen le explica cómo debe cumplir sus funciones, cómo debe dar buen ejemplo al pueblo, cómo debe poner a raya a los insolentes comunistas que quieren hacer desórdenes y revueltas en un pueblo tan pacífico y cristiano que sólo se debe a la Virgen y no a politiquerías . . . (192),

because after all, "ella es la que manda y decide" (192).

There is also another important issue at hand here. Doña Carmen chooses Nicasio Duque Pando, a relative of Manuel Pando, as successor to the former *teniente político*, because she hopes to use his influence to control Manuel Pando.

Again her manipulative ways emerge. She makes Nicasio Duque

Pando her puppet, and through him, she hopes to bring the Pando family into her fold.⁹ She figures that there is not a better way to accomplish her goal than to make a weak Pando her representative of the Benavides power.

Doña Carmen has indeed become the power figure as is evident when she leaves her house: "camina oronda y circunspecta recibiendo saludos temerosos, alabanzas adulonas y mal rayo te parta de algunos" (193). She is, after all, the ". . . dueña del pueblo y de la gentes [so] . . . a este paso no van a poder ni respirar sin que ella dé su visto bueno" (193). Doña Carmen, *la dueña del pueblo*, exercises her power through the established male hierarchical order. She relies on force and manipulation to accomplish her goals: "Doña Carmen manda a decir al boticario que riegue la voz por todo el pueblo que la próxima vez que ensucian la paredes, pondrá una multa de doscientos sucres y mandará a los culpables seis días en la cárcel" (193). The subversion of order is apparent in her attitude toward the *boticario* since he relinquishes power to her when he obeys without question. Also important is the fact that the *Cofradía* now gives fines to those who break their laws. Notice that it is, after all, their laws that are being enforced, laws that came into being upon their taking of power.

Some problems exist with Doña Carmen's rule of this small town, and one of them is suggested by how she projects

herself: "[Doña Carmen's] . . . pisadas resuenan autoritarias, recias y sonoras" (142). She has not changed the masculine version or exercise of power at all. Instead, her appearance and attitude remind one of the Mexican *cacique*, a female version of Juan Rulfo's protagonist, Pedro Páramo, or the vicious and avaricious Doña Bárbara in Rómulo Gallegos' best selling 1929 novel. Although her designs are shrouded behind a religious façade, it is still possible to see her attitude toward power:

Vencer a los enemigos de la humanidad: al mundo con sus placeres insanos; al demonio con sus diarias tentaciones y a la carne con sus concupiscencias, o morir como mártires en la heroica lucha, y exclama enternecida: -- ¡Quién creyera que aún se conserva la moral muy en alto a pesar de la falta de buenos sacerdotes! (143)

Thus Doña Carmen believes that she does not need a man to control the town much less the church. Why should she, she declares, since through her efforts "se conserva la moral muy en alto" (143). She personally takes the credit for the town's apparent moral goodness although her analysis of the situation is less than complete and not at all trustworthy.

Perhaps Doña Carmen's ultimate use of manipulation is in her attempts to control the communist propaganda. Her initial reaction is that of surprise, "--¡Comunistas en nuestro propio pueblo!" (147). But immediately, using masculine terminology, she exclaims that: "No pueden resignarse ni quedarse impávidas. Tienen que organizarse y tomar al toro por los cuernos" (147). Actually there are

two important issues in her exclamation. The first is her rejection of traditional feminine characteristics, especially with the use of the term "impávidas" which denotes passivity and idleness. The second is the masculine terminology used in the idiom, *tomar al toro por los cuernos*. She also displays an attitude of retaliation. For years psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists have insisted that women are more passive, submissive and less resistant to outside forces, while men tend *tomar el toro por los cuernos*. The idiom denotes the males' propensity to make rash decisions and take immediate action. Males act aggressively through the exercise of physical strength, and this strength helps them attain the ultimate boon: power.¹⁰ Doña Carmen has noticeably become the embodiment of patriarchal power by resorting to aggressiveness and immediate action. She maintains her power through the patriarchal system already established. The subversion is done on an unconscious level since all the normal masculine power structures remain intact while the order of distribution has been transmuted. Yáñez Cossío's masculine characters question the religious façade of the new system, and confirm the reader's conviction when the narrator says: "Que ellas no están haciendo nada de política como creen sus hijos y maridos" (182). The reader intuitively grasps the meaning since the phrase is tongue-in-cheek in order to show the subversion of the thought process. Furthermore, Yáñez

Cossío displays the deceiving nature of power when she interjects these ideas:

Que la política es sucia y es cosa de hombres, y que ellas son limpias como monedas de plato recién acuñadas, y que son sumamente dignas y recatadas y no quieren saber nada de masculinidades que echan por la tierra el eterno femenino y no van acorde con la parábola de las vírgenes prudentes. (182)

It is intriguing to notice that as the *Cofradía* becomes powerful they reject everything masculine, but do not understand exactly what they are doing since they are committing the same errors they detest. This can be seen in the words "Que la política es sucia y es cosa de hombres." They believe that the politics invented and sustained by men are without merit. The problem with their new epistemology is that they find fault only in patriarchy and not in themselves. Perhaps it would not be so except for the fact that they do not do anything different from their counterparts. Another interpretation is that politics have historically been men's sphere, and women oppose the nature of politics since it leaves them outside the sphere that legislates their relegation and subjection. Also interesting is the phrase "ellas son limpias como monedas de plato recién acuñadas" since the use of the verb *ser* denotes inner cleanliness, and not the outer cleanliness so often referred to. The use of the words "como monedas de plato recién acuñadas" shows how the women of the *Cofradía* see themselves. They are without blemish and extremely valuable

to the establishment of order with the absence of masculine control. The reference to "echar por la tierra el eterno femenino" reminds one of Rosario Castellanos' drama El eterno femenino. In this play she found a way to "destroy the myths inside and outside of themselves" (Wittig 50-51): "acting out the stereotypes--and women's collusion with them--that have oppressed women and their lives in Mexico for centuries" (Ahern 53). The *eterno femenino* refers to the image that men have historically placed on woman and their subsequent image of themselves: that of La Malinche (the symbol of violation), La Llorona (the symbol of the long-suffering Mexican mother), Sor Juana, and other Mexican figures. The *eterno femenino* is a "rebunking" (Ahern 53) of these former feminine images in an attempt to invent new feminine selves because a woman is authentic when she uses her experiences to fulfill herself and to find her identity. The woman who is not authentic hides behind a mask.

The subversion of the patriarchal order is also manifest in the sententious comments uttered by Jorge Washington Pando when he describes the *Cofradía* as an oligarchy:

--La oligarquía, a semejanza a la plutocracia y la dictadura, consigna una forma de gobierno considerada como ilegítima por la opinión de los preámbulos de las constituciones, ello explica que la oligarquía designe una forma realmente existente de gobierno ideal que afecta a la distribución de la autoridad real en una sociedad política. (151)

Morris says that an oligarchy is "Government by the few, especially by a small faction" (916), and also it is "a government in which a small group exercises control especially for corrupt and selfish purposes" (Mish 822). Perhaps it would not be stretching too much to assume that Yánez Cossío could be referring to the ancient meaning of the word: "Greek oligarchies were based on . . . the notion that their members were superior to other men (Morris 916). Although not stated in the definition, the notion is that certain "male" members were superior to other "male" members, but Yánez Cossío could be using the term to insinuate that these women see themselves as superior to other men in general. Jorge Washington Pando is declaring that the *Cofradía*, while disguising themselves under a religious façade, is exactly like a dictatorship or plutocracy (government by the wealthy): ". . . Doña Carmen es rica, riquísima, que es la dueña de todo el pueblo y hasta la inmensa Catedral y de la Virgen Pipona con todas las joyas y tesoros . . ." (154). Moreover, he has determined that the *Cofradía* is illegitimate since it foregoes the constitution.

The power of the *Cofradía* becomes extremely strong and even controls all forms of government and tries to control the press. There is one character who embodies enough manliness to withstand domination by Doña Carmen, Manuel Pando. He is a curious individual since his origins

are uncertain due to the meddling of the *Cofradía*:

. . . "La Voz Del Pueblo" propiedad del cínico Manuel Pando que dejó un brillante porvenir por cuatro ideas locas que se le metieron en la cabeza, sólo porque en un mal momento de iras, una de las tías le dijo que no era Benavides de pura cepa, . . . (52)

Manuel Pando is the only novel-long character to stand up against Doña Carmen Benavides except for the priests. His criticism is bold as can be seen when he says: ". . . que la Virgen Pipona tiene demasiadas joyas y que una sola pepita de una de sus coronas armaría a todo el pueblo y haría la revolución . . ." (52). Also the author says that: "Manuel Pando es el único que conserva la cabeza fría y se ríe de los unos y los otros" (101). Manuel Pando and Doña Carmen Benavides have a bitter relationship. His resentment is due to her hypocritical attitude, her meddling in his affairs and her attempts to either close down or censor his newspaper, *La Voz Del Pueblo*. Doña Carmen decides that she must do something to control him:

Hay que hacer algo con él, que es de cuidado, de todos los que hay en el pueblo, éste es el único medio respetable y hasta inspira miedo por todas las barbaridades y calumnias que dicen que escribe a diario en su periódico contra la Cofradía y la religión y contra todos los Benavides, hasta dicen que muchos de los curas que vinieron y se fueron discutieron con él e hicieron las maletas. (142)

Her defiance of him is due to his denunciation of her right to power. Manuel Pando struggles for the poor and

downtrodden; hence his opposition to Doña Carmen. The narrator offers this description of Manuel Pando:

Y en todo el pueblo, sólo podía ser
 revolucionario Manuel Pando porque tiró por
 la borda todo lo que tuvo para luchar el lado
 de los pobres y se supo revestir de dignidad
 y orgullo para asustar a los grandes
 Benavides, e infundir respeto natural a los
 anodinos Pando que están en lo que están sólo
 por codicia y no por principios ideológicos
 ni porque el corazón les rebase la camisa.
 (90)

There is a subtle subversion of patriarchal values. The Benavides family represents avariciousness of wealth and power. Yáñez Cossío has changed the usual portrayal of gender since the women possess characteristics that are commonly referred to as masculine. For example, the desire for both wealth and power is a common characteristic of masculinity. On the other hand, Manuel Pando is seen as caring and passionate toward the less fortunate. Moreover, he exhibits the Christian attitude of mercy while the *Cofradía* is hostile toward those they should be helping. If the situation were reversed, and a woman were struggling against male power, it would remind one of Irene Beltrán of De amor y sombra by Isabel Allende. Obviously, it is a reversal of woman's traditional position in which she is the outsider looking in. The resemblance between the two novels is strikingly similar when Manuel Pando, like Professor Leal, takes part in revolutionary activities: "Manuel Pando vuelve a la lucha, retorna a bregar por sus principios . . . Imprime sus hojas subersivas . . ." (90). There are some

other important issues brought up at this time in the novel, and they can be seen in this one citation:

. . . y mientras [Manuel Pando] da vuelta a la manivela, cae en la cuenta, una vez más, de que solo, tremendamente solitario e íngrimo como estuvo Jesus en muchas tardes, y sabe que está solo frente a una ciudadela que debe derribarse, sacando una a una las piedras milenarias del cimiento, sabe que debe limpiar la argamasa con que están unidas y sabe que debe construir nuevamente un pueblo que no esté dormido a la sombra de una catedral inmensa, sino un pueblo donde se viva al ritmo del corazón y de razones naturales, un pueblo con escuelas, hospitales y jardines donde el aire sea más delgado y limpio.

[. . . and while [Manuel Pando] turns the crank, he realizes, once more, that he is alone, frightfully solitary and isolated like Jesus on many afternoons, and he knows that he is alone in front of a citadel that should be demolished, taking away the thousands of stones one by one from the foundation, he knows that he should clean the mortar with which they are joined together and he knows that he should again build a town that is not asleep in the shadow of an immense cathedral, but a town that lives at the rhythm of the heart and of natural reasons, a town with schools, hospitals and gardens where the air is thinner and clean].

(90) ¹¹

Everyone is at the mercy of the immense cathedral which does not represent God, but the power of the *Cofradía* which, in fact, is not only a usurpation of man's power but also of God's authority. The protagonist has perverted the true purpose of the church. Instead of being a refuge, the church's authority is abused by its representatives who are merciless and vengeful. The author is criticizing the established order of power, and sees its manipulation as an

error and misappropriation of power. The *Cofradía* hurts and destroys people's lives, and hypocritically calls it a Christian sisterhood. The reference to Jesus is an attempt to show how he, Manuel Pando, is playing a similar role to that of Jesus' role. Likewise, the women of the *Cofradía* play the role of the Pharisees, and the *Cofradía* the role of the Sanhedrin. Inlike manner, Manuel Pando sees himself as the town's savior and believes it to be his calling to tear down the cathedral (the representative of the law), and all its oppressive rules and regulations.

Doña Carmen also disrupts the male social order when she either runs all the priests out of town by her belligerence:

Y en el 54, cuando a Monseñor Proaño le designan obispo de Riobamba, le piden una cura, y cuando éste llega, apenas saluda con las damas de la Cofradía que han ido a recibirle al partidero y estas le dicen lo que debe hacer y no hacer, él, asustado, sin descansar siquiera de los sacudones de la mula, ni abrir las maletas, ni tomar un sorbo de agua para aplacar la sed que trae, se regresa en la misma mula dejando al pueblo en ascuas y a las damas furibundas, (45)

or for their critical comments:

La presidenta de la Cofradía del Mullo del Vestido de la Virgen Pipona se va a dar cuenta de que el sermón alude a su nieta preferida y va a tener los problemas que han tenido los otros curas que han venido al pueblo y se han ido. Han llegado por centenares y ninguno ha durado. Se dice que muchos han sido castigados y vilipendiados por Doña Carmen. (24)

But she soon discovers that "No hay quien confiese una triste misa" (50). Therefore her negation to allow male dominance in the town, even of a priest, leads her to write: ". . . casi a diario al Santo Padre de Roma pidiéndole autorización para fundar en el pueblo de la Virgen Pipona un diaconado, que para ello hay razón y méritos más que suficientes" (51). She writes day after day supplying "todos sus papeles indicando sus dignidades, cualidades, obras que ha hecho en el transcurso de los años apostólicos" (53), but receives no formal notification from the Vatican. Thus, she decides to take matters into her own hands, as she has done all along, in all areas of the town's organization: "Y hasta, impelida por la desesperación y la urgencia, Doña Carmen se ha candidatizado a sí misma. El único impedimento que podrían objetar es el de su sexo, pero a parte de las faldas, ¿quién más apta que ella en todo el pueblo?" (53). Perhaps Yáñez Cossío is making a statement when she tells of Carmen's priestly aspirations. In fact, the author alludes to the fact that the women of the *Cofradía* are overstepping their bounds when Doña Carmen tries to become a part of the clergy since, according to the Bible, she is commanded to remain silent in the congregational worship. It is interesting that Yáñez Cossío subverts the patriarchal order even to the most sacred. Doña Carmen has reached the apogee in her pursuit toward complete control and domination in all areas with the nomination of herself. What greater power is

there than to nominate yourself and confirm yourself? This proves that Doña Carmen has created a dictatorship under the guise of religious fervor. Her desire for the religious post is her last great hurdle toward her final destination. She knows that the priests are the major source of control and power in any town. She also understands that the pulpit is the most influential position one can hold.

In La Cofradía del mullo del vestido de la virgen pipona, Yáñez Cossío's feminist program is a rejection of the former program dictated by a dualistic perspective on the sexes that unassailably values male over female. Traditionally women are seen as victims of passion, lacking self-control, obsessed with personal needs, and unhappiness. Furthermore, women are shown to be unstable when it comes to the "serious business of life" --which, it seems, is conducted best by those who are analytical, dispassionate, capable of subordinating personal need to "the truth." Yáñez Cossío has taken every quality assigned to male and female and reversed their order. Not only does Doña Carmen possess all the masculine characteristics, she uses them with manipulative precision. Yáñez Cossío accomplishes what Lucía Guerra-Cunningham has proposed: "As with other minority groups, contemporary women's predicament goes beyond the denunciation of power oppression and the deconstruction of the hegemonic patriarchal system" (12). This novel is an attempt for Yáñez Cossío to express her

insights and offer some solutions concerning women's position. She sees this position in the words of Mary Daly: "[as] spell-bound victims helplessly caught in the toils of a patriarchal plot, a conspiracy deliberately constructed by men" (233). As with her preceding novels, she does not leave the reader feeling helpless. She very accurately presents a situation involving women who challenge the traditionally accepted manner of life. Her subversion of the patriarchal order is an attempt to describe the necessity of feminine liberation in Hispano-American culture. She wrote La cofradía conscientiously, and reveals a system that has alienated men and women. Their inability to communicate, according to the novel, does not rely on who is in control since both men and women are both human beings and make the same mistakes. Yáñez Cossío notes various aspects of the power system and shows how it influences women as well as men. She includes hypocrisy, the imposition of strictly masculine and feminine roles, and especially the anguish, emptiness and hostility felt by the young women doomed to subservient lives. She also depicts the conditions which have been imposed and which create incomprehension and resentment among the same women. In La cofradía the opposite of what one expects occurs. The author has forgone the usual representation of patriarchy in which men control all aspects of women's lives. Her new platform shows that women are tired of being presented like

puppets who are manipulated so that they will never leave their place and will play their role well. Yáñez's response in this novel is a direct refusal to accept the patriarchal oppression historically practiced by the upper classes and the military in Latin America.

Notes

¹The patriarchal system is seen by the radical feminists as a sexual system of power which of power supports superior male power and privilege. It is constructed according to a male hierarchical ordering of society. The Marxist feminists believe that the patriarchal concept revolves around the marriage and family relationship through the sexual division of labor. Contrary to radical feminist theorists, who believe that the basic difference resides in biology, the Marxists base their theory on economics. Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex was a paramount work for feminists, since she sees the division of sexes "as a biological fact, not an event in human history" (xix). Nevertheless she, like Rosario Castellanos, rejects biological determinism of women's roles (Ahern 41). Beauvoir also states that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman . . . it is a civilization as a whole that produces this creature" (The Second Sex 301). She has stated that she failed to see how Freud's sexual monism or Engels economic monism could help analyze woman's oppressive status in a patriarchal society (The Second Sex 54). Engel did, however, make some valid contribution concerning feminist theory when he said that the overthrow of "mother right," or inheritance via the female line, was "the historic defeat of the female sex" (123). Other important theorists include Kate Millet, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose. Millet is concerned with the way patriarchy victimizes women, while Mitchell and Rose are concerned with evidence that the victims of patriarchy are in a position to strike back.

²I use the term "intrigue plot" to mean that Yánez Cossío, by a covert maneuver, achieves a secret or underhanded scheme.

³The translation of the title was done by Dick Gerdes in his article "An Embattled Society: Orality Versus Writing in Alicia Yánez Cossío's La cofradía del mullo del vestido de la Virgen pipona."

⁴Many women have believed that male-defined structures and institutions are responsible for women's subordinate status rather than men *per se*.

⁵"Matriarchy is a stage on the way to patriarchy, to man's fullest realization of himself; he goes from worshipping Nature through women to conquering it. Though it is true that woman's lot worsened considerably under patriarchy, she never had it good; for despite all nostalgia it is not hard to prove that matriarchy was never an answer to woman's fundamental oppression. Basically it was no more

than a different means of counting lineage and inheritance, one which, though it might have held more advantages for women than the later patriarchy, did not allow women into society as equals" (Firestone 83). The nineteenth-century socialist philosopher John Jacob Bachofen once wrote that matriarchy can be loosely defined to cover a fairly wide range of situations--from that in which women dominate men outright to a more or less egalitarian relationship between the sexes.

⁶The term *vicios* used here refers to the tempting, soliciting and entreating of a woman to commit fornication, and not the usual meaning assigned to the word vice: "To seek the affection of with intent to marry" (Morris 1473). This is understood because Doña Carmen Benavides does not want Magdalena to get married, and it was her responsibility, being the blond maiden, to stand guard over the Virgin Pipona.

⁷Doña Carmen confuses and befuddles her opponent, especially with numerous conflicting statements or situations.

⁸In Yo vendo unos ojos negros Yáñez Cossío shows the ludicrousness of man's belief that he has power by birthright.

⁹I use the word "fold" in a religious sense to show its similarity to "flock." Doña Carmen, although not a real religious figure, thinks herself to be one, and considers the town her flock. Moreover, she sees herself as the divinely called shepherd.

¹⁰I use the word boon to refer to a blessing.

¹¹I feel it necessary to translate this citation since it is so important to the overall novel.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROSTITUTE IN ALICIA YANEZ COSSIO'S

LA CASA DEL SANO PLACER

In 1989 Alicia Yáñez Cossío published La casa del sano placer, a novel that calls for a reevaluation of female sexuality within the patriarchal establishment. La casa del sano placer calls attention to the inequality between men and women and points in another more equitable direction. This new direction attempts to answer the question set forth in La casa concerning the attitude toward prostitution in Ecuadorian society. There is a problem in Western literature as it relates to woman in the last century or so. For example, the Victorian mind only believed in a world dominated by the masculinization of society at all levels--in industry, the economy, and thought. To seek an adequate attitude toward women is crucial to our contemporary society. Our world and the ways in which we think about it and deal with it belong almost exclusively to the masculinization of knowledge. Without doubt Yáñez Cossío points out in her latest novel that male modes of thought have to come to an end. Furthermore, she urgently directs her attention to the need of a more equal creation. Her attitude parallels what Colerage once stated: "The truth is, a great mind must be androgynous" (Stern 39). In fact, "in the psychic budgets of the individual mind the two components, male and female, must be linked in harmony"

(Stern 39). Yáñez Cossío affirms: "Que nunca se había topado con un ser humano al natural, un ser humano no acondicionado por la educación y la costumbre, porque la educación tradicional no obedecía a principios esenciales sino a las conveniencias y a las rutinas" (35). As a consequence, Yáñez Cossío has created, on one hand, a verisimilar portrayal and, on the other, a vivid ironic portrayal of prostitution in Ecuador. It is a novel that treats the subordination of women in patriarchal society. La casa shows the institutionalization of male dominance over women in all arenas of life: the home, the workplace and the church. Patriarchal dominance means that men hold the large majority of power in all the important institutions of society, and that women are not allowed access to patriarchal power. The definition that is usually applied to patriarchy and employed by feminists is the one derived from Greek and Roman law in which the male power figure, usually the father, retained complete legal and economic power over the rest of the members of the family. More often than not, however, patriarchy is treated in this limited manner and not applied to the institutionalization of male dominance over women. La casa del sano placer is an interesting novel with regard to this theme since it treats prostitution as an institution and woman as a commodity. Yáñez Cossío demonstrates that economic, ideological and psychological factors are means by which prostitution

maintains masculine hegemony over women, and which the Church supports in order to continue perpetuating the sexual exploitation of women. This chapter will show that La casa del sano placer demonstrates how the institutionalization of prostitution maintains masculine lordship and propagates feminine bondage.

La casa del sano placer tells the story of Doña Rita Benavides' attempt to create the *heterae* modeled after ancient Greece, and later in Victorian England, and in the French Second Empire. In her attempt to establish her *Casa del Sano Placer*, she reforms what is the standard for brothels in order to reestablish the manner of prostitution as seen in earlier times. She has noticed that the economic prosperity of the rich has created the desire in men for someone to maintain a center for whores in order to cater to the male citizens. In the beginning Doña Rita Benavides is not consciously aware that her actions are in direct opposition to female liberation. She, instead, sees life in a microcosm and believes that a cosmetic make-over of prostitution will aid the situation of a certain type of woman. The women with which she is concerned are those who, she believes, are not responsible for their present condition since: "Las circunstancias le demostraron que eran lo que eran, no por nacimiento, sino por circunstancias de la vida" (27-28). Thus, Doña Rita Benavides tries to create a new kind of prostitute, the *heterae*. She justifies her own

initiative since these girls are *ninfas* "que se comprende, en su mayor parte eran ninfómanas" that "la mayoría solo se interesaba por la práctica del sexo y nada más"(83). Yánez Cossío echoes this idea when she states that the girls: "No pueden seguir otra cosa [. . .] no sirven para nada, pero tienen esa apetencia sexual y es para lo único que sirven" (Boyles 2c). The *hetaira*, which comes from the ancient Greek word *heterae*, means a well paid, well endowed, and well-educated woman with an exceedingly impressive character who is highly respected in society. This prostitute is unlike the common portrayal which is sordid, dirty, exploited, and mistreated. These women were considered to be a respected class of professional women who serve society in a noble way. In France the *heterae* was called a courtesan, in the world of Islam the *jarra* and *qayna*, and in Japan the *geisha*. Yánez Cossío refers directly to the Japanese model:

Que el caso no era tan insólito ni tan escandaloso porque en el Japón la aspiración de muchas japonesas era la de convertirse en geishas, para lo cual pasaban por un largo y esmerado aprendizaje practicando maneras finas y buena conversación. (71)

This type of attitude and inclination toward promiscuity produced what is commonly called the brothel. The brothel or *dicteria* was a nationalized house of prostitution established and maintained by the state to serve its citizens. Since the state ran the brothel, it tried to maintain a house that truly performed a social

service. Being a social service the fees were cheap and therefore barely covered the expenses necessary for the maintenance of the system. Doña Rita Benavides says concerning her establishment: "La Casa del Sano Placer no era ningún negocio. Lo que pagaban los clientes apenas lograba cubrir los ingentes gastos que demandaban su sostenimiento" (141). Moreover, the house of prostitution was a place where married and single men could find solace from their wives and creditors since it was morally acceptable. Doña Rita Benavides also mentions this:

Que las mujeres de La Casa del Sano Placer eran únicas. Que eran profesionales del asunto. Que de la manera como se estaba llevando la casa, se podía asegurar que casi, casi no había ofensa a la institución de matrimonio. (140)

Not only did the nationalized brothels serve as sexual fulfillment centers for men, but also served as educational centers for women. Kishtainy writes: "The *dicteria* established schools of their own for the teaching of harlots" (19). The *heterae* received a rigorous educational training in many different areas ranging from personal hygiene to history. The narrator explains:

Durante el primer año debía abarcar el Estudio de la Historia del Escote que iba desde cuando el escote no existía o llegaba a las rodillas hasta la época de Napoléon y Josefina. Estudio de la Historia del Vestido que comprendía desde la desnudez hasta la cavernícola al taparrabo, desde el estuche penial al tatuado, desde la falsa con bejucos al albornoz, desde la túnica ceñida al *peplo*, desde la falda con bejucos a la gorguera, desde el corpiño ecorsetado a la papalina,

desde el polisión al miriñaque, desde las mangas de buillón al guardainfante.

El segundo año se vería el estudio de la Historia del Peinado que iba desde el pelo hirsuto hasta el cabello largo, desde los rizos a la raya en medio, desde la raya al lado a la trenza, desde el cabello tirante al moño, desde el redote a la cola de caballo, desde el estilo paje a la permanente eléctrica, desde el flequillo al "mírame Pepito" . . . (82)

Al empezar el tercer año, tenían que estudiar la Revolución Francesa. La vida, obra y milagros del personaje Don Juan y el donjuanismo, la del célebre marqués de Sade y el sadismo, de Giacomo Cassanova y sus Memorias, más una cincuenta biografías de cortesanas célebres. (83)

The narrator also informs the reader why this knowledge is necessary for the profession:

Que si querían tener un preámbulo antes de iniciar el acto para que no fuera tan bruscamente animalesco, se hablara como quien dice del clima, de la Revolución Francesa, de política o de los libros leídos que en ellos había material de calentamiento suficiente. (159)

This attitude in general concerning women aided the formation and maintenance of the brothels throughout human history. During this epoch in Greece, women in general were totally held in submission to paternal dominance and received in exchange for submission protection and unpaid labor for maintenance (economic support). Some saw this arrangement as nothing more than a legal form of prostitution. Kishtainy says that "women hired themselves in cold blood to the mechanical gratification of men in exchange for their upkeep and security" (28). In actuality,

prostitution was a result of a number of things. First, it grew out of slavery as women were enslaved years ago in Babylonia. Gerda Lerna affirms that "Biological and cultural factors predisposed men to enslave women before they learned how to enslave men" (87). She also observes that women were raped and impregnated so that they would become psychologically dependent on their masters. "From this derived the institutionalization of concubinage, which became the social instrument for integrating captive women into households of their captors" (87). This type of situation created a new kind of prostitution since it allowed the captor to be in total control of the object of exchange. Isaac Mendelsohn observes: "In the case of the female slave the master had a right not only to her labor, but also to her body. He or a member of his family could cohabit with her freely without assuming the slightest obligation" (47). Thus, the Babylonian masters would rent out their slaves as prostitutes for a fixed price to a private client or, at times, to a owner of a brothel depending on the availability of clients. She became a piece of machinery for the male master to earn capital. Trafficking in women became a common practice and was considered a "private" system of male domination. This is important also in Latin America, especially in Ecuador, since, as Tatiana Cordero points out, "Prostitution is not a crime in Ecuador. Supposedly it is not a crime or a

misdemeanor but a sexual offense, an offense to proper behavior" (Pheterson 89).

Second, prostitution grew out of monogamous marriage. Men have long held to the belief that one partner is not enough and that it is necessary to have multiple partners in order to be sexually fulfilled. Hilary Evans writes: "Prostitution came into being because marriage, which in some form or other is the fundamental unit of almost every social structure, is inadequate to meet all of society's needs" (13). She continues to explain that most men and women would like to enjoy more frequent and more rewarding sexual experiences than most societal structures can allow. Yánez Cossío echoes Evans: "Que durante siglos se practicó la poligamia y también la poliandria y que muchos pueblos aún lo siguen practicando y vayan a ver quienes son más felices" (70). Likewise, Frederick Engels pointed out in his Origin of the Family that prostitution grew out of the fact that human beings are not inherently sexually faithful. Furthermore, Engels observes that monogamous fidelity has never been the sole relationship between men and women in most societies. Engles writes that in Catholic countries, more often than not, marriages were not arranged based on what he terms "individual sex love," but it was a matter of convenience negotiated by the parents of the couple in question.¹ In fact, as Yánez Cossío also points out, sexual relations for pleasure were not exercised by women

but reserved for paid women. Moreover, sexual relations for married women were solely for procreative reasons. Why else, she posits, would male theologians designate sexual relations between man and wife a sin except to make women feel inferior: "Que los teólogos, que siempre fueron varones, manipularon el asunto del pecado original recargando la culpabilidad a la hembra" (68).

Yáñez Cossío recognizes that women's marginal and trivialized voices have been neutralized by the dominant masculine establishment and advocates a tearing away of men's control of women's sexuality and, thus, masculine hegemony. Because, after all, as S. O'Callaghan has observed "prostitution is nearly as internationalized and monopolized as petroleom" (Kishtainy 33). She, as in Yo vendo unos ojos negros, shows woman as a object in a capitalist society who has no control of her own sexuality. She is a form of commodification that was created by men, and in the history of mankind, represents the first accumulation of private property. In fact, the sexuality of women, which consists of their sexual, their reproductive capacities and services were commodified in an act that has led women to perpetual servitude. Gerda Lerner writes:

Economic oppression and exploitation are based as much on the commodification of female sexuality and the appropriation by men of women's labor power and her reproductive power as on the direct economic acquisition of resources and persons. (216)

Since women's sexuality, an aspect of their body, was controlled by others, they were not only actually disadvantaged but psychologically restrained in a very special way. Not only do women live in a continual state of un-freedom psychologically, they also suffer as victims of different forms of oppression and dominance, whereas men have historically struggled for emancipation and freedom.

Women have for millenia been a separate class beginning with the first female slave. Men have always defined class lines based on their relationship to the means of production. That is, those who owned (men) the means of production could dominate those (women) who did not. In like manner, the owners of the means of production also acquired the commodity of female sexual services. That translates into a very lucrative enterprise since the owner has the privilege of using women from his own class as well as those of the subordinate classes. Men did not see women as equal human beings, but rather a source for economic gain at the expense of a subordinate class.

Yánez Cossío deals with women's roles in patriarchal society in La casa. She assumes this stance as a result of women's continued class subordination which in turn is the result of the institutionalization of patriarchy which created sharply defined boundaries between women of different classes. Thus her novel is certainly different in its point of view concerning patriarchy, as Yánez Cossío

herself states, "es un punto de vista atrevido" (Angulo 51). Likewise the novel "aparece como un libro poco escandaloso" (Angulo 51), since it counteracts patriarchal values.

La casa points out that sexual control of women has been the favorite means of social control employed by patriarchy. Sexual dominance of women through the family has been, since the second millenium B.C., the starting point of subordination for women. Yáñez Cossío demonstrates in La casa the fact that paternal dominance has chained women to three different ways of being: married, lesbians or prostitutes. The latter without paternal protection, powerless and economically dependent, must, nevertheless, care for themselves and earn a living. On the basis of paternalism it was necessary for women to want a strong protector for themselves and thier children so that she would not be forced to use her flesh to earn their daily bread. One must remember that the basis for paternalism is an unwritten contract of exchange: economic support and protection given by the male for subordination in all matters, sexual service, and unpaid domestic service given by the female. In fact, women's sexual and reproductive capacities were commodified, traded, leased, or sold in the interest of the family as the paternal representative saw fit: "Women are given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favors, sent as tribute, bought, sold . . . Women are transacted as slaves, serfs, prostitutes, but also

simply as women" (Ruben 175-76). Thus, without being conscious of it, "Women have for millenia participated in the process of their own subordination because they have been psychologically shaped so as to internalize the idea of their own inferiority" (Lerner 218). A women's inferiority has been defined by her relationship to the man (either father, husband or pimp) in her life. In the case of the married woman the economic and social status of her husband was the primary asset that she or her female child could have. Paternalism therefore tried to assure the wife's fidelity and the daughter's chastity in order to guarantee the wife's faithfulness and the daughter's right to marry in her own social class. On the other hand, the unprotected female was at the mercy of licentious men who considered them second-class citizens and treated them like slaves. During the slave trade days in Latin America the female's position was quite basic: "to get hold of a girl by fair means or foul, and persuade or coerce her into a situation where her only choice was between prostitution and death" (Evans 205). It must be pointed out, in this case, that these girls did not become prostitutes of their own volition, but rather they were prostituted, and in any meaningful sense of the word, they were slaves. Prostitutes portrayed as simpletons forced to give themselves to men were commonly portrayed in the nineteenth-century melodramas although obviously, as here, it was not always the case. As

a consequence of years of submission, prostitutes began to create within themselves an inferiority complex that has led them to see themselves as the lowest class of society. It is even difficult, Evans points out, to create in the harlot the desire to want to help herself because she, more often than not, sees herself beyond hope. She has hit rock bottom psychologically, economically and spiritually, and can only survive if someone begins to take extraordinary interest in her condition.² Prostitution also offers some psychological benefit although most would disagree on moral grounds. It briefly and temporarily gives the prostitute the feeling that she is wanted by her customers, and in a fierce and exciting way. "This psychological fact can be a source of self-confidence and reassurance to a girl who otherwise receives no indication from society that she is anything but an outcast" (Evans 26).

Most of the prostitutes that fill the pages of Latin American novels and short stories are set against a background of poverty and incredible horrid social conditions. In La casa del sano placer, Yáñez Cossío introduces a series of common whores suffering from such a social environment in order to show the human suffering and degradation that goes along with the "low prostitute." Faced with the choice between starvation on one hand, and an instinctive reluctance on the other, it is hardly surprising that these women in a desperate situation have turned to

prostitution as a way out. Of course we recognize that prostitution does not offer a way out but it does offer short-term relief from poverty. As the author focuses on the adverse conditions encountered by the prostitute, one sees that it is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century naturalist's gruesome description of brothel life.³ The author establishes the crudity in a realistic presentation which, in turn, creates a high degree of verisimilitude. Yáñez Cossío's protagonist observes first-hand the sordid conditions of brothel life:

Había confirmado sus sospechas: no podía contar con ninguna de esas pécoras. Las mujeres que había visto en Los Jazmines eran alrededor de nueve y se estaban consumiendo en el último escalón de lo más sórdido y abyecto. Ni siquiera servía el lugar porque a Los Jazmines sólo llegaba en cuando una que otra lágrima de agua entubaba y de tarde en tarde un relampago de luz eléctrica. Los perros flacos compartían sobre la tierra con los hijos esqueléticos. Las moscas estercoleras zumbaban en el basura aleteando con orgías. Las pobres mujeres más bien le parecieron repugnantes y algunas hasta viejas. Los apretados vestidos dejaban escapar deformidades de hambres pasadas y congénitas, sin mangas y escotados, a pesar del frío lastimero de la tarde pretendían ser provocativas a los más miopes, cobardes y borrachos de los hombres, pero eran tristemente cursis. Las bocas mal pintadas competían con las ojeras transnochadas, y el olor a sudores y a otros mal-olientes de la carne flaca, hirieron la nariz de Doña Rita Benavides, y tal como lo pensaba y suponía, ninguna de las pobres tenía la vocación de ser lo que eran. (45)

The protagonist, Doña Rita Benavides, exclaims: "Que puaf, qué asco. Miseria, explotación e ignorancia" (45), as she

views the "caterva de mujeres aspavientosas, descuidadas y amargadas" (43). Upon seeing the trepid conditions of *Los Jazmines*, Doña Rita Benvides "se llenó de una compasión eternecida y de indignación que rebasaba los límites de sus proyecciones" (45-46). With this description of the wretched brothel the narrator is setting the reader up for Doña Rita Benavides' next move. She describes the women at *Los Jazmines* in order to contrast them with the *hetaires*:

"Que eran los seres menos libres de todo el universo, menos libres que los mismos animales porque a estos les salvaba el instinto ciego, pero que así y todo, eran redimibles porque eran víctimas de un sistema injusto" (50). It is necessary to point out that with this description there are two completely different presentations of houses of prostitution (*Los Jazmines* and *La Casa del Sano Placer*), and with it Yáñez Cossío establishes binary oppositions so as to play what Doña Rita Benavides believes to be the "good" and the "bad" against one another. The reader therefore is compelled to come to grips with Doña Rita Benvides' plan to create a new type of brothel for a new type of prostitute since it appears to be, at this point at least, a pleasant alternative: "Una casa que tratara de dignificar el oficio sirviendo como un núcleo generador en la educación del sexo para los hombres y las mujeres" (67). Doña Rita Benavides desires to ameliorate the condition of the individuals comprising the ranks of prostitution, and to lessen the

number of ill-treated poverty stricken harlots. She struggles against the establishments in which women live with their landlady, by whom they are provided with food, dress and lodging, all which are charged to the women at an exorbitant price, and the landlady usually contrives to keep them in debt:

Estaban allí porque la vida las había arrojado a esos sitios donde eran cobardemente explotadas y aunque quisieran dejar el oficio, no podían porque estaban endeudadas en grandes sumas de dinero con la patrona o el rufián que las administraba para hacer el más ruín de los negocios. (154)

Doña Rita Benavides' attitude toward prostitution is radical and daring due to her conviction that there is a certain type of woman that has a predestined vocation: "Que había dicho que si sus encomiendas eran como eran y hacían el trabajo que hacían, este trabajo no obedecía a un capricho de ella o de nadie, sino a una vocación determinada" (87). Then she defines the word "vocation" as "Vocación, del latín vocatio. Inspiración con que predestina la providencia para un papel determinado" (87). She dismisses the idea that these women, whom she directs and teaches, have chosen harlotry purely out of vice, and that their vices will harm societal morality. She believes otherwise since "lo que estaba haciendo era una obra social de grandes méritos" (87). Her thesis is in direct opposition to William Acton when he writes: "The choice of prostitution as a means of living cannot in my opinion be

conceived even in this limited sense to be a matter of calculation; it is usually referable to accident, necessity, or vicious inclination" (239). Furthermore, Acton discourages prostitution on the grounds that provision for prostitution will encourage immorality. Doña Rita Benavides perceives her work in the community as purely social, and certainly not immoral, and expects aid from the citizens and tourists (through their patronage) and the Mayor, Don Manuel Benavides. He is in charge of securing *un piano de cola* "para el desfile de las odaliscas" (141). He obtains it by convincing the *concejales* that the "planteamiento de . . . La Casa del Sano Placer debería ser una dependencia del municipio" (143). It must be pointed out that such provision is an unfair tax upon the virtuous and well-conducted since they are compelled to support the vicious and improvident, even against their will. Doña Rita Benavides must realize that such support, if given at all, should at least be given voluntarily. Doña Rita Benavides does understand, however, that: "numbers of women . . . if born under happier auspices, might have proved virtuous and faithful wives and mothers . . . [but instead] . . . find themselves vicious and despicable outcasts" (Acton 240). She says concerning *Los Jazmines*: "Que aunque algunas pudieron haber escogido libremente ese camino, no eran felices, mientras otras cambiarían una vida normal por ser como ellas" (50). Doña Rita Benavides' denial of certain

women's ability to control their own sexuality lies in her belief that certain harlots, if helped, will be unable to change their inner sexual drive. Doña Rita Benavides declares as she discusses the *ninfas* sexuality: "que en su mayor parte eran ninfómanas" (83), that "solo se interesaba por la práctica del sexo y nada más" (83). In fact, "eran insaciables y hasta que se había pensado introducir en la comida un nuevo régimen porque parecía que hasta el pan que comían y el agua que bebían actuaban en sus organismos como si se les diera afrodisíacos" (100). She also rejects the idea that these kind of *pécoras* can be reformed: "Que se dieron cuenta que eran simple y llanamente putas . . ." (162). She instead advocates education and, at the same time, tries to justify her new project:

Entonces, Doña Rita Benavides reunió a todas las ninfas que había conocido y que estaban en abierta pugna con el mundo. A todas las que sabía que nunca serían buenas madres aunque tuvieran un serafín por hijo, a las que nunca serían regulares esposas aunque se casaran con un santo, ni buenas estudiantes aunque los maestros fueran eminencias, ni buenas enfermeras aunque sólo tuvieran que aplicar curitas en heridas leves, ni buenas empleadas aunque tuvieran que pasarse sentadas limándose las uñas, y ni siquiera buenas prostitutas porque les faltaba educación. (71)

Thus, according to Doña Rita Benavides, most of the *malas pécoras* will not be accepted back into mainstream society because they are incapable of following a suitable occupation. Doña Rita Benavides' position counteracts Fraser Harrison's opinion: "Presumably the average

prostitute, if she had the opportunity, would have been only too glad to exchange her haunts of vice for a conventional job, providing it paid her enough to buy the material necessities which, unaided, she had only been able to obtain by selling herself" (254). By and large, however, Henriques' research in the nineteenth century proved that the reformation of prostitutes in the communities was not at all successful. Most societies rejected the repentant prostitute since, to them, prostitution was unlike any other vice, such as alcoholism and drug abuse (mainly because it was a moral offense). Doña Rita Benavides maintains her thesis and continues to demonstrate that not all women are exactly alike sexually and that some should be given the freedom to fulfill their chosen societal role.

However, the problem still lies in the fact that a newly established brothel modeled after the *dicteria* will not treat the "cause" of the problem; all it will do is mitigate the misery entailed by it. Doña Rita Benavides is, without doubt, trying to treat the "effects" without acknowledging the reasons for the "fallen women" (it can be seen in her lack of interest in the moral question).⁴ Her motivations are pure, but she does not see that her actions are hurting women's liberation. Instead she relies on the standard reasons for women's fall into prostitution:

Decidió que debía seguir adelante sin vacilaciones ni consultas, porque los raptos, violaciones, estrupos y violencias podían amenazar a las mujeres indefensas de las

lascivias masculinas en la sociedad de los campos abandonados, en la frialdad de las calles oscuras, en las sinuosidades de los campos poco transitados. (66)

The protagonist's justification of prostitution reiterates once again what most prostitutes cite as the need for their profession: "if they did not cater for men's sexual urges these would lead men to force themselves on other women and children" (McLeod 66). The author's point of view is exactly that: "Doña Rita lo ve eso porque dice que . . . si no hubiera lugares como los prostíbulos entonces los hombres con su apetito exacerbado se dedicarían a la violación. Habría mujeres violadas, niñas violadas, etc., etc." (Boyles 2c). Doña Rita Benavides therefore says that houses of prostitution must be tolerated because their suppression is either impossible or attended with worse results than the mischiefs which they occasion (rape, incest, for example). An opposite point of view could be taken however that: "they afford facilities for the illicit intercourse of the sexes; they keep in existence a class of people directly interested in the extension of prostitution" (Acton 230).

Doña Rita Benavides continues her new project and figures she must, if prostitution is inevitable, dignify it. Thus, "Las instaló en su propia casa y empezó a reeducarles afirmándoles en sus vocaciones y tratando de hacer de la profesión tan vilipendiada un modelo de dignidad y de respeto," and *La Casa del Sano Placer* "Sería un

establecimiento con todos los detalles necesarios, como los que sabía que existían en otros lugares allende de los mares" (71). Later she declares: "La Casa del sano placer cumplía una labor social porque estaba amparando a las criadas y a las dependientes, a las empleadas y a todas las mujeres indefensas" (123). In order to make all her justifications come together in support of prostitution, she makes some ingenious parallels, because as the narrator explains, what is the difference between establishing public hygiene and organic hygiene?:

Que así como el alcalde del pueblo, Don Manuel Benavides, tenía proyectado establecer servicios higiénicos en los sitios públicos, para las funciones biológicas que no podían suprimirse porque la naturaleza humana estaba hecha con un buen número de aciertos y de fallas, Doña Rita Benavides iba a hacer lo mismo con la otra función orgánica. (67-68)

Doña Rita Benavides' mission of transforming a school, *El Colegio de Señoritas El Sueño de Bolívar*, into a clean, well respected house of prostitution is both ironic and fascinating. Her goal is to make *La Casa del Sano Placer* "la más seria y respetable de las casas de ese tipo" (84) since "estaba preservando a la familia" (70). First, it is fascinating since she goes through a great number of self- and social justifications in order to accomplish this new way of seeing sexuality: "Y era hora de que apareciera una sociedad que pusiera el asunto del sexo en su punto: un función biológica que servía para descargar la líbida y atenuar las tensiones" (36). She even propagates masculine

licentiousness and feminine passivity when she advocates men's right to sexual activity under certain conditions outside of marriage: "Doña Rita Benavides les preguntó que qué pasaba cuando las casadas tenían menstuo, habían dado a luz, estaban enfermas o se encontraban enojadas" (123).⁵ McLeod offers the same justification based on research as the protagonist when he states: "Most prostitutes still adhere to the conservative view that it is a wife's duty to give her husband sex and see themselves as appropriately offering compensation if this fails to happen" (82). Thus the prostitutes often see themselves from a "conservative point of view" and still maintain that their services are needed. Yáñez Cossío is showing the erroneous understanding of marriage when the protagonist advocates fornication. Otherwise she would be espousing the *macho* attitude and outlook on life that she has consistently negated. She, again, combats the unequal distribution of rights between the sexes and says the old order of things has passed away. No longer are women like the Victorian ideal of femininity: pious, pure, domestic, and submissive. Furthermore, she denies the assumption that men and women are indeed opposites whose lives and nature relegate them to completely separate spheres.

Second, her goal to make *La Casa del Sano Placer* the most serious and respectable of its type is ironical because the transformation creates a new type of harlot, the

heterae, who, in reality, has not overcome masculine hegemony in any sense of the word. In fact, the *heterae*, only serves to further propagate the exploitation and sexual bondage of women. The prostitutes are offering a privatized, money making palliative, rather than challenging as such masculine hegemony. Doña Rita Benavides is unable to see what her *Casa del Sano Placer* is really doing to the community and women as a whole. She also fails to see that she has divided women into groups who diametrically oppose one another, although she says without heeding her own advice: "Que desde que el mundo era mundo habían existido guerras entre pueblos y naciones, pero que las escaramuzas femeninas eran el signo de la absoluta decadencia" (160). Later Doña Carmen Benavides says concerning her sister's activities: "Que un ser femenino se destroece por causa de un masculino, paciencia y paciencia hasta el estallido, pero que la causa sea otra mujer es inaudito y repulsivo" (208).

Doña Rita Benavides postulates, however, that prostitution is a necessary evil. She believes that the legislation of prostitution is necessary since it would "protect respectable women from importunity, so that 'there is a necessity of sacrificing one part of womankind to preserve the other'" (Pearson 93). Thus, her attitudes contradict society's moral code, and she faces daily struggles. Her struggles, more importantly, are only against the women of the Marianist town.⁶ The men, who the

author shows as lascivious, are in agreement with this efficient, affordable house of pleasure. Muriel writes that: "jamás hombre alguno vio menoscabada su honra por asistir a los burdeles" (32). Yáñez Cossío attacks men's lustful nature and calls attention to patriarchal society's double standard. The double standard signifies that sex confirms manhood and condemns womanhood. Patriarchal society's double standard interprets men's and women's rights unequally. That is, the majority of Latin American men consider adultery to be an offense committed only by a married woman and her lover. Moreover, there is a tendency to exonerate married men from possible adultery charges, and its origins are found in German law and reinforced by the revival of Roman law.⁷ Furthermore, a desire to maintain the strict definition of adultery was one of the principal motivations for the creation of red-light districts since men could distance themselves from mainstream society and could not be arrested for adultery. Yáñez Cossío therefore attacks men's inability to control their own licentiousness in order to demonstrate the double-mindedness of Latin American patriarchal culture: "que los hombres no podían aguantarse como hombres porque no se les había enseñado a ser otra manera" (123). In effect, she ironically makes excuses for patriarchy's acceptance of masculine weakness in order to demonstrate its incongruency with normal moral behavior. This is made obvious when an unnamed character

declares: "Que los hombres debían aguantarse o no eran hombres" (123). Furthermore, by creating the *hetaires*, she provides a mirror image of the double standard in society. That is, if men can be sexually promiscuous, why cannot women have the same right? And if standard prostitution, as in *Los Jazmines* is unacceptable, why not offer one that is safe and clean and that functions purely on a social work basis? Afterall, sexual promiscuity will always exist, and it is immeasurably more efficient, according to Doña Rita Benavides, done her way. Why should the *ninfas* not have the right to live and work in a well-conducted brothel that provides an easy-going existence, of friendly camaraderie during the day and with a non-stop party every night of the week. This is, by the way, the portrayal that Doña Rita Benavides gives to the reader. All this is unsettling to the patriarchal establishment because in such an atmosphere women begin to have some control over their lives and their bodies. Prostitutes reject the paternal hierarchical ordering of society, and resist masculine control of their psyche in order to create a niche for themselves. Women working as prostitutes have abandoned patriarchy's notion that sex creates a psychological emotion that binds women to men. Prostitutes erroneously deny that they have been manipulated though the maintenance of prostitution. They believe that they have psychological control, when in truth, they do not since they are still trading something in

exchange for their sexual services. La casa points out the futility of the belief that: "Working prostitutes are not prepared to have their emotional beings taken over against their will any more than their bodies. They adopt a range of devices to protect themselves against this happening" (McLeod 40). Furthermore, "Women engaged in prostitution appreciate the danger prostitution brings of being 'got at' emotionally and its devastating outcome and that is why they guard against it so carefully" (McLeod 41). Even though this may be true, prostitution is, in reality, a step forward and backward at the same time since women are still held captive socially, sexually, politically and ideologically, and, all the while, men have not changed their perspective on women. They continue to be objects of exchange in that the man has the capital to exact something for his money: "The role of the client is shown as reflecting men's advantageous social position" (McLeod 1). He has the power and treats the process as another business transaction. The transaction is straightforward--there is a preliminary negotiation of terms, followed by the fulfillment of the contract. Ruben states that this exchange or "traffic in women" implies that women are not partners in the transaction, but are themselves the objects of exchange since it involves money from men. Men therefore acquire global rights over women's body and work. In turn, women deceive themselves into believing that when they get

into sexual-economic relations in which they are partners of the transaction and where specific services are negotiated they share power.

Something that also upsets married women as well as patriarchal society in general is a prostitute's ability to have free sex. Women are not supposed to be able to engage in copulation without being vulnerable to men's paternal restrictions: "Obviously, the prostitute had to be denied any capacity for deriving enjoyment from her profession; all sense of moral injustice would have been overthrown if she had been permitted to have her cake and eat it with relish" (Harrison 256). Yañez Cossío treats this in La casa when Doña Rita Benavides states: "Que las hetaires de La Casa del Sano Placer no tenían ningún derecho ni ningún consentimiento . . . para ejercer otras funciones que no fueran exclusivamente las funciones de la cópula y la carne" (159). Later she observes: "Que la palabra de amor estaba completamente prohibido en los cuartos de la casa, ni tampoco estaban en un sitio para enamoramientos" (161). Moreover, she affirms: "Debían tener un sentido de honradez y no mezclar en la misma olla el apetito carnal con el sentimentalismo" (160), because "sería un desastre que la peor de ellas se juntara con el menor de ellos" (163). She refers to *ellos* as those men who frequent the brothel as *embusteros* who resort to *engaños* (163) to get what they want. She denounces men who go to brothels and says that

they are not worth marrying because "los pobres hombres [son] los más desgraciados de todo el universo" (160). At the same time, the author juxtaposes these *hombres engañosos* and the *malas pécoras* with what she calls *las mujeres del segundo sexo*.⁸ According to Doña Rita Benavides, the *mujeres del segundo sexo* are those who marry *hombres determinados*. The dissimulated juxtaposition of Yáñez Cossío demonstrates what a real family consists of: "Que la familia . . . no nacía como las coles o lechugas sino que se hacía con sudores y con lágrimas y con todos esos sentimentales que eran la facultad del segundo sexo y de determinados hombres" (161). Likewise, she shows that love between women of the second sex and determined men "era el desarrollo de la personalidad de los seres libres y positivos capaces de conservar su individualidad" (161). Doña Rita Benavides holds to the fact that these *malas pécoras* are incapable of sustaining meaningful relationships and must therefore fulfill the lustfulness of timid, nervous, irresolute, and incapable men (Yáñez Cossío 159).

La casa is indeed ironical in its treatment of prostitution since, according to the narrative, it should be dignified, and made available to all males at an affordable price. It all seems to be put together too easily for the reader to accept all this anti-moral rhetoric without having a deeper meaning. Yáñez Cossío has not published a novel yet that degrades women and preaches subordination in any

way. Therefore, one must question the meaning of the novel at first reading. Does it mean that prostitution is a verifiable alternative for women in contemporary society? Yánez Cossío says concerning Doña Rita Benavides' attempt to dignify and legalize prostitution: "En el fondo yo lo veo como un desgaste de energía; ese tipo de aventuras, a la larga, yo no las veo como una *liberación*. Creo que podría encausarse esa apetencia, esa energía, en algo más productiva que una aventura sexual" [italics added] (Angulo 51). Therefore, what is the immediate purpose of a novel in which the author disagrees with her protagonist? She affirms that: "el personaje Rita, es un personaje que se me impulso, pero es un personaje que a veces dice cosas con las que yo no estoy totalmente de acuerdo, claro, eso lo disimulo con la ironía" (Angulo 50).⁹ Obviously she treats the inclusion of prostitution into mainstream occupations as ironical. She makes her point by demonstrating the complete futility of such a situation. She demonstrates that in a capitalist society those who have money control and manipulate those who do not. In supply and demand terminology, Yánez Cossío portrays men as those who by their licentious nature produce the demand for prostitutes. McLeod writes that "men's desire and women's need for money maintains prostitution's existence" (28). Thus prostitution is the result of man's corruptness and women are but pawns created to serve his needs. Yánez Cossío places the blame

on masculinity and its inability to control its sexual urges. Acton once said that the desire of the male, and he specified the "unbridled desire of precocious youths and vicious men," produced the demand which prostitution rose to satisfy. In The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism, G.B Shaw says that women suffer more than men from the extremity of the capitalist system and are forced to fight to entrap men to subsidize their reduced earnings. Thus, "capitalism acts on women as a continual bribe to enter into sex relations for money" (196). McLeod echoes Shaw: "One of the most significant aspects of contemporary heterosexual prostitution is that as prostitutes, women are grappling with their disadvantaged social position in the context of a capitalist society" (McLeod 1). Women are therefore at the mercy of masculine demands and must rely on their economic support to survive. The poverty stricken women feel that "sex is their most saliable commodity" (McLeod 1). It is necessary to point out once again that the *hetaires* of the *Casa del Sano Placer* are not high-class call girls who have the option of selecting their own johns. Instead they are the ones selected by the men, who by their economic condition, really possess the control and power. However, women working as prostitutes often say that they have to take the lead in what is essentially a business encounter. This lends itself to support the idea that the transaction itself functions as a device to complete women's

self-deception. The *hetaires* of *La Casa del Sano Placer* are therefore deceived in more than one way because they believe that they are going to become well-respected professional working women, and that they will control their own destinies: "Doña Rita Benavides les había prometido concederles al cabo de tres años de práctica carnal y de estudios, el título de *hetaires* profesionales" (82). . . . "Que en medio de tantos sufrimientos no podían negar que se estaban labrando una carrera de importancia" (83). The deception is now made clear when the women are paraded in front of men so that they can raffle for them like animals at an auction: "Que se aceptaba la observación, pero que no había necesidad de escoger porque todas eran óptimas en sus formas y su oficio . . . Después del desfile, se iniciaba el sorteo" (80). I believe that Yáñez Cossío, while presenting the prostitute's point of view, is still demonstrating the absurdity of it. She powerfully points out that prostitution is another way in which men use and abuse women's sexuality. Women working as prostitutes want desperately to deny that fact, since prostitution allows them a way to better their economic condition while harming them physically, emotionally and morally. Afterall, those who receive payment for morally subversive activities are always the weaker elements at the margins of society. Although Doña Rita Benavides desires "equal social dignity" (without distinction due to sex or personal or social

conditions) among all citizens, the reader sees through the mass of justifications. By doing so the reader then intuitively grasps the author's purpose for the novel: to make a logical case for prostitution in order to see the impossibility and irrationality of it.

The improvements that Yáñez Cossío addresses in La casa are multiple, and this chapter cannot begin to treat them all. However, we will have to agree to the fact that the improvements in women's social status that will occur because of this novel will only take place when women as a group understand their common position. Yáñez Cossío has defined this common position: "Para mí ser prostituta es, por ejemplo, una mujer que a lo mejor tiene su estabilidad, su hogar, su casa, sus hijos, tal vez tiene hasta un esposo excelente y sin embargo busca algo que va más allá" (Angulo 51). This means that women's advancement can only be noted as they attain more access to patriarchal positions and begin to exert more leverage in the system of patriarchy. McLeod writes that: "Prostitution is not a world apart. It is bound up with wider social processes and permeated by assumptions current in society at large. Analyzing prostitution may therefore contribute to understanding more general social relations" (1). This citation makes one reexamine Yáñez Cossío's last statement concerning what a prostitute is. She points out that as one examines brothel life certain parallels are apparent between the *casas de*

lenocinio in La casa del sano placer and women in general. Thus Yáñez Cossío widens her definition of prostitution in order to show patriarchy's dominance of every facet of women's lives.

By writing La casa del sano placer Yáñez Cossío has created an amalgamation of many different ideas and points of view. The institutionalization of prostitution demonstrates that masculine dominance continues to oppress women as a class economically, ideologically, politically and socially. Women struggle as individuals and as a group to combat patriarchy and paternalism on a daily basis. Yáñez Cossío attempts to portray prostitution as a morally acceptable manner of behavior in order to make the reader question socially acceptable modes of conduct. She writes an ingenious novel that hides its meaning between sentences, ideas and perspectives. One cannot simply read La casa casually and hope to understand the deep undertones that almost reach out and bite you. After the second reading the multiplicity of meanings almost bewilders the reader into questioning everything he/she has taken for granted all his/her life. Only after much contemplation can one create a semblance of coherency within the narrative. It is not because the novel employs unusual narrative techniques, but rather because it throws everything one believes into disarray. Yáñez Cossío begins the novel presenting the material that one already knows, and by that she makes the

reader debate within himself/herself the validity of the Western conception of life. Her ironical presentation of prostitution demonstrates that men and women alike can truly understand sexual exploitation. Both men and women have traditionally accepted the notion that if women are receiving pay for their services they do not need to be pandered to. The novel creates a discussion concerning feminine sexuality and helps each female understand the other: "No estaban convencidas [las mujeres del pueblo] con las declaraciones de la dueña del prostíbulo [Doña Rita Benavides], pero al menos se quedaron pensativas y habían depuesto a su actitud beligerante" (128). The discussion does not however reduce the seriousness of Yáñez Cossío's message: "No había dinero en el mundo capaz de pagar sus favores, porque la constante penetración del macho no era solamente a su himen maltratado, sino que iba hasta la pulverización de todo sentimiento humano" (49). Yáñez Cossío has included within the citation the germ of the entire novel. She reminds everyone that money is not the great stabilizer of humanity. Neither is the man the sole being in the universe, and man must come to grips with his own suppressive instincts because his activities, through constant penetration, have demoralized, dehumanized, pulverized the prostitutes' feelings.¹⁰ What the Russians termed "the necessary social evil," and what others simply called "the social evil" must be obliterated in order for

women to be freed once and for all from masculine tyranny in all areas of life. No longer can prostitution have "un sitio prefectamente delimitado y aceptado serenamente por las autoridades" (Muriel 29), and even less by citizens of every nation world over. Furthermore, as La casa del sano placer points out, society cannot continue to perpetuate paternalism: the art of extending social benefits and alleviating the effects of misfortune while enhancing the prestige and moral worth of the giver of the benefits, and thereby reinforcing rather than undermining the existence of social structure.

Notes

¹In Protestant countries a measure of freedom of choice was extended to the son, as long as he understood that his selection had to be strictly limited to girls in his own social and economic class, and this made room for the possibility of love in the marriage.

²Although many prostitutes see themselves as well-off, the fact remains that they are still worse off than those who exploit them. Their belief that they have attained economic dependence has indeed wrecked them emotionally and psychologically.

³I refer here to Zola's *Nana*, Eduardo Barrios' *Santa* or Manuel Gálvez's *Nacha Regules* just to name a few.

⁴Doña Rita Benavides does acknowledge the women's need for religiosity, but she sees it a means of control.

⁵It is easy to see that the author is also being ironical here. She hopes that the reader will see the outrageousness of such a situation.

⁶Remember that Doña Rita Benavides' *La Casa del Sano Placer* is in the same town as Doña Carmen Benavides' cathedral. The novel's location is the same as La cofradía del mullo del vestido de la Virgen pipona.

⁷Henri Giles writes of this in his documents entitled Les coutumes de Toulouse (1286) et leu premier commentaire (1296). Toulouse, 1969. See Otis p. 106.

⁸Yáñez Cossío uses Simone de Beauvoir's term, the "second sex."

⁹Yáñez Cossío indeed dissimulates the meaning here of prostitution. She disguises her intentions under a feigned appearance. She conceals her true feelings or intentions concerning prostitution to create an ironical account.

¹⁰It should be keep in mind that the author includes all women and not just the type of prostitutes mentioned here. One must remember that Yáñez Cossío considers all women "prostitutes" in one way or another since she does not always refer to just the sexual connotation.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study we have seen the ever present contraposition of the feminine and masculine perspective on life and the roles that each characteristically plays.

Es bueno recalcar, en este punto, que los personajes de Alicia no representan un feminismo exagerado, fanático, ni mucho menos. Luchan sencillamente por romper prejuicios morales, sociales, religiosos que atentan contra los derechos elementales de la mujer. (Vanégas Coveña 12)

Alicia Yáñez, within the narrative, has interjected the continual need for liberty and equality for women. The novels that have been studied all share these characteristics in one way or another. Each novel points out the conscious or unconscious denial of the subordination of women by both men and women alike. Each novel has its own special circumstances that create different reactions and responses. The importance lies in the fact that each work shows both positive and negative reactions and creates a dialogue between the sexes. Without doubt the author has an agenda and her agenda can be followed through her entire corpus of novels. However the reader never becomes tired or discouraged by the author employing the same story lines or plots. Instead Yáñez uses different narrative techniques to ease the reader into a comfort zone, and then surprises him/her with an application that can at times startle.

In Bruna Yáñez Cossío offers a narrative vision using the ancestor conflict. She places in doubt the identity of the protagonist and proceeds to reconstruct her past based on fragmented information. This allows the reader to take an active part in the narrative since the answers are not all given in a chronological sequence. We have seen that Bruna follows the pattern for the feminized quest-romance. Without purposely trying to create a feminized quest-romance Yáñez Cossío demonstrates the importance of female questers. That is, she understands that women too can create their own past, separate and divorced from their male counterparts. Furthermore, she writes that women are more than the prize for the masculine libido after his conquest. To her, women are capable of moving freely in a "man's" world, thus becoming their heroes.

In Bruna the women characters display a greater independence from the traditional concept that has usually been seen in a masculine dominated literature. Within the struggle, the women characters vigorously attempt to disassociate themselves from male dominance and pride. The narrative offers many different perspectives concerning each character, and each character must combat the prejudices and discriminations against her. Bruna struggles to find out who she is, her ancestry and her geneological tree. While she searches she prunes away the limbs that she dislikes and retains those she likes. Remember that the narrator says of

Bruna: "Tenía ya veinte años y no tenía pasado" (8). Bruna not only has to find her past, she must also find the self within her. She questions patriarchal society's hierarchical ordering and renounces the severe patriarchal attitude that continually espouses masculine superiority. Bruna denies feminine silence and demands to be heard. The other characters in Bruna show a marked advance in the women's movement, especially Camelia Llorosa who, although different, will not allow her rights to be stolen from her. Even Mamá Chana will not let her child's father rob her of what is most important to her. Each character demands her rightful place and will not accept the traditional position allotted to her. Although the women characters have had to maintain silence, excluded from discourse, they must carry through since their own happiness and self-fulfillment depend upon it. Moreover, the dominant masculine figure, a permanent fixture in Latin America, is rejected for a new kind of female. This new female denounces and rejects the machista domination that has traditionally ruled.

Yo vendo unos ojos negros is studied from two completely different perspectives. On one hand we have seen that Yo vendo offers a new "feminine consciousness." And on the other hand, we have seen the exploitation of the woman worker based on the dictates of patriarchal society's capitalist demands. The "feminine consciousness" is just that. It is being able to react consciously to the

injustices of a consumer society that regards women as just another part of the engine that makes money. In Yo vendo María comes full circle in the maturation process. She, with the help of her *mala amiga*, begins to see the differences between herself and her male counterparts. Based on these differences María denounces the victimization of women. She rebels against a system of living and thinking that continues to destroy both men and women. Handelsman points out the solution that Yáñez Cossío offers: "en Yo vendo unos ojos negros la rebelión y la resistencia de María no se limitan a un conflicto entre los sexos; la transformación de relaciones entre hombre y mujer exige un esfuerzo común" (900). Yo vendo proposes that it is necessary to create a new man and a new woman that are independent and free from societal norms and the socioeconomic system that prostitutes human values and feelings for the sake of monetary gain.

In Yo vendo women are prostituted in the workplace. In María's case she has been forced to become a part of something that she was never prepared to do, work outside the home. The novel deals with a young, middle class woman who is married to a boring and useless bureaucrat. The protagonist attempts to make herself independent both economically and emotionally. María decides to leave her stagnant and submissive life and go in search of employment. She comes in contact with "real life" problems in the

workplace and finds herself inept and extremely unprepared. She blames her ineptness on her family and her husband who did nothing to prepare her in any way for the possible setbacks in her life. After much embarrassment and numerous failures María finds work in a cosmetics firm. She goes through the training process and learns how to cheat and swindle others and sell them things that they neither need nor want. Unhappy and absorbed by the capitalist system, she finds herself doing the same thing that had always turned her off to business. She rejects the corrupt society in which she lives because she sees it governed by money and sex. María says "¿Por qué se acepta un sistema basado en la comodidad de unos pocos y en la costumbre? ¿Por qué tanta opresión, tanta ignorancia de lo que es un ser humano?" (76). The author calls for a new system in which men and women can create a different socioeconomic order in which each person can develop his/her own potential regardless of stereotypical presuppositions based on gender.

La cofradía del mullo del vestido de la virgen pipona is a novel that is formed by the narration of the four Pando brothers. They are liberals who recount the historical and political events that have taken place in the pious town. It is a small town in the sierra that has a legend concerning the Virgen Pipona; the entire country is familiar with the Virgen and her miracles. The other important family in the small Ecuadorian town is the Benavides family.

The oldest sister, Doña Carmen, is the most powerful person both politically and religiously in the *pueblo*. She ruthlessly rules with an iron fist manipulating everyone and destroying anyone who dares to get in her way. The Benavides family is seen as the *cacique* of the region. Doña Carmen cheats, lies and deceives to achieve her desired results. Doña Carmen uses the church and the adoration of the Virgen Pipona as instruments of oppression and control. The main message that the novel presents is that of the subversion of the patriarchal order. Yáñez Cossío reverses the normal portrayal of power by taking it out of the hands of men and placing it in the hands of women. Thus she sets up an unusual representation of the handling of politics and religion. Women have often complained that the reason there is no equality in society is because men do not know how to treat women. Yáñez Cossío suggests in La cofradía that it is does not matter which gender governs because it is the system that oppresses and degrades men and women. The novel is blatant in showing that even though a woman has power, she relies on the same patriarchally based system to retain political and religious hegemony. In La cofradía nothing is sacred since even religion is a tool for maintaining control. Thus Yáñez Cossío demonstrates that the traditionally acceptable masculine hierarchical ordering of things is quite impractical as she paints a situation in which neither men nor women are capable of making

patriarchal practices work properly. Therefore, it is necessary that it be changed to something that will incorporate attitudes and beliefs of both men and women.

La casa del sano placer is indeed a novel that will catch the reader off guard. It ironically portrays prostitution as a solution to women's plight in a society held in bondage. Yáñez Cossío creates a character that seems to overtake the author. Doña Rita Benavides, like her sister Doña Carmen Benavides, has a strong personality and a powerful agenda. She has a great project to make prostitution respectable in the small pious Ecuadorian town. In order to accomplish her objectives, she founds the *Casa del Sano Placer*, which she wants to function as a school of sexual, moral and religious instruction, all under a rigid form of discipline. As time passes the entire town becomes tired of the *Casa del Sano Placer* as well as the whole situation. The priest is forced to leave town by Doña Carmen Benavides, and the women decide to stop cooking for their husbands who frequent the house of ill repute.

The novel calls attention to the situation of women in a patriarchal society. The author portrays women in this manner because she sees that "El mundo quiere olvidarse de la prostituta y la situación de la mujer en general" (Boyles 2c). Furthermore she states that: "Esta es una sociedad en la que se miente, se engaña mucho. Entonces, es una

necesidad de poner de manifiesto eso, por un lado" (Boyles 2c).

The author points out that women continue to be exploited even though they do not recognize it. Her ironical treatment of a *lupanar* is just that. She affirms that her narrative is clearly attacking masculine control over women's sexuality, but she does not stop there. Instead, she shows how feminine bondage includes psychological oppression and emotional mistreatment. Yáñez Cossío struggles to rescue the elementary rights of women that are more often than not ignored in underdeveloped countries like her own. La casa del sano placer gives an ironical treatment of prostitution, and points out a problem that continues to destroy society. Yáñez Cossío criticizes such a society that will allow and encourage a degrading activity that affects women of all ages. How can one only see the use of women's bodies as prostitution when women are prostituted in so many other ways?, posits the author.

If one had to encapsulate the entire corpus of Yáñez Cossío's feminist novels, he/she would conclude that it deals with machismo, materialism, fear of equality of the sexes, conventionalisms and capitalism. Moreover, the literary aim of Yáñez Cossío is to combat all types of injustices that degrade the human being, all the while using the most obvious as literary themes. Within the narratives one finds a combination of hidden facts (usually by

hiperbaton, the distortion of normal order or relationships), and she employs passages that move the action forward or roll it back. She uses vivid descriptions, inserted dialogues, interior monologues, introspections, parallelisms, jargon, refrains and popular songs (Vanégas Coveña 21-22). The feminist novels of Alicia Yáñez Cossío denounce moral, social and religious prejudices that go against the elemental rights of women.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW WITH ALICIA YANEZ COSSIO

Alicia Yáñez Cossío me invitó a entrevistarla en Quito en el séptimo piso del apartamento Casal Madrid en la esquina de Madrid y Toledo el 06 de Octubre de 1992. Este día llovía todo el día y los carros y autobuses circulaban hacia arriba y abajo en la calle, mientras hablábamos en la biblioteca. Nos saludamos y empezamos a discutir sus novelas. Ella era muy agradable y pasamos dos horas conversando. Antes de empezar la entrevista le pregunté si era posible que yo usara mi grabadora. Ella respondió que si . . .

Dane Boyles: En realidad ¿en qué condición está la mujer en esta sociedad machista?

Alicia Yáñez: La condición de la mujer ahora no es diferente de la que era hace muchos años. La mujer sigue siendo víctima, oprimida, y explotada por los hombres. Es que en su corazón ella no quiere cambiar su posición. Acepta la tradición española en que el hombre domina todo. Es que las raíces son hondas.

D.B.: La crítica es obvia en Yo vendo. Quisiera saber el significado del título. Parece tener más de uno, ¿no?

A.Y.: El título sí tiene dos sentidos. Es que el título es la última cosa que hago cuando termina una novela. Si tengo un título en mente antes de escribir casi siempre es inconforme con el nombre que les dio. El título es algo difícil para mí ya que no me gustan los títulos. En el caso

de Yo vendo unos ojos negros el título viene de una canción chilena. Pero sí el título tiene más de un sentido.

Primero "unos ojos negros" se refiere al daño hecho a la mujer por otra mujer. Estoy en contra de la mujer que le hace la mala jugada a la otra mujer . . . a mí me parece horrible. Es malo cuando una mujer engañe a otra mujer puramente para su ventaja. Segundo, la artificialidad de la mujer bella me repulsa y la Compañía Christine Farrow representa este engaño. En realidad, no me gustan los títulos porque son los que más trabajo me cuestan.

D.B.: *Pero, no tiene nada que ver con la venta de cosméticos?*

A.Y.: No, absolutamente no.

D.B.: *¿Por qué en la novela el hombre desempeña un papel secundario? Me parece que usted misma plantea que el hombre subordina a la mujer.*

A.Y.: Es intencional en todas mis novelas; la literatura ecuatoriana ha explotado tanto a la mujer dominada como personaje, que busco poner en mis novelas mujeres que luchan y el hombre pasa a ser secundario.

D.B.: *¿Por qué el equipo de ventas promociona artículos de belleza y no otro producto?*

A.Y.: Verá, la novela refleja la lucha de mi esposo; cuando nos quedamos sin trabajo vi como una salida para comer, el dedicarme a las ventas, así que fui a pedir trabajo en la librería Selecciones; lo mismo hizo mi esposo en otra

editora. Yo no seguí el curso de entrenamiento porque mi dijeron que a mí no me hacía falta; pero él sí. Les enseñaban técnicas que tenían que aplicar a cada cliente y convencerles para que compren. Pero en Yo vendo en vez de promocionar libros le cambié a cosméticos, porque esto es el colmo; venden cremas para la cara, para los codos, para las rodillas, y las mujeres caen en el consumerismo, y lo peor de todo es que hay quienes se dedicaban sólo a ésto, viven para agradar al hombre ya que tiempo cultivan lo de adentro.

D.B.: ¿También quiere decir el título que la mujer está vendida en una sociedad capitalista o de consumo?

A.Y.: Sí, y también la mujer llega a ser parte integral del sistema que destruye a la persona sin saberlo. Es que no me gustan lo artificial y la mujer bella que producen la sociedad de consumo. En Yo vendo unos ojos negros, me daba cuenta de que el mundo de la mujer es doloroso y sentía como angustia al escribir una novela sobre eso.

D.B.: La protagonista, Mariá, me parece la primera protagonista netamente feminista en sus obras aunque Camelia Llorosa nos ofreece, por primera vez, una mirada dentro de su idea de lo que es una mujer liberada. ¿En qué manera cambió su punto de vista acerca de la mujer cuando empezó a escribir Yo vendo?

A.Y.: Es que en Yo vendo vi una necesidad de presentar a la mujer en una manera que verdaderamente representa la mujer.

Es que la mujer vive en un mundo doloroso y quería escribir de la angustia que sufre.

D.B.: *¿Es Mariá una mujer-símbolo en Yo vendo unos ojos negros? ¿Si es, en qué manera?*

A.Y.: Si es, yo no sé. Si tú dices que es entonces es. Para mí yo no estoy segura exactamente lo que es una mujer-símbolo.

D.B.: *Empleo este término porque Michael Handelman de la Universidad de Tennessee lo utilizó una vez en un artículo en cuanto a Yo vendo.*

A.Y.: Para mí, entonces, ella es mujer-símbolo ya que alcanza su libertad económica aunque no es una libertad desarrollada y completa.

D.B.: *Es curioso, pero ingenioso, que la primera cosa que haga María es quitarse el <<de>> de su apellido. ¿Qué quiere decir eso?*

A.Y.: Eso quiere decir que la mujer se separa del hombre completamente cuando se quita el <<de>> de su apellido. Entiendo que en el principio es algo superficial pero poco a poco se separa del hombre emocionalmente e intelectualmente. Lo importante es que empiece a hacer algo definitivo. Ahora puede buscar sí misma fuera del control del hombre. Sus preferencias son las suyas y sus fracasos son los suyos. En fin, es su propia persona.

D.B.: *¿Representa Santos de León lo masculino en general? Bueno, no he ~~pensado~~ pensado en Santo de León en este modo. Pero,*

sí, representa el hombre en una sociedad de consumo perfectamente puesto que manipula a la mujer para ayudar su propio negocio e interés. En una sociedad de consumo la mujer es otro instrumento en el motor capitalista. Lo más importante es el ganar de dinero y lo menos importante es la persona en sí. Vemos la deshumanización de la mujer en esta sociedad ya que es un ser inferior.

D.B.: Me parece que Santos de León quiere programar a la mujer para trabajar en un mundo capitalista. ¿Representa Christine Farrow de Nueva York una manera en la cual la mujer puede ser seducida?

A.Y.: Sí, Christine Farrow de Nueva York engaña a la mujer. Quiere producir en la mujer el deseo de querer cosas, que la mujer sea codiciosa. Por su propia avaricia Christine Farrow puede manipular las acciones de la mujer. En el principio María sólo está trabajando para Christine Farrow porque quiere mejorar su situación económica por medio de los 5.000 sucres mensuales que le paga. Pero al fin de la novela se da cuenta de que este sistema de vender es algo totalmente malo.

D.B.: Dice en Yo vendo que "los hombres eran una minoría" y en La casa del sano placer implica la misma cosa. ¿Cuál es, en su opinión, un "hombre verdadero"?

A.Y.: El hombre verdadero es el que no es machista. El que

puede tener relaciones íntimas con una mujer sin maltratarla es un hombre verdadero.

D.B.: *Ha dicho que "la Biblia es un libro facinante desde el punto de vista histórico, pero no acepta la Biblia como libro religioso" Teniendo esto en cuenta ¿por qué aparece en casi todas la novelas una figura religiosa?*

A.Y.: De niña viví con las monjas en un convento por doce años. Ahora no me gusta este sistema ya que era bastante riguroso. Me gusta la libertad, no me gusta tanto control que exige la iglesia católica sobre la persona.

D.B.: *¿Veo un poco de anticlericalismo en su obra? En realidad, ¿es anticlericalismo o anticatolicismo?*

A.Y.: No veo en realidad una diferencia entre estos dos términos. Significan la misma cosa ya que en el Ecuador predominan los católicos. Nunca he pensado en eso. Creo que viene de mi pasado personal y mis experiencias malas mientras estaba en la escuela católica.

D.B.: *Para usted ¿qué significa la religión?*

A.Y.: Creo que en este momento es como una necesidad de la humanidad de encontrar un ser superior que le convenza a sí mismo. Es una búsqueda, hasta cierto punto humilde, de un ser superior. ¡Que no te pongan tantas cosas que están oscuras en tu mente! Que sea, a la vez, una cosa de conocimiento y una cosa de sentimiento.

Yáñez me preguntó: *¿qué religión profeso?*

D.B.: *Le respondí que asisto a la iglesia de Cristo.*

Yánez me respondió:

A.Y.: La Biblia está en entredicho, desde los últimos descubrimientos que se hicieron en las cuevas en el Mar Muerto.

Yánez sigue hablando:

A.Y.: A raíz de eso, principalmente los lingüistas hacen una nueva revisión de la Biblia y encuentran que hay todavía mucho que estudiar, que ver, mucho que está en tela de juicio. Yo me niego a considerar que la Palabra de Dios esté en un libro. Es un concepto que no entra en mí. Yo digo que la Palabra de Dios está dentro de cada uno y que cada uno debe entrar dentro de sí para poder oírla. No es fácil, ¿no? Pero este concepto lo acepto más que considerar que está en un libro.

D.B.: *He notado la subversión del orden patriarcal en La cofradía. ¿Qué quiere decir este cambio?*

A.Y.: No te entiendo la pregunta. ¿Qué quieres decir con orden patriarcal?

D.B.: *En vez de que gobiernen los hombres lo hacen las mujeres, tenemos la Cofradía que es muy fuerte en el pueblo.*

A.Y.: Bueno, fíjate, eso se da en el contexto de la novela en un pueblo. Fíjate que siempre trato de minimizar a los hombres, entonces en este pueblo, pues, los hombres no hacen nada. Bueno, hay alcalde y todo eso, el alcalde debería ser

la autoridad. Pero como no hace nada ni tampoco el teniente político ni ningún hombre hace nada, entonces Doña Carmen acapara el poder.

D.B.: Lo que veo en La cofradía es que no importa quién gobierne ya que los problemas económicos e ideológicos siguen existiendo.

A.Y.: Sí, entonces al final de esta novela hay como una insinuación a que se dé una revolución porque al final dice bueno, ¿dónde está el panadero,? ¿dónde está el lechero,? ¿dónde están? . . . todos se fueron. Se fueron a las montañas, entonces queda la cosa así. Lo que pensaba en ese entonces, cuando escribí, era que había una posibilidad de una revolución, tú sabes que hoy en día es imposible, ¿no? Cayó el muro de Berlin, se descubre todo lo que había en Rusia, todo queda en nada. Hay entonces una posibilidad a una salida revolucionaria que tampoco yo estoy de acuerdo con una salida revolucionaria al estilo de lo que está pasando en el Perú. Pero ahora ya en este momento si yo volvería a escribir sería imposible. No existe, no hay una revolución que se pueda dar en el mundo a ese nivel. La única revolución posible es la autenticidad del hombre y de la mujer. No hay más.

D.B.: ¿En cuanto a la condición de la mujer en La cofradía se puede decir que ha mejorado?

A.Y.: Por supuesto que sí, pero las relaciones entre el hombre y la mujer exige un esfuerzo común.

D.B.: Me parece que La casa del sano placer es bastante irónica. ¿Por qué escogió representar la mujer de tal manera?

A.Y.: Es que quería escribir algo diferente, o sea quería una representación diferente de la mujer de lo que sueles ver en las novelas latinoamericanas. Claro que esta novela es irónica y que la gente aquí no la entiende.

D.B.: Veo que uno tiene que leer entre las líneas para poder entender el mensaje.

A.Y.: Eso es cierto. Es que la explotación de la mujer no está sólo en la familia sino también en la calle. El mundo quiere olvidarse de la prostituta y la situación de la mujer en general.

D.B.: Hay algunos personajes que son prostitutas en varias novelas tuyas. ¿Por qué aparecen prostitutas en estas novelas? Inmediatamente pienso en Iridia en Más allá de las islas.

D.B.: ¿Es ella una prostituta?

A.Y.: Iridia es un tipo de prostituta que se da los hombres por compasión. No sé si tú conoces una película española que se llama Iridiana. Iridia está inspirada en el personaje de Iridiana. Iridiana no es propiamente prostituta. Se hace prostituta pero por compasión a los hombres, ¿no,? porque veo una serie de mendigos, de pobres, de gente de lo último, entonces ella se ofrece a ellos en

una especie como de algo semejante a un holocausto. Es un personaje femenino muy, muy interesante. Iridia lo que busca en la relación con los hombres es a Morgan.

D.B.: *¿Y de dónde viene Morgan?*

A.Y.: ¡Oye, i Morgan es un personaje histórico que cada vez se hacen más estudios sobre él. ¿Tú has oído hablar de Carlos Julio Arosemena? Fue presidente de la República. El vive en Guayaquil. Entonces, es un hombre que lee mucho y le gustó esta novela de Más allá de las islas. Y empezó a hacer investigaciones sobre Morgan y encontró muchas cosas muy, muy interesantes. No están publicadas.

D.B.: *¿Por qué murió cada uno de los personajes en tales maneras. Es como si dijéramos que todos están huyendo de la muerte, no?, u cada uno tiene una forma de morir diferente.*

A.Y.: Es porque en esa época estaba yo un poco obsesionada por la cuestión de la muerte. Esa es la novela que más trabajo me ha costado. Siempre, salvo en el Cristo feo, y en otra que estoy escribiendo ahora, que estoy escribiendo ya mis memorias yo he tratado de ponerme al margen. He tratado con todas mis fuerzas de no estar yo, con mi personalidad, dentro de la novela. Entonces, en Más allá de las islas, al comienzo era una novela que trataba de una escritora que tenía problemas matrimoniales, en la cuestión de infidelidad. Tenía un marido mujeriego. Entonces, ella iba a las islas para olvidarse del golpe, el choque que había tenido. En las islas escribía, pero mientras escribía

estaba obsesionada por la cuestión esta de su problema personal. Entonces, esa novela leyó aquí una amiga y me dijo: sí, es lo mejor que has escrito, pero cuando esta novela lean tus hijos van a odiar a su padre. Entonces, yo dije, no tengo derecho. Pero como la novela ya estaba terminada, la rehice. Entonces, no sabía con que amalgamarlas. Quité el personaje que era yo, la escritora y puse el personaje la muerte para que haya una amalgama pues, para que tenga, digamos, un uso, para que una la novela. Esa es la novela que más trabajo me ha costado.

D.B.: *Más allá de la islas me pareció una novela bastante diferente a las demás que usted ha escrito.*

A.Y.: Yo creo que literariamente es mi mejor novela.

D.B.: *¿En qué sentido?*

A.Y.: En estructura, en creación de personajes.

Yáñez me hizo una pregunta:

A.Y.: ¿Tú encuentras afinidad entre Bruna, soroche y los tíos y Cien años de soledad?

D.B.: *Si hay varias semejanzas entre Bruna, soroche y los tíos y Cien años de soledad, pero también ha afinidad entre Bruna y La casa de los espíritus de Isabel Allende.*

Yáñez me declaró fuertemente y con pasión.

A.Y.: ¡Oye, aquí fue terrible! Yo escribí esa novela muchísimos años antes, en el '63, por ahí. Y la mandé a un concurso en La Casa de la Cultura, pero me puse ese seudónimo Romina. Bueno, eso viene aquí. Y no lo leyeron.

Y después, creo que en el '65 vino Cien años de soledad y yo lo leí. Y dije, mi novela no es tan maluca. Entonces, lo mandé a un concurso en Guayaquil y gané un premio nacional, que fue el primer gran premio que se había entregado en los últimos años. Pero, claro, me puse un seudónimo de hombre, por si acaso. Pero, entonces, aquí todo el mundo me decía es Cien años de soledad, Cien años de soledad. Plagio a Cien años de soledad. Pero a mí no me importa. Y, eso está probado. Pero la gente que leía tenía mucha influencia de Cien años de soledad.

D.B.: *Cuando le comenté a Yáñez sobre las obras de Isabel Allende que yo he leído, ella me dijo que se siente muy diferente de Allende y se considera sólo una ama de casa, una ama de casa que escribe.*

A.Y.: Es que yo no pertenezco a ningún círculo ni nada de eso.

D.B.: *¿Cuándo pienso terminar su última novela, Cristo feo?*

A.Y.: Cristo feo está terminada ya. Está en un diskette de computadora. Estoy esperando que uno de mis hijos la edite.

D.B.: Me gustaría leerla.

A.Y.: Sí, me gustaría que la leas.

D.B.: *¿Cuántas páginas tendrá?*

A.Y.: No sé exactamente, creo que ha salido una novela corta, y no lo podría decir porque es la primera vez que escribo en computadora. ¡Es apasionante la computadora!

D.B.: *¿Hay una fecha fija para publicarla?*

A.Y.: No. Estoy ahora en un estado en que la literatura como que no me importa, no me interesa, como que ya dejé esa etapa. No sé, no es que esté deprimida, no, estoy bien, me siento muy bien ahora. Pero no sé por qué. Cuando viví en el campo me empezó a gustar más la agricultura que la literatura. Entonces ahora, lo que quisiera realmente es eso, dejar todo esto y vivir en el campo. Entonces, estoy entrando en un período como que . . . no me importa, no sé.

D.B.: *Es que yo quisiera incluir esta novela en mi tesis doctoral.*

A.Y.: Sería muy bueno. Déjame ver como lo puedo hacer. Cuando esté lista yo te llamo por teléfono.

D.B.: *Se refiere a Virginia Wolf en Yo vendo. ¿Ha leído algunos de sus libros?*

A.Y.: Sí, me gusta Cuarto de Estar porque ella dice: para que una mujer escriba, necesita independencia, necesita un cuarto de estar. El cuarto de estar es el espacio físico que ahora, a los sesenta años, a los cuarenta años de matrimonio, mmm . . . nunca tuve mi espacio, mi sitio. Lo importante aquí es que Virginia Wolf dice: es imposible concebir una escritora que no tenga su espacio físico y su dependencia económica. Es imposible escribir sin eso. En mi última novela Cristo feo, hay una parte en que la protagonista, que es una mujer creadora, dice: "si yo fuera hombre, si yo fuera el que estoy haciendo la obra, mi mujer vendría, me tocaría la puerta, me traería una tacita de

café, esperaría a que me tome el café azucarado y calentito y me quedaría mirando. Es que las autoras necesitan fuerza para escribir de la posición que ocupa a la mujer actual. Virginia Wolf me da inspiración y quiero que la mujer se dé cuenta de su condición.

D.B.: *Doña Rita basa su Casa del Sano Placer en los modelos griegos de la prostitución. Más tarde apareció el mismo sistema en la época Victoriana en Inglaterra y en el Segundo Imperio Francés. ¿Usó usted estos ejemplos para escribir del prostíbulo y sus sistema social?*

A.Y.: ¡Qué interesante! en el sentido, por ejemplo, de hacer un prostíbulo. Sabía de los griegos sí, pero de los ingleses y los franceses no. Pero en el sentido que en algún momento planteo en la novela de un lugar de reeducación del hombre para su relación con la mujer. Es una cuestión de educación. Podría entonces (el prostíbulo) ser una escuela de reeducación de los hombres, un lugar así, bien llevado y con un sentido moral . . . Esta novela escandalizó aquí, y mucha gente no la entendió, entonces no pueden diferenciar mi pensamiento con el pensamiento de Doña Rita. Fíjate, no estoy de acuerdo con las fechorías de Doña Rita Benavides. Lo que pasaba era que ella se me impulsaba. Era como decir, nada de lo que escribes es Doña Rita y Doña Rita me decía, "soy yo, déjame vivir." Es que Doña Rita, como personaje, me costó tanto trabajo que llegó un momento en que dije: bueno si le da la gana de hacer un prostíbulo,

que haga, vamos a ayudarlo a que salga con ese prostíbulo. No quería crear la misma idea del prostíbulo como el de Los Jazmines. En vez de dar una impresión de pobreza y miseria escogí escribir de un prostíbulo donde se hace la cosa puramente sexual. Todos los lectores me decían que ¿cómo es posible que tú estés hablando de la necesidad de crear prostíbulos? Recuerdo que alguien me dijo, ¿cómo es posible que escribas eso si no has entrado en un prostíbulo? Fíjate, no he entrado en un prostíbulo por eso tuve que documentarme mucho. Esto está basado en un estudio que hace una sicóloga, Fabiloa Solís, sobre las relaciones dentro del matrimonio o sea la sexualidad de las mujeres. Y hace estadísticas, entonces, encuentra que a nivel de gente de clase media y baja, un porcentaje inmenso un sesenta o setenta por ciento de mujeres no conocen el orgasmo. Muchas llegan a la menopausia y han sido toda su vida fuente de placer del hombre sin haber experimentado el orgasmo. Entonces son detalles horribles, ¿no? Entonces podría darse un casa donde se reeduce al hombre. Acuérdate que en La casa del sano placer hay una parte en que Doña Rita se pregunta: ¿por qué un prostíbulo bien llevado como el mío, que no es negocio sino una institución de prevención social--para que no haya violaciones, etc.--porque una institución así, no se vale de estas mujeres? Por eso es que les hace estudiar tanto para que sirvan como educadores del hombre, difusoras de placer también, ¿no?

D.B.: Me parece que La casa del sano placer es bastante irónica ya que no quiere decir que la prostitución es algo que necesita la sociedad sino que es otra manera en la cual el hombre sigue manipulando a la mujer. La mujer cree que porque recibe dinero su trabajo está bien y justificado, pero para el hombre sus relaciones siguen siendo un negocio (una cuestión de acuéstese y salga) y nada más como era en *Babylonia* hace muchísimos años.

A.Y.: Pues mira, tú entendiste mucho más que la gente aquí.

D.B.: Explícame, por favor, la razón por la cual Doña Rita ve la prostitución como algo aceptable y moral?

A.Y.: Bueno, Doña Rita lo ve eso porque dice en alguna parte que si no hubiera lugares como los prostíbulos entonces los hombres con su apetito exacerbado se dedicarían a la violación. Habría mujeres violadas, niñas violadas etc., etc. Doña Rita piensa también que en muchos aspectos el hecho de que un hombre vaya a un prostíbulo es menos inmoral que el hecho de que el hombre tenga una amante. El está, digamos, pendiente de su amante. Y dentro de la casa de Doña Rita la norma que ella pone es que no haya entre el cliente y la prostituta esa especie de relación sentimental. Eso es lo inmoral porque entonces el hombre está faltando a su palabra, a su juramento a la fidelidad. Doña Rita pone como la máxima cosa la fidelidad, fidelidad en la pareja. Entonces, el hecho de que tenga una aventura no es importante. Pero eso ella prohíbe el sentimentalismo en su

casa. Pero lo verdaderamente inmoral es el mantener la querida. Es como más inmoral el mantener una querida oculta que irse alguna vez a un lugar como La Casa del Sano Placer. En esta época, ya dentro de la pareja, qué es lo grave, lo verdaderamente monstruoso, lo pecaminoso es el engaño. En esta novela, no sé si tú entiendes o percibes que cuando uno tiene una aventura sexual es menos inmoral que mantener una querida.

D.B.: *¿Pero todo esto es irónico?*

A.Y.: Sí es irónico, así lo dice Doña Rita, no lo digo yo. Lo que dice Doña Rita es que aquí se viene a hacer el sexo, cuestión de carne y adiós.

D.B.: *Pero, usted no quiere que la mujer se venda a sí misma en ninguna manera.*

A.Y.: Ya, ahora entiendo. Veo que tú comprendiste mejor que los demás.

D.B.: *¿Es posible que las hetaires de La Casa del Sano Placer sigan otra carrera? Porque a mi juicio, dentro de la narración, no aparece que eso fuera posible.*

A.Y.: No, no pueden seguir otra cosa, porque fíjate, ella las escoge porque no sirven para otra cosa. Ella dice, estas no valen como estudiantes, como enfermeras, como cocineras, como mamás, no sirven para nada. Pero tienen esa cosa, esa apetencia sexual, y es para lo único que sirven.

D.B.: *¿Y de dónde les viene esa apetencia?*

A.Y.: Es el producto de la educación.

D.B.: *¿De la educación patriarcal dentro de nuestro sistema masculino?*

A.Y.: Podría ser, o podría ser también un sistema de mucha prohibición. Entonces, ven el sexo como una cosa que les deslumbra porque no conocen.

D.B.: *Como yo lo veo, estas ninfas son productos de una sociedad masculina. Las mujeres piensan así porque así han sido educadas.*

A.Y.: No está muy lejos esto, ¿no? Es hasta ahora. La idea de que lo mejor que pueda pasarle a una hija es que se case bien, y casarse bien es con un hombre rico. Entonces están vedando posibilidades, ¿no? En fin el matrimonio es definitivamente sexo, porque lo mejor es que se pueda casar con un hombre rico y todo eso, pero no lo quiere, ¿no? Entonces, es una cuestión de negocio, cuestión de negocio y la mujer está tremendamente metida en esta sociedad todavía.

D.B.: *Por eso tenemos la misma situación con la mujer ya que su condición no ha mejorado en ninguna manera porque sigue siendo un objeto de negocio.*

A.Y.: Ahora, ¿quién es la responsable de esta situación?

No es el hombre, es la mujer. Esto ya lo dije, no me acuerdo en cual novela, creo que en esta, no sé. Porque la mujer es la que educa a los hijos. Entonces es la responsable de la educación de los niños por lo menos en Latinoamérica, el padre casi no tiene que ver nada.

Entonces, es la madre, y la madre es la que sigue influyendo en esa misma trayectoria del machismo.

D.B.: *Eso me hace pensar en Yo vendo unos ojos negros ya que el narrador plantea la idea de que en el Ecuador la mujer es educada sólo con un objetivo, casarse. ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre eso?*

A.Y.: Eso debe ser el fin, por todavía si tiene aspiraciones a menos que encuentre un compañero que comparta sus aspiraciones y las entienda, porque si no, se anula totalmente por los hijos, la casa y el hombre no colaboran con las labores del hogar; pero la culpa de esto tiene la madre que educa a los hijos distintamente dando unos juguetes a los niños y otros a las niñas; al darles muñecas se les condiciona a ser madre, cuando se debe enseñarle primero a ser lo que ellas sienten y lo que deben ser.

D.B.: *Entonces la culpa de su subordinación es la propia mujer?*

A.Y.: Sí, ella por no saber educar a sus hijos, y también las estructuras educativas; por ejemplo: en la escuela la mayor parte de profesores son mujeres y ellas tienden a preferir a las niñas por los modositas que son, por lo tranquilas que están; a los niños les dejan de lado, no les dan cariño por igual y después ellos se ponen malcriados, vienen las peleas y se ahondan las diferencias.

D.B.: *También me hace pensar en la madre de García en Yo vendo.*

A.Y.: ¡Ah ya!, claro.

D.B.: *Porque la madre de García no quiere que ella salga de su situación atrasada.*

A.Y.: Es una cosa que viene, y cada vez produce más problema, ha desaparecido mucho en la sociedad actual, pero todavía existe, y esa es nuestra herencia española. Y es de donde más viene el machismo. Persona más machista que el español no hay.

D.B.: *Dice La casa del sano placer "Que los teólogos, que siempre fueron varones, manipularon el asunto del pecado original recargando la culpabilidad a la hembra." ¿Por qué se refiere al pecado original?*

A.Y.: Porque, bueno, es el origen de todo, ¿no? Fíjate, ¿quién le dio la manzana? Eva. Eva te dio la manzana, y luego, ha un período durante la Edad Media entre los padres de la iglesia, que sé yo, no sé si tú conoces eso, San Ambrosio, ¡es tremendo! Entonces durante toda la Edad Media lo que hacen es recargar la culpabilidad de todo en la mujer pero diciendo, bueno, la mujer desde el comienzo fue la que tentó al hombre, ¿no,? y todos estos padres de la iglesia te dicen, pues la mujer es el origen de todo mal, la mujer es la causa de meter el pecado en el mundo, la mujer la que incita al pecado. Entonces, casi toda la Edad Media es, digamos, un bombardeo a la mujer. Ahora del pecado

original, fíjate, esas cosas de la Biblia están puestas muy en el sentido que yo no creo, ¿porque en realidad existió toda esa trama,? ¿esa cosa de la serpiente y el pecado original,? yo no lo creo. No, no lo creo. Inclusive creo que el verdadero pecado original, si es que se podría decir pecado, o sea esa interrupción, digamos, de la relación de Dios con el ser humano se debió a otra cosa. Yo pienso, ¿no? En algún tiempo hubo más relación de la divinidad con la humanidad. Entonces, alguna falla de la humanidad, que sé yo, ¿soberbia?, ¿lujuria?, que sé yo, interrumpió esa comunicación con la divinidad. Eso creo yo. Pudo haber pasado. Exactamente lo del pecado original no creo.

D.B.: *En La casa del sano placer la narradora critica el pecado original, y es parte de la tesis de Doña Rita, cuando dice "--Que el matrimonio era un sacramento, quería decir que era sagrado, que entonces cómo podía resultar pecaminoso cuando había placer sin la consiguiente procreación, en el caso de mujeres menopaúsicas o grávidas. Que no era posible que un hombre, para evitar el adulterio, cometiera un pecado cuando yacía en su cama matrimonial con su verdadera esposa."* ¿Qué quiere decir esta cita para usted?

A.Y.: Para mí es una tremenda contradicción pues, ¿no? Es una contradicción ya que el sexo debe ser solo para la procreación. Sí, te dicen solo en la procreación. Y creo que lo dice ahí también que es lo que pasa, por ejemplo, con la mujer menopaúsica. El sexo es una función biológica,

entonces, que tienen que meter ahí la cuestión del sacramento. O sea que existe mucha manipulación a este respecto. Un exceso de manipulación, por eso, cada vez creo menos. Yo vivía en eso, a mí me educaron en eso. Y ya en la vida real tú ves y te das cuenta de tanta cosa, tantos absurdos. Tienes que irlo dejando, para ser sincero con uno mismo.

D.B.: *¿Qué quiere decir "la humanidad se iba de cabeza al despelote"?*

Que se iba cayendo como en un vacío. O sea que llegará, está por llegar un momento, en que las cuestiones que eran básicas, religiosamente básicas, se desmoronan.

Te voy a decir una cosa que te va a gustar. Yo creo que se va a terminar, por ejemplo, la cuestión de Roma. Creo que la iglesia en este momento está entrando en un . . . papeleo, diría yo, en una falta de seguridad terrible. ¿Has leído los nuevos pecados que proclama el Vaticano?

D.B.: No.

A.Y.: Bueno, algunos están bien. Atentar contra la ecología, la usura es un pecado, bueno. Pero leer el horóscopo, puede ser un pecado? Eso es una cosa intrascendente. La gente lee el horóscopo por necesidad, por búsqueda de algo, por curiosidad, o por otra razón. No tiene por qué prohibirse en una cosa tan infantil, tan boba, tan tonta. Entonces, ese es el despelote. La humanidad va perdiendo, por lo menos yo digo humanidad en el

sentido localista, en el sentido de religión católica. Se va al diablo todo, si es que no se ha ido ya.

D.B.: *¿Por qué cree Doña Rita que en "la casa casi no había ofensa a la institución del matrimonio? Sé que "no se mezclan en la misma olla el apetito carnal con el sentimentalismo." Pero tiene que ser irónico, ¿no?*

A.Y.: Bueno, sí es irónico. Para Doña Rita el visitar de un prostíbulo es menos inmoral que mantener una querida. Es peor todavía si tiene una amante ya que la amante puede destruir su matrimonio. Además para Doña Rita es una cuestión de carne y adiós. Pero al mismo tiempo no es difícil ver que las dos acciones son atrasadas, ¿no?

D.B.: *Dice La casa que los hombres "necesitan ciertos superioridades necias para afirmar un prestigio que no tienen en otros campos. Que necesitaban la jactancia de aventuras con mujeres, y esa jactancia venía a ser igual que el quiquirquí del gallo." ¿Es decir que la prostitución es nada más que otro modo de opresión para la mujer?*

A.Y.: Ves, por ejemplo en esta sociedad, te vas a dar cuenta que el viernes, le dicen San Viernes. Todos los burócratas, los oficinistas, celebran. Empiezan a beber. En este país, por desgracia se bebe demasiado y de ahí, pues, están a un paso de irse al prostíbulo. Pero, más por jactancia, por decir yo voy a esos sitios, yo hago lo que me da la gana, yo tengo mujeres. Y también, fíjate, es como un fenómeno que se ve en estos últimos años. El hombre va

subiendo de categoría en su trabajo, en su oficina, tiene ya su secretaria y entonces es como si lo que le rodea, el medio ambiente, le impone como una necesidad el hecho de tener una amante, como una especie de prestigio social. Entonces qué es eso? Nada. Es como el quiquiriquí en un gallinero. Para decir YO.

D.B.: *Por eso, ¿la mujer sigue siendo un objeto?*

A.Y.: Sí, sigue siendo un objeto.

D.B.: *Si tuviera que resumir en una oración el mensaje central de La casa, qué diría?*

A.Y.: Es difícil.

D.B.: *Entonces, en dos oraciones o en un párrafo. Es que hay muchos lectores que no entienden el tema de La casa.*

A.Y.: ¿Qué quiero decir? Tanta cosa que quiero decir. En parte, el hecho de que haya fidelidad en la pareja aunque el hombre vaya a un prostíbulo. Para mí lo más importante es esa especie de fidelidad, de afinidad, en cuanto a sentimiento. Esta es una sociedad en la que se miente, se engaña mucho. Entonces es una necesidad de poner de manifiesto eso, por un lado.

D.B.: *En su obra usted escribió que el hombre verdadero y el segundo sexo, refiriéndose a la mujer, pueden tener éxito en sus relaciones matrimoniales. ¿Qué quiso decir al llamar segundo sexo a la mujer?*

A.Y.: La sociedad está dividida en sexo masculino y femenino. Pero en el sexo femenino no todas son iguales.

D.B.: *Tampoco en el sexo masculino.*

A.Y.: Así es, tampoco el masculino, porque deberían ser el hombre y los machistas, como subdivisión y en el femenino, la mujer que lucha y que está consciente y la mujer oprimida, la cual no tiene la culpa de la situación en que vive. Pero el otro tipo de sexo que es la mujer que se da cuenta de las cosas, que sabe, sin embargo es la que origina el triángulo. Entonces, ya no pertenece propiamente al hecho femenino, a ser mujer o sea la mujer que busca o inicia la cuestión del sexo, la que hace las cosas, la prostituta, digamos, tiene una actitud masculina. De hecho la prostituta es medio masculina. Entonces ya no es propiamente del segundo sexo. Debería integrarse en otro, aparte, en otro grupo. No es propiamente una mujer, mujer. Este tipo de mujer es destructiva.

D.B.: *¿Qué tiene la mujer del segundo sexo que la hace diferente de la prostituta? ¿Tiene ella características masculinas y femininas a la misma vez? ¿Por qué no puede creerse que sea totalmente sumisa?*

A.Y.: Fíjate que la primera labor que hace Doña Rita es sacar las mujeres del prostíbulo, de ese que se llama Los Jazmines. Entonces trata de redimir a esas mujeres, pero qué encuentra? Encuentra que propiamente no son prostitutas, prostitutas por vocación, sino que una tiene por ejemplo apetencia para la cocina, para la costura, etc,

etc, hasta una que se hace monja. Entonces esas mujeres son redimibles, pueden volver a ser mujeres.

D.B.: *Pero las ninfas no.*

A.Y.: Las ninfas no pueden porque propiamente están en lo suyo, según Doña Rita. Cada mujer es un ser humano redimible, pero, según Doña Rita, esas mujeres son irredimibles porque sólo sirven para eso.

D.B.: *F. Henriques hizo un estudio sobre las prostitutas en el siglo diecinueve y Khalid Kristainy discute los descubrimientos de Henriques en su libro, The Prostitute in Progressive Literature. El creía que las prostitutas no eran redimibles, a diferencia de las alcohólicas y drogadictas, porque las primeras no volvían a aceptar por la sociedad por haber cometido pecados sexuales y las otras sí, porque sus pecados no eran de tipo sexual. Algo similar lo expresa usted en su novela.*

A.Y: Claro, porque yo creo que de hecho existen mujeres que sólo sirven para eso. Ahora, las causas se originen en que ellas también son unas víctimas. Fíjate, que se dan algunos casos de señoras que tienen su esposo, sus hijos, una buena posición social y económica pero que siempre están alrededor de la cuestión del sexo. No con su marido, por supuesto, sino con otros hombres, dañando otros hogares sin la necesidad económica de la propia prostituta. Quiere decir que tienen una aberración mental, de vivir alrededor del sexo. De esto se da mucho. Serán estas redimibles o no lo

serán, yo no sé, pero las ninfas no son redimibles. Las ninfas están necesitando además alguien que esté por encima de ellas. Alguien que les manipule. Por eso es que cuando aparece ese predicador se van con él. En alguna parte dije yo que ellas tienen alma de esclavas. Ni les interesa ni buscan la libertad ni la superación sino que siempre están dependiendo de alguien. Si éste aparece, lo siguen.

A.Y.: ¿Conoces tú la vida de Rasputín?

D.B.: No.

A.Y.: Rasputín era un hombre que en la época de los zares, al final de esta. Utilizó mucho la cuestión religiosa para atraer como sus adeptas a mujeres fáciles. Tenía una facilidad increíble para esto y de hecho las mujeres corrían tras de él como enloquecidas. Rasputín llenaba la necesidad de ese tipo de mujer irredimible que no le interesa la libertad sino que busca estar sojuzgada, a veces por la misma religión.

D.B.: *Eso me hace pensar en un libro de Gerda Lerner que se llama The Creation of Patriarchy en el que relata sobre la forma en que la gente crea una sociedad patriarcal, en la que la mujer siempre fue esclava. Hasta la fecha sigue siendo esclava pero en otro sentido. No ha podido cambiar ni sentir en forma diferente porque siempre ha vivido en esta condición. En su novela también he encontrado conceptos similares.*

A.Y.: Así es, y la liberación de la mujer llegará cuando piense por sí misma. Porque si sigue pensando lo que le dicen o sigue aferrada a creencias continuará en la misma condición que hasta ahora y nunca será libre.