Creation and marginalisation in women's writing in mid-twentieth-century Uruguay: the case of Concepción Silva Bélinzon's poetry

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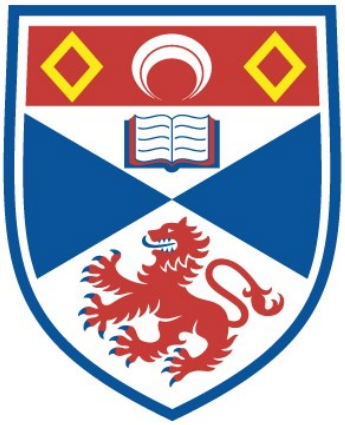
A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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This thesis is dedicated to my sister, Macarena,
mi hermana superpoderosa.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how women's writing in mid-twentieth century Uruguay enables a reconsideration of the intertwined hegemonic practices of literary canon formation and national identity in this seminal period. Within a national history and a cultural tradition conceived of as patriarchal, progressive and homogeneous, in correspondence to a European/Eurocentric concept of time and historicism, women writers struggled to find a recognised position from which to speak. Nevertheless, like other marginal groups, women writers have challenged the hegemonic discourses of modernity in Uruguay, as elsewhere in Latin America, producing what can be described, following Elaine Showalter, as a double-voiced textual strategy that replicates as well as subverts the dominant order.

In this respect, Concepción Silva Bélinzon (Montevideo, 1900-1987) offers a remarkable case study to show how women's poetry destabilises and renegotiates the great discourses of modernity. Socially and culturally marginalised, Silva Bélinzon's life demonstrates the failures and limitations of a patriarchal/paternalistic society, while her poetry problematises the homogeneous national discourses of modern Uruguay, exposing the discontinuity inherent to a national history conceived of as masculine, linear and teleological.

Silva Bélinzon's poetry has been defined as a synthesis of *Modernismo* and Surrealism, and described as a combination of free associations, biblical references and metaphysical concerns, all expressed within conventional metric forms, notably, the sonnet. Her poetry has been considered incoherent and bizarre, and has thus received little critical attention. However, one of the most interesting characteristics of her poetry has been overlooked. That is, the juxtaposition of different artistic trends and the dialectical tension that exists between the use of random, discontinuous and disconnected images within strict traditional poetic forms.

The theoretical approach of this thesis is predominantly framed by postcolonial, feminist and gender theories, including those of Homi K. Bhabha and Judith Butler. In addition, drawing on Henri Bergson's work, *Matière et mémoire* (1896) and Marcel Proust's well-known idea of *mémoire involontaire*, I interpret Silva Bélinzon's elliptical poetry as a virtual journey through layers of the personal and national pasts that thereby deterritorialises the national, hegemonic discourses of the modern nation. Thus, using Silva Bélinzon's poetry as a case study, the thesis aims to demonstrate how women writers 'overlap in the act of writing the nation' (Bhabha 2003: 292).

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FOREWORD

[…] Eso hizo. Dibujar con insistencia y sortilegio la cara ultraterrena, las espinas y las luces.

Estaba trabajando en el cuaderno, pero al mismo tiempo en las colchas y cortinas, en las baldosas y en el aire, el infinito.

Un trabajo sombreado por Dios. Esa alhucema fuerte como ninguna.

Vestal inclinada e invencible; a veces también lo visible, crió gatos y perros que quedaban como sacralizados, y sus sepulcros bajo el patio.

Ató a los íconos, pues suelen volarse, con leves correas; los ató a la pared, cerca del retrato de la hermana **Clara** – oscura, desolada.

Inventaba tés de guindas. Y hasta de retamas, creo; e iba a comprar confites de nácar para ofrendar a sus amigos. Bajo aquel mirar como lluvia cayendo inexplicablemente, de un cielo sin nube.

Ahora, surge entre los pinos, pasa en carruaje; hay que correrla un poco.

En la alta noche regresa a su casa con un atado de cucharillas, un número que no existe, anotado en un papel muy chico. Tanto que casi no se puede ver. Y muy ancho. Tanto que es imposible doblarlo. […]

"Concepción Silva Bélinzon"
Marosa di Giorgio
Posdata magazine, Montevideo (1994).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My research project has been greatly transformed since my first proposal was presented, but it was also unexpectedly interrupted. In the process of writing this thesis, I contracted a debilitating and painful illness that led me to blindness. For that reason, my most sincere gratitude goes to all doctors and personnel of Clinic 4 at the Moorfields Eye Hospital in London for giving me my vision and my life back. Thank you to mum, dad and siblings, as well as the rest of my extended family for their love, understanding and encouragement, in particular to my nephews for making me such a proud aunt. In addition, many thanks to the family Martin-Jones for looking after me and helping us when I was so poorly. Thanks to my friends in Uruguay and all over the world for all the enjoyment, laughter and support. Thank you all my colleagues and friends at the School of Modern Languages at the University of St Andrews, especially the Spanish department, who assisted and backed me at different stages and in so many different ways throughout these difficult and wonderful years. Professor Gill Plain, David Martin-Jones and Eleni Kefala provided valuable comments; Uruguayan writer and critic Jorge Arbeleche kindly replied to a few questions by email; Walter Diconca from *Fundación Felisberto Hernández* and Silvia Guerra from *Fundación Nancy Bacelo* gave me the opportunity to present my research findings in Uruguay.

Special thanks go to my supervisor, Dr Gustavo San Román for his help over these years, and for creating and developing the agreement between the University of St Andrews and *Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación* in Uruguay that allowed me to pursue this research. It is a shame that due to the new political and migration policies in the UK this agreement has just ended.

I would also like to thank the *Gifford Travel Bursary* and the *Santander Fund* for generous contributions towards the costs of travelling to research in Uruguay.

Finally, thanks to Eduardo “Pincho” Casanova, who met Concepción Silva Bélinzon in the 1980s and inherited a complete archive, which made it possible for me to start this study.

More importantly, one million thanks to David for loving me, looking after me and understanding me so well.

A todos, ¡muchas gracias!

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

All quotations from Concepción Silva Bélinzon's books will be taken from her published books and will be as follows, in order of publication:

ERDLS: *El regreso de la samaritana*

LMDA: *La mano del ángel*

EPDP: *El plantador de pinos*

ANA: *Amor no amado*

LRDO: *Los reyes de oro*

ECT: *El cordero terrible*

LCI: *La ciudad invisible*

MYMV: *Muero y más vivo*

MEME: *Me espera el mundo entero*

EMJL: El más justo llamó

AODH: *Al oído del hombre*

SC: *Sagrada Cantidad*

LYD: *Llamarlo y despedirlo*

SA: *Sitios abandonados*

AP: Antología poética

PP: *Poesías*

CBS's archive, BN: Concepción Silva Bélinzon's archive in the National Library in Montevideo, Uruguay.

PA: References and quotations from my personal archive.

UP: Unpublished manuscripts in my possession.

EPC: Quotations from unpublished interviews with Eduardo "Pincho" Casanova, also in my possession, (usually quoted as EPC, PA).

INTRODUCTION

Despite the great political and social reforms at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the progressive current government under the Left-wing party *Encuentro Progresista Frente Amplio*, Uruguay is still behind in terms of women's rights and gender equality not only in Latin America but also in the world. While the abortion law is still very much a sensitive issue in the political agenda, in terms of cultural representation, recent conferences and reports have shown that women in the media are clearly less represented than men.[1] Furthermore, in a study on women's political representation in Uruguay Verónica Pérez notes that although '[h]istorically Uruguay has been a relatively egalitarian country [...]', in the twenty-first century, there is still an 'unbalance to be resolved: women in elected and appointed office are (and were) very few compared to other countries in Latin America and in the world [*sic*]' (2006: 57). In this article, Pérez states that, during her interviews with male members of parliament, '[i]t was also frequent among the legislators from the traditional parties to use images that referred to forms of feminine subordination [and sometimes expressed] doubts regarding their capacities as politically autonomous subjects, capable of taking decisions and support[ing] them independently' (81). Even though Uruguay has introduced a quota for women's political representation in 2009, this has not shown a considerable and effective increase in women legislators. According to *The Global Gender Gap Index 2010 Rankings: Comparisons with 2009, 2008, 2007 and 2006*, Uruguay descended from the fifty-seventh to the fifty-ninth position in the last few years (*Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio* 2010).[2]

[1] A recent conference organised by the Ministry of Culture, entitled "La igualdad de género en la cultura, una agenda en controversia. Conversatorio preliminar sobre género, políticas públicas y políticas culturales" addressed women's cultural participation in contemporary Uruguay. For more information see various reports published by the women's organisation, *Cotidiano Mujer*: <http://www.cotidianomujer.org.uy/> [accessed 30 January 2011].

[2] See in "Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio 2010", report published by *Gender Equality Observatory for Latin American and the Caribbean*, UN:
<http://www.eclac.cl/oig/noticias/noticias/9/40069/2010_622_ODM_ESPANOL_CapV.pdf>; also "Measuring the Global Gender Gap" in *The Economic World Forum*:
<https://members.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/rankings2010.pdf> [accessed on 30 January 2011].

During a trip to Uruguay in August 2010, I attended a retrospective exhibition on a renowned Uruguayan male artist, which included a large number of caricatures. In an informal talk with a cultural sponsor at the reception, she proudly pointed out that the exhibition was a clear representation of the country's national and cultural history. Significantly, there were only a handful of caricatures representing women in this exhibition about Uruguayan cultural and political history in the twentieth century. This is, however, just one anecdotal example of how women are mis- and under- represented. The present thesis aims to address more systematically women's writing and cultural representation, national history and canon formation at the important juncture in the process of nation building. My main interest here is to understand some of the root causes of the invisibility and/or misrepresentation of women in the construction of national cultural identity.

Hence, this thesis addresses women's writing in mid-twentieth-century Uruguay, focusing on gender, canon formation and national identity. Within a national history and a cultural tradition conceived of as patriarchal, progressive and homogeneous, in keeping with a European and Eurocentric concept of time and historicism, women writers struggled to find a recognised position from which to speak in the context of modernity and modernisation. Nevertheless, like other marginal groups, women writers have challenged the hegemonic discourses of modernity in Uruguay, as elsewhere in Latin America, producing what can be described, following Elaine Showalter, as a double-voiced textual discourse that reproduces as well as destabilises the dominant order (Showalter 1981: 2001).

By analysing the work of Concepción Silva Bélinzon (Montevideo, 1900-1987) as a paradigmatic case of women's cultural location in literary history, this thesis will demonstrate that, whereas Silva Bélinzon's life shows the failures and limitations of a patriarchal and paternalistic society, her poetry challenges the dominant national discourses of modern Uruguay. In doing so, her poetry exposes the discontinuity inherent to a national history conceived of as masculine, linear and teleological. By considering her poetry as a case study, this thesis aims to demonstrate how and why women's writing destabilises and disperses 'the homogeneous, visual time of the horizontal society' (Bhabha 2003: 293) by offering an alternative and multilayered vision of the nation as narration. Silva Bélinzon is effectively just one example to expose how women writers 'overlap in the act of writing the nation' (Bhabha 2003: 292) and how the nation is constantly in the process of being rewritten at the margins.

Silva Bélinzon's work can be better understood within the wider political, social and cultural context of the beginning of the twentieth-century. Structured as an inverted pyramid, the

first chapter of this thesis generally outlines the main cultural groups and artistic trends in the first half of the twentieth century, such as *Modernismo* and avant-gardes in Uruguay. In so doing, it begins to explore women's political, social and cultural presence, participation and reception within those movements. Therefore, this chapter exposes the arbitrariness of existing literary categorisations as well as the mechanisms and methods that have placed women writers aside from the means of cultural production and representation. In order to demonstrate that Silva Bélinzon is representative of a larger trend in the region, chapter two focuses on Uruguayan women's poetry produced from the cultural Generations of 1930 and 1945 by analysing the ideas, texts and criticism that preceded and informed their works. Before going on to show how Silva Bélinzon's poetry demonstrates this, the third chapter concentrates on her biography in order to offer a framework within which to explain the grounds that contributed particularly to her cultural and social (dis)location. This chapter is articulated around three fundamental aspects of her life: her childhood, her relationship with her sister, the more recognised writer Clara Silva, and her platonic love with actor Claudio Ross. By highlighting the circumstances that determined her personality and work, this section helps to understand gender identity in Uruguayan modern society and offers a better understanding of the nature of Silva Bélinzon's cultural and social position. Moving from the personal, historical, social and political circumstances to the more concrete examples of her work's reception, chapter four studies the different critical approaches that Silva Bélinzon's poetry has received. Therefore, this chapter reveals the strategies and discourses that have prevented her poetry from carving a place of distinction in Uruguayan literary history. Drawing on Bergson's work, *Matière et mémoire/Matter and Memory* (1896), and Marcel Proust's well-known idea of *mémoire involontaire*, in chapter five I interpret Silva Bélinzon's poetry as an elliptical writing whose discontinuous montage of images subverts the patriarchal discourses of the modern nation. Chapter six contests the idea of Silva Bélinzon as a solipsistic and politically detached poet. Considering Silva Bélinzon's books written under the country's political and economic deterioration from the 1960s onwards, this chapter reveals that her writing visibly reflects and defies the conflicting world in which she was immersed. Studying her last poetry books, published from 1962 to 1979, and taking into account some of her unpublished poems and manuscripts, this final chapter analyses how her production not only conflates with the difficult economic, political and social situation in Uruguay in the second half of the twentieth century, but also challenges it.

The Canon

To fully understand the cultural (dis)location of women's writing within existing literary canon formations in Latin American literature, it is necessary to introduce first the concept of the literary canon.

The literary canon is generally understood as a virtual corpus of writings and writers that has been historically constructed in order to preserve and promulgate knowledge, principles and models. In other words, the literary canon settles and promulgates the conditions, values and conventions in which the literature of a certain country or community should be nationally and internationally represented and recognised. It is clear, therefore, that the literary canon cannot be defined only in literary terms. It is not only a static conglomerate of writings and names, but it also represents the need of a certain community to establish its past, 'adapt[ing] itself to the present, and project[ing] its own future', creating, reinforcing or changing its tradition (Mignolo 1991: 1). Thus, the literary canon has been largely interpreted as a cultural construct from which a nation narrates and institutes its own identity. It follows that there is a fundamental link between the concepts of literary canon and nation, as Charlotte Stevens notes in "The Literary Canon" (2007); although she uses Great Britain to explain this tight connection, a similar analysis can be extended, as in this instance, to other regions. The invention of a literary tradition, Stevens explains, allows a nation to become, in the words of Benedict Anderson, 'an imagined political community' able to differentiate itself from other nations (2006: 6). Building on Anderson's idea of nation as a cultural artefact, Homi K. Bhabha argues in *Nation and Narration* that the cultural construction of the nation, or nation(ness), must be identified as a 'form of social and textual affiliation' (2003: 292). Consequently, Bhabha affirms that the nation 'as a powerful historical idea in the west' emerged from 'traditions of political thought and literary language' (1).

The literary canon therefore has been defined as a political construct that attempts to create a congruous national body of writings, which characterises national identity. The ostensibly *harmonious* uniformity that a literary canon apparently exposes is the result of a complex historical process of selection, manipulation, discrimination and suppression which, according to Terry Eagleton, 'is fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time' and is shaped by 'particular criteria and in the light of given purposes' (1983:10-12; 22-24).[3]

[3] In the case of Latin America, the connection between nation-building projects and literature was particularly strong. As Pedro Henríquez Ureña and later Doris Sommer have pointed out, the fact that at the turn of the

Considering the role of literature and the literary canon in the construction of national cultures, Itamar Even-Zohar has defined canonised and non-canonised texts as follows:

> '[C]anonized' means those literary norms and works (i.e. both models and texts) which are accepted as legitimate by the dominant circles within a culture and whose conspicuous products are preserved by the community to become part of its historical heritage. On the other hand, 'non-canonized' means those norms and texts which are rejected by these circles as illegitimate and whose products are often forgotten in the long run by the community. (1990: 15)

Even-Zohar argues that the literary canon can also (and only) be understood as a *polysystem*, a theory he suggested in the late 1960s and reshaped twenty years later. Departing from Russian Formalism, the polysystem theory includes semiotics theories and the works of Yuri Lotman and Pierre Bourdieu. In his theory, Even-Zohar interprets all human patterns of communication, such as language, literature, and culture as (poly)systems (1990: 9). For him, a semiotic system should be conceived as a 'dynamic [and] heterogeneous, open structure' (11-12) which is very rarely a *uni-system* but is rather 'a multiple system, a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options yet functioning as one structured whole, whose members are interdependent' (11). In other words, the concept of polysystems 'emphasizes the multiplicity of intersections and hence the greater complexity of structuredness involved' (12). This notion underlines the intricate and complex relationship between centre and periphery involved in all semiotic systems. Moreover, this theory aims to expose and intervene in the relation between the literary canon and its own processes of control and selection. Therefore, the polysystem theory reveals the ideas of centre and periphery (and therefore, marginalisation) not as innate, unique and fixed but as relative and relational ones:

> [T]he (uni-)system has been identified with the central stratum exclusively (that is, official culture as manifested *inter alia*, in standard language, canonized literature, patterns of behavior of the dominating classes), peripheries have been conceived (if at all) as categorically

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twentieth century there was a large number of writers who were politicians and even presidents illustrates that effective connection between literature and nation (Bhabha 2003: 73-74). In the region of the River Plate, this phenomenon is exemplified by the works of Bartolomé Mitre and Domingo F. Sarmiento in Argentina and, in a less influential manner, in the works of the Uruguayans Eduardo Acevedo Díaz, Bernardo Prudencio Berro and Alejandro Magariños Cervantes, among others.

> extra-systemic, a view which coincides of course with the 'inside view' of the people-in-the-culture. (14)

According to Even-Zohar, the literary institution with the literary canon as its most notorious apparatus, defines, establishes and preserves aesthetic concepts by a practice of differentiation and appreciation, or in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, 'by a process of distinction'(1984: 466). John Guillory for his part has proposed that 'the problem of what is called canon formation is best understood as a problem in the constitution and distribution of [what Pierre Bourdieu has called] cultural capital' (1994: ix). In other words, Guillory affirms that the 'problematic of representation [is concerned] with the distribution of [that] cultural capital' (16). Such 'cultural capital' has been historically more conspicuously restricted for women writers within patriarchal societies. As feminist critics have established, women writers have been frequently marginalised from the national culture or mainstream literary tradition which is characterised, as Catherine Davies explains, as 'an area of political and intellectual contention' (2006: 184). This thesis tries to elucidate the reasons behind such marginalisation, in this case in the Uruguay of the mid-twentieth century, when two significant cultural generations debated the country's cultural legacy.

Women and the Canon

Despite the fact that women have been producing groundbreaking ideas and works, as Judith Butler asserts, they are 'misrepresented or not represented at all' (1990: 4). Certainly, women's movements and feminist studies have historically proved that the access of women to political and/or cultural circles is an ongoing struggle and that 'the social construction of sexual difference plays [in fact] a constitutive role in the production, reception and history of literature' (Miller 1986: xi). Traditionally, hegemonic discourses have reproduced the image of a dominant critical corpus, refusing the productive role of women's writing and granting them only the reproductive one. As Nira Yuval-Davis has argued, nationalist discourses have stressed the 'biological' as well as 'cultural reproduction of the nation' (1997: 26; 39). 'These two notions', Claire Taylor explains, 'explore how women's reproductive roles are controlled by state discourses (to give birth to new generation of citizens), and also how women are frequently encoded by national discourses as representative of the cultural values of that nation'

(2009: xiv). In so doing, conventional methods, models and criticism have excluded women from the literary canon, converting them into a silent group. As Nanneke Redclift states:

> The habits of omission, forgetfulness and misrecognition deployed in national, official and normative discourse, constituted women as a muted group, anything but silent to themselves, but not represented, and frequently misrepresented, in relation to stories of nationhood, family and survival. (2003: 488)

If by chance, women's writings were groundbreaking, they were also seen as "exceptional" and miraculous, as either 'supernormal' or 'under normality' (Luisi 1925: 170-171), or even as a 'strange phenomenon' (Ugarte 1930: 239). In Latin America, such persistent selectivity of women writers in literary history has ensured that its cultural map appears patchy and women writers as *extra*-ordinary, ex-centric and extra-systemic, following Even-Zohar's theory. As Amy K. Kaminsky also notes, '[w]omen's literary history has been annulled in Latin America, making the occasional woman writer named in conventional literary history appear to be exceptional' (1993: 29). Brianda Domecq also explains this process:

> Lo que es importante señalar es que estas 'excepciones' no están de ninguna manera integradas al 'corpus' de la literatura escrita por hombres, sino que parecen prender como extraños colgajos prendidos apenas con los alfileres de la concesión paternalista a la epidermis de la impenetrable tradición masculina. (1994: 76-77)

Hence, long-engraved preconceptions of gender, genre and identity have meant that women writers have been studied as isolated or exceptional expressions, or as mere reproducers of the dominant, patriarchal discourses. They usually seem to 'burst into the official canon as if from nowhere – eccentric, peculiar, with techniques that look odd and preoccupations that don't "fit"' (Russ 1983: 122). The result is a systematic but also subtle exclusion of women from the literary canon (a situation that has only slightly changed in the twenty-first century).

It can be argued that Uruguay's large number of women poets is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the country's twentieth-century literature and therefore, such a process is a fallacy. Nevertheless, the important contingent of female poets that has appeared in this small and peripheral country is remarkable but considerably unexplored.[4] Ambiguously included in

[4] Despite the fact that in the last few decades there has been a growing interest in including Uruguayan women

the national discourses, Uruguayan women poets found it difficult to find spaces from which to speak within the national discourses at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a consequence of a Cartesian discourse on difference (where rationality is equated with the masculine position and the irrational with the feminine, and so on), poetry was generally envisaged as the appropriate genre where women were somehow allowed to communicate their feelings (although men also explored it); whereas faith and spirituality have traditionally been indicated as intrinsic characteristics of gender identity. Paradoxically, if women were allowed to move within those areas, their writings were usually considered detached from history and politics or dismissed as obscure and difficult. In this way, women and their writings have been dehistoricised and deterritorialised from their contexts of production and the national literary canon that both included and excluded them. The result is a large and effective critical tradition of stereotypes and labels that has denied women their own sense of identity, and therefore their capacity to connote and transform reality. Even if Uruguay was considered at the time as one of the most politically and socially advanced countries in Latin America, women were trapped in stereotypical conceptions of gender that left little room for representation.

However, women's poetry in the Uruguay of mid-twentieth century reveals an interstitial space of conflict, intervention and negotiation in cultural history that this thesis tries to elucidate by offering the inclusion of a marginal figure. My intention here is to expose the political, social and cultural mechanisms that have excluded women poets from the literary canon, and/or have mis- and under-represented them in Uruguayan cultural history. In this sense, this research engages with a Latin American and international feminist criticism that has been exploring women's writing not only as a *difference* but as historically marginalised from the production of meaning (Tierney-Tello 1996: 10). As Jean Franco suggests, the focus of study in women's writing in Latin America should not be on the character of their writings but on power relations: '[n]o se trata de averiguar si las escritoras tienen temas específicos o un tema diferente a los hombres, sino explorar las relaciones de poder' (1986: 41). Hence, as Kaminsky also proposes:

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poets in the national education programmes, such as Matilde Bianchi, Esther de Cáceres, Sara de Ibáñez, Clara Silva, or more recently, Marosa di Giorgio, this does not necessarily mean that they have been properly studied or represented in Uruguayan cultural history. Indeed such recognition has not necessarily been accompanied by a diverse and prolific critical corpus.

> Reading from the complexity of meanings of sexuality, gender, and politics is a necessary starting point if we are to disturb the impassive solidity of prepacked truths and uninterrogated assumptions that have thus far prevented us from seeing our way into a new history. (1993: 136)

If biased, homogeneous, unilateral and usually patriarchal views have prevented us from considering and understanding other fundamental aspects of our world, there are many more [his]stories and discourses to be considered if we want to question those (e.g., hegemonic, hierarchical, patriarchal, colonial) beliefs. Explaining Homi K. Bhabha's ideas, David Huddart states that, if modernity is seen as 'stable within its own coherent narratives of progress' (2006:9), we should, he proposes, 'see modernity as something that needs to be hybridized' (9). In this sense, he continues, '[t]here are many ways to understand the modern world, and many contributions that have been ignored, which we now need to explore and acknowledge' (9). Concepción Silva Bélinzon's poetry is one of these contributions.

Still, bringing back the marginal or ignored voices is not an easy endeavour. Actually, to focus on a "minor" and controversial poet has provoked many obstacles to this research.[5] Due to Silva Bélinzon's marginal and unclear position within Uruguayan cultural history and the critical silence that has surrounded her *œuvre*, writing about her poetry has meant embarking on a task full of lacunae and lack of information in comparison to the major, established canonical figures. It has meant commencing this research with practically no consistent literary criticism from which to depart. So far, a handful of published articles, prologues to her books, descriptive dictionary entries and a few anthologies, as well as some informal testimonies are almost the entire critical corpus available. Studying her also meant challenging my own prejudices about a poet who is generally considered unpopular and mediocre. Nonetheless, Silva Bélinzon's poetry represents a curious and emblematic case in the Uruguayan literary canon that allows us to identify a much more complex cultural panorama of Uruguay of the mid-twentieth century, hence, the importance of engaging with her work.

[5] I am using "minor" as a term coined by Deleuze and Guattari, as 'a literature that produces an active solidarity in spite of its scepticism; and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another community, and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility [...]' (2003: 17).

Concepción Silva Bélinzon: "The Mad Woman on the *Patio*"[6]

> Han perdido la tierra las pupilas
> el humo cada brazo cada juego;
> casi llanto que mueve de las lilas
> tomadas de la mano por un ruego.
>
> El todo ver quizás entre las filas
> al justo ver, quizás, donde navego;
> recién, quizás, recién, sin clorofilas
> los cuernitos de polvo ya despego.
>
> Ni por qué de quién era el pecado;
> le quitaré las galas de su adorno
> y alguno se dio vuelta avergonzado.
>
> Los hambrientos tendrían más comida;
> cualquier estar en pena, su retorno
> y la sangre quedó sin avenida. (*ECT*: 61-62)

Produced between two different cultural generations and ambiguously considered by literary criticism, Silva Bélinzon's poetry offers a remarkable case to understand women's writing and literary canon formation in this seminal period. Born in 1900, when the modern state started to construct the foundations of the "new" nation, Silva Bélinzon's life and poetry reveal the impacts and limitations of a patriarchal society and the struggle for authorship and identity. To borrow Nelly Richard's words in "Postmodernism and Periphery", Silva Bélinzon's poetry unveils 'the discontinuities of a history marked by a multiplicity of pasts laid down like sediments in hybrid and fragmented memories' (1987: 7).

Devotedly Catholic, single and childless, she lived with her two unmarried aunts and dedicated her life to writing poetry. From 1945 to 1979, she unflaggingly published books of poetry, at a rate of almost one volume every three years. This was exactly within the period of gestation and development of one of the most groundbreaking Uruguayan cultural groups, the so-called Generation of 1945 (*Generación del 45*, also labelled as *Generación crítica* or *Gen-*

[6] Almost three decades ago, Peruvian feminist Sara Castro-Klarén proposed the term "la loca criolla en el ático" (1985: 34-5) as a way of engaging with international feminist theories. Although this approach has been widely questioned in Latin America, and more recently by decolonial studies, my analysis clearly acknowledges and incorporates international as well as local theories in order to study the specificities of Uruguayan women's writing.

eración de Marcha) which was active from around 1938 to the collapse of democratic rule in the early 1970s.[7] She was granted several national poetry prizes, was nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1974 and received international acclamation from respected writers, such as Jules Supervielle, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Oliverio Girondo and Alejandra Pizarnik. However, seen as mere acknowledgments of her persistent correspondence and determined desire to be recognised as an author, critics have generally dismissed this international recognition, as chapter four of this thesis explores. Instead, she has been considered as an eccentric and ex-centric, hermetic and obstinate poet, estranged from her own cultural and social milieu. Only recognised by a small group of followers, and usually associated with her sister's name, the better-known writer Clara Silva, Silva Bélinzon's poetry is rarely mentioned.[8] In spite of this, a few critics have attempted to rescue her poetry from obliviousness, such as Arturo Sergio Visca, Luis Bravo, Wilfredo Penco, Fernando Loustaunau, Silvia Guerra, Sofi Richero and Eduardo Espina (see chapters three and four). Women poets such as Marosa di Giorgio and Orfila Bardesio expressed their admiration and offered their friendship. Yet again, while controversial and arguable, her nomination to the Nobel Prize also exposes the incongruous reception of Silva Bélinzon's work. As Silvia Guerra affirms, '[e]n el Uruguay, un alto muro de silencio, a veces ligeramente estremecido rodea [la obra de Silva Bélinzon], sin que podamos tener una clara conciencia del por qué, ni del cómo' ("Concepción Silva Bélinzon: sin tarjeta de visita").

Defined as a synthesis of *Modernismo* and the avant-gardes, Silva Bélinzon's poetry has been described as a combination of free associations and random images, biblical references, and metaphysical concerns, all expressed within conventional metric forms, notably, the sonnet. Her writing has been also considered bizarre, irregular, anachronistic and obsolete, and thus was paid little attention. However, one of the most interesting characteristics of Silva Bélinzon's poetry has been overlooked. That is, the juxtaposition of different artistic trends and the dialectical tension that exists between the descriptions of discontinuous and disconnected images within conventional poetic forms. As the sonnet at the beginning of this sec-

[7] Hereafter "Generation of 1945".

[8] In a book catalogue of the Generation of 1945 published by the bookshop *Linardi y Risso* in Uruguay, Silva Bélinzon's book includes a special note that states: 'Poeta uruguaya, *hermana de Clara de Silva*', in "Generación del 45: Poesía, narrativa, ensayo, crítica, teatro"; 287: p.14:
<http://www.linardiyrisso.com/antiguos/historia/287_LITERATURA_GENERACION_45.pdf > [accessed 5 April 2011; my emphasis].

tion illustrates, the remarkable visuality of her poetry is highlighted by the arbitrary use of the linguistic structure (more evident in the first and second stanza), whereas her intense imagery is organised within the rigorous limits of the verse, metre and the pattern of the rhyme (ABABCDCEDE). Furthermore, the use of different tenses (present: 'mueve', 'navego', 'despego'; preterite: 'dio', 'quedó'; present perfect: 'han perdido'; imperfect: 'era'; future: 'quitaré'; and even conditional: 'tendrían') creates a multi-layered poetic dimension of time that I would like to explore in this thesis. Using Bergson's *Matière et mémoire* and Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, I interpret Silva Bélinzon's elliptical writing as a discontinuous montage of images that subverts the patriarchal discourses of the modern nation. In other words, I argue that Silva Bélinzon's poetry can be construed as a virtual journey through layers of the personal and national pasts that thereby deterritorialises the national hegemonic discourses of twentieth-century Uruguay. Whereas Silva Bélinzon's life showed the failures and limitations of a patriarchal and paternalistic society, her poetry problematises the homogeneous national discourses of modern Uruguay and exposes the discontinuity of national cultural history. Socially and culturally marginalised, Concepción Silva Bélinzon expressed the changes of the outside world and her secluded life through a fragmentary and liminal poetry. Her poetry is, in this respect, an interesting example of a counter-discourse at the time: an intricate poetry that resists any specific and strict categorisation and, yet, expresses the complexity and contradictions of her time and her own identity. In this, Silva Bélinzon is not alone. Similar moments of non-canonical poetry have been noted in other contexts, for example British women poets in the First World War, as noted by Gill Plain in "'Great Expectations': Rehabilitating the Recalcitrant War Poets" (1995). Like them, Silva Bélinzon's poetry was written in isolation, secluded from the homogeneous cultural discourses, and she was left to find her own sense of identity in a world dominated by a patriarchal discourse. Plain's article formulates a few questions that can enable a reconsideration of Silva Bélinzon's social role and her hermetic writing:

> If women are encouraged to live their lives through and for their men, what happens when those men are removed? Are the women who stay behind left to exist in a vacuum [...]? Or do they begin the slow process of formulating an identity in which absence of the subject to which they are other gives them an unprecedented degree of mobility of the symbolic order? (45)

And if women are excluded from the Symbolic order, as Plain explains:

> [O]n the periphery they are faced with a choice between a masculine identification, which includes that deriving of a sense of self through a husband or father [...] or a feminine identification that leaves them outside the arena of power, if not without a voice, then certainly without an audience! (46)

Gill Plain's article seems to support the idea that such women writers have historically developed their writings without a tradition, hence the difficulty critics have accommodating them into established canonical forms. Silva Bélinzon's poetry dealt with a similar situation, having to negotiate between a patriarchal tradition and her own voice. Although the women poets analysed by Plain wrote under the distressing situation of the war, Silva Bélinzon's poetry is also marked by loneliness, loss and grief.[9]

Organised around the multifaceted concept of marginality, which is understood as a relational concept, this thesis analyses the grounds that contributed to such distinctive writing. Focusing on Silva Bélinzon as a non-canonical woman writer whose poetry was developed within two different literary generations and, therefore, two different conceptions of the nation, I will engage with gender issues, hegemonic discourses and cultural projects from three perspectives. Firstly, modernity and modernisation, as expressed in the idealised welfare state and the patriarchal Uruguayan society of the first half of the twentieth century; secondly, the two opposite cultural generations in which Silva Bélinzon performed her writing; and finally, the personal and social circumstances of her life. In so doing, this thesis proposes a more constructive reading of women's writing and gender identity in Uruguay at this seminal time, when concepts of canon and nation formation were at the heart of the country's cultural and political agendas. Closely analysing her poetry will enable me to expose the historical, political and social mechanisms of creation and marginalisation. Ultimately, this thesis offers, for the first time, a complete analysis of Silva Bélinzon's poetry and proposes a significant model to demonstrate how women's poetry in this period forces us to review the homogenous and linear discourses of the nation's time.

[9] Her first published book is dedicated to her deceased parents, especially to the beloved and 'celestial' memory of her father (*ERDLS*). Furthermore, even if the Second World War did not affect Silva Bélinzon directly, some of her poems indicate those circumstances.

CHAPTER ONE

Women Poets, Modernity and the Nation

This chapter outlines the literary generations in Uruguay in the first half of the twentieth century, namely "Generación del 900" and "Generación del 15" or "del 17", "Generación del 30" or "Centenario", and "Generación del 45", "Crítica" or "de Marcha".[10] It illustrates how the aims of these cultural groups are linked to complex ideological and cultural strategies that make the literary canon one of the instruments through which modernity shaped the nation's past and intervenes in the cultural present and future. In doing so, this chapter exposes the arbitrariness of those designations, as well as the mechanisms and methods that have placed women writers apart from the means of cultural production and representation.

Introduction

The concept of the literary (or cultural) generation as a model of periodisation is very much a questionable topic in literary studies in the Hispanic world. In principle, it should offer the possibility to understand the diverse cultural processes within a particular historical framework, but it also brings problems of definition. Its function, utility and effectiveness in literary history has been studied and debated since José Ortega y Gasset introduced the concept in the 1930s.[11] In Uruguay, while it was (and still is) difficult to discern and establish cultural movements, critics and historians have nonetheless been keen to draw on an established tradition of analysis and continue to speak in terms of literary generations. In any case, such divisions, useful in certain ways, have not left much room for interstitial writings; writings able to speak in between literary generations and national and/or cultural projects, and truly express the complexity and heterogeneity of cultural and national histories. The strict division of literary generations in Uruguay has demonstrated that this sort of periodisation does not work ef-

[10] Hereafter, I will use the first given names to refer to these cultural generations, using its simple translation in English as follows: Generation of 1900, 1915, 1930, and as already pointed out, the Generation of 1945.

[11] In "Idea de las generaciones" (1923) and "La idea de la generación" (1933) in *Obras completas* (1946-83: vol. 3 and 5).

fectively (exceptions, omissions and exclusions have to be frequently pointed out). Usually, women writers show the limitations of such strict categorisations.

In Uruguay, despite critics and scholars demonstrating the inconsistencies, imprecisions and ambiguities of such strict divisions, cultural generations have served to construct the national literary canon and have therefore contributed to the establishment of normative understandings of the nation's identity (as Europeanised, white, bourgeois, heterosexual and masculine). Women writers have usually played a minor or marginal role in those political and social structures and their writings have demonstrated the failures as well as challenges that those constructions have implied for them. In order to demonstrate these limitations, we will have to go through those fixed constructions to understand the fissures and omissions present in those classifications in the case of Uruguay.

In the first half of the twentieth century, literary studies generally define and locate four important literary generations in Uruguay: the so-called Generation of 1900, Generation of 1915, Generation of 1930 and Generation of 1945. These four generations – in fact some scholars talk about just three (combining the cultural generation of 1915 and 1930 into one) – are somehow tightly connected, influenced or informed by the contemporary political and cultural processes in Uruguay and have been used to shape the notion of Uruguayan national identity. This preoccupation with constructing the national discourses of independent countries was, in fact, a clear common aim in Latin America in the first half of the twentieth century. As Luis Cárcamo-Huechante and José Antonio Mazzotti argue, the period between the 1930s and 1970s 'implicó una configuración clara de los nexos entre cultura, identidad y territorio' (2003: 13). This is consistent with the view of Néstor García Canclini, for whom national cultures in Latin America 'parecían sistemas razonables para preservar, dentro de la homogeneidad industrial, ciertas diferencias y cierto arraigo territorial, que más o menos coincidían con los espacios de producción y circulación de bienes' (1995: 31).

Not surprisingly, these literary generations conflate and overlap with three of the four phases of the political and historical process in Uruguay as noted by historian José Pedro Barrán:

> En la historia del Uruguay en el siglo XX se distinguen cuatro etapas: la consolidación de la democracia política, la reforma social y la prosperidad económica (1903-1930); la crisis económica y política y la restauración democrática (1930- 1958); el estancamiento económico, la atomización de los partidos políticos tradicionales, el crecimiento de la izquierda, y la dictadura militar (1959-1985); y por fin la restau-

> ración democrática y la entrada del Uruguay al MERCOSUR (1985-…). (Barrán "Uruguay siglo XX": para. 1 of 37)

Coincidentally, although they do not correspond exactly to each historical stage mentioned by Barrán, Jorge Rial talks about four myths forged in the Uruguayan collective imaginary that helped to outline Uruguay's national identity:

> […] *averageness* as a prerequisite for security and the attainment of a happy Uruguay; the *uniqueness* which enabled us to feel strongly Uruguayan; *consensus and the rule of law*, of respect for the rules of the game which ultimately laid the foundation for Uruguay's democratic regime; and *a country of cultured citizens*, appropriately *culturosos* with a minimum standard far above average – were the basis for the imaginary of Uruguayans during the period of the happy Uruguay. (Sonowski 1993: 68; emphasis in original)

These myths, Rial continues, 'were set in motion by elites in order to "modify", unify, and, especially, adapt a variety of social imaginaries, ideas and ideologies' of the new society (68). As will be discussed throughout this thesis, these ideas and ideologies are, in fact, condensed into the great national myth that sees Uruguay as the "Suiza de América" (the Switzerland of the Americas), as a prosperous and modern country, or the 'happy Uruguay', as mentioned in Rial's quote.

The following general background of Uruguay during the first half of the twentieth century helps us understand women's cultural and social position in this seminal period. Accordingly, this chapter now begins to outline how women poets were set apart from the national discourses, were denied the possibility of embracing the intellectual model and have been trapped since then in preconceptions and stereotypes about their authorship and identity. In the rare instances where they have been included in the literary canon, this has involved a rather discreet but persistent strategy to fulfil the country's political and social agenda.

Modernity, *Modernismo* and the Generation of 1900

Walter D. Mignolo affirms that modernity is 'the name for the historical process in which Europe began its process towards world hegemony' (2006: xiii), which 'carries a darker side, coloniality' (5). Along these lines, Enrique Dussel refers to the '"myth of Modernity" as an idea that carries out European superiority over the other cultures of the world – [and which]

began five hundred years ago' (Moraña, Dussel & Jáuregui 2008: 341).[12] By understanding coloniality as 'the logical structure of colonial domination underlying the Spanish, Dutch, British and US control of the Atlantic economy and politics, and from there the control and management of almost the entire planet' (6-7), Mignolo maintains that modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same coin.[13] Although that convoluted and long process of modernity/coloniality was implemented and experienced by the "new" countries in Latin America in different ways, Jorge Larrain also argues that modernity has been presented in the region 'as an alternative to identity' (2000: 4). In Argentina and Uruguay, that identity was translated into European concepts and, therefore, the 'projects of modernization are also projects of a new cultural identity with characteristics opposite to the Indo-Iberian cultural pattern […]' (Larrain 2000: 89). In line with Dussel and Mignolo, Larrain also states that modernity was a project whose objective was based on the destruction of the pre-colonial cultural identity in order to destroy what was considered a barbarian civilisation. A culture that, in the words of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (*Facundo: Civilización y barbarie en las pampas argentinas*, 1845), was incapable of progress (83). Thus, with modernity, Latin America entered a "civilised" life, which would bring order, progress and reason, commerce and industrialisation. Modernity/coloniality, and therefore capitalism, imposed a whole change in terms of sensitivity and identity, and a new way of experiencing life and art in the region in relation to a European model. History was then perceived in line with a Eurocentric idea of time, as linear and progressive. As Aníbal Quijano explains, Europe conceived 'the idea of the history of human civilization as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe' (Moraña, Dussel & Jáuregui 2008: 190). '[T]he Eurocentric pretension to be the exclusive producer and protagonist of modernity [...]', Quijano continues, 'is a Europeanization' of the non-European countries (192). Modernity was indeed the backdrop of a multifaceted, complex and diverse cultural, political and social scenario in Latin America, which was set up in line with European values.[14]

[12] See also in *El encubrimiento del otro: El origen del mito de la modernidad: Conferencias de Frankfurt* (1992).

[13] Decolonial thinking distinguishes between *first* and *second* modernity – the Spanish Conquest of the Americas and Enlightenment/North European colonialism respectively (Enrique Dussel, (2002) 'World-System and "Trans"-Modernity' (trans. A. Fornazzari). *Nepantla: Views from the South* 3(2): 221 – 244; 227-8).

[14] In general, rationalism, liberalism and positivism were the new philosophies discussed and debated by the cultural elites in the great majority of Latin America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the one hand, new thoughts and ideologies, such as anarchism, were brought by the massive wave of European immi-

The national projects of the beginning of the twentieth century in Latin America would ignore and obliterate its precolonial history, and a new identity would be constructed over the indigenous people's footprints. In Homi K. Bhabha's terms, forgetting 'constitutes the beginning of the nation's narrative' (2003: 311). '[I]n the name of the national interest or ethic prerogative' […], Bhabha continues, 'the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as "containing" thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production' (2003: 4). Such "obligation" to forget, Bhabha argues, 'is the construction of a discourse in society that performs the problem of totalizing the people and unifying the national will' (1994: 160-161).

In Uruguay, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the country's indigenous population had been annihilated and the nation had overcome civil war (*Guerra Grande*, 1843-1852), consolidating its independence and configuring itself as a progressive state after the last combat in 1904. Having obliterated almost any previous, indigenous history, in a country that was considered by the colonisers as *tierras de ningún provecho*, Uruguay seemed to be the "perfect" land to develop the colonial enterprises. As José Pedro Barrán observed, at the turn of the twentieth century the country prepared itself to leave behind its barbaric culture (1800-1860) and to install and construct its 'cultura disciplinada' (1860-1920) (Barrán 1990). Thus, in the first three decades of the twentieth century the country promulgated itself as a reformist, peaceful and Europeanised nation. Mainly under the two administrations of José Batlle y Ordóñez (1903-1907, and especially, 1911-1915), state policies were created that marked the beginning of an important change in the country.

The emergent economy was bolstered by the labour of a massive inflow of European immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which arrived in the country attracted by the modernising development. Social reforms were enacted and new laws were approved, such as the eight-hour working day and the divorce laws. The divorce law *por causal* was approved in 1907 and *por la sola voluntad de la mujer* in 1915.[15] Free, public, obligatory

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grants. On the other hand, a strong agnosticism and scepticism, along with a materialist atheism, were also broadened. Evolutionism and a strong faith in science were also the new coordinates of modernity in the region.

[15] As Asunción Lavrin states ' Divorce by the sole will of the woman was a revolutionary idea of its time, possible only in a small state experimenting with new forms of social and political change' (Lavrin 1995: 12).Twenty years after the divorce law was created, the number of divorces considerably increased in relation to the number of marriages. In spite of that, Pedro Barrán points out that divorced women used to be stigmatised: 'en el imaginario dominante sobre todo en los medios del 'sexo devoto', mujer 'divorciada' y mujer 'fácil' eran virtualmen-

and secular education, previously created by José Pedro Varela in 1877, gave a much-needed boost to modernisation. In other words, this is the time when secularisation, modernisation, industrialisation, European immigration, and state-building occurred almost simultaneously. Or so history tells us.

From the political perspective of the beginning of the twentieth century, under the *Batllista* government, the public had supremacy over the private in the search of the country's construction of its national identity and interests (Barrán, Caetano & Porzecanski 1996-1998: 22-36). On the contrary, from an individual, middle-class and bourgeois point of view, the private sphere was the terrain from which to defend that identity. Thus, on the one hand, the State and the Catholic Church had control over the public domain, establishing the social rules to follow and respect (Barrán 2001: 73). On the other hand, the intimacy of the private realm was very much defended by the conservative, generally Catholic, white, middle and upper class family, who jealously protected its privacy and its manners. In this sense, Barrán continues, 'las fuerzas de la tradición, con la Iglesia Católica a su frente, condenaron las manifestaciones que conducían [por ejemplo] a la manifestación del cuerpo y los placeres, una de las facetas relevantes del derecho a la intimidad y el secreto' (94). Intimacy and privacy were seen as social values by the Uruguayan middle and upper classes, whose family, the main support of the society, was defined in the words of Batlle y Ordóñez himself as 'un castillo feudal, cerrado por todas partes [al cual] muy difícilmente se entraba [y] más difícilmente todavía se salía de él'(131). In the feudal castle that that family and home represented, women were the most precious trophies to be kept away and protected from the "dangers" of the outside world.[16] As Alejandra Cuadrado points out, in fact, the welfare state contributed to the construction of strong social and gender stereotypes in this patriarchal society 'donde existen determinadas expectativas acerca de comportamientos y actitudes femeninas' (Araújo et al 2001: 109).

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te sinónimos y hasta la década 1940-1950 fue común que las familias católicas no recibieran en sus casas a divorciadas' (Barrán 2001:120).

[16] J.C. Haedo, a woman who lived in the turn-of-the-twentieth-century Uruguay, recalled those times with the following words: 'La mujer permanece excluida […] salvo las horas de paseo, o cuando sale para el teatro, las tiendas o las visitas, acompañadas siempre de las personas de su familia, padres o hermanos. Su aparición es siempre fugaz o accidental, cuidando especialmente de no mostrarse dos días seguidos o dos veces en el mismo día. La sola excepción que recuerda aquella clausura, que recuerda a las ciudades árabes, y que presta tan singular tono a las relaciones de los sexos, es el paseo por 25 de Mayo y Sarandí que se cumple sistemáticamente con la regularidad de un rito' (Scott 2002: 6).

Indeed, despite the fact that *Batllista* policies made it possible to integrate women into the public and political arena (Ehrick 2005: 13), women, the Uruguayan welfare state, and the most conservative and traditionalist sectors of Uruguayan society kept an ambiguous and complex, sometimes contradictory and always conflictive relationship. As Christine Ehrick explains, the secular projects of Batlle y Ordóñez provoked the reaction of the most conservative and Catholic sectors (2005: 70). Paradoxically, such ideological conflict was mainly expressed through the Catholic legion of *Damas Católicas* which, ironically 'provided a catalyst for the first important feminist organization of twentieth-century Uruguay' (Ehrick 2005: 70). Although religion was one of the "natural" spaces conceded to women, used to reinforce the moral code and maintain gender roles unchanged, it would offer Uruguayan women a space for expression, as will be analysed in the section "The unusual re(li)gion".[17]

Along with the new political and socio-economic projects of modernisation, a cultural expression emerged in Latin America, namely *Modernismo*. Strongly influenced by French Parnassianism and Symbolism, with some traces of Romanticism, and under the leadership of Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío (1867-1916), Modernismo in Latin America sought innovation in the use of language, style and rhythm. Faithful to the power of poetic language, the *modernistas* looked for an exaltation of sensitivity, and the cult of beauty as the highest goal. Nevertheless, Modernismo was not a coherent and homogeneous movement, partly due to the range of countries to which it spread. As Jean Franco explains, especially after 1900, Modernismo 'tended to separate in a number of different strands' (Franco 1994: 120). In Uruguay, those different strands can be especially found in the religious and meditative poetry of Julio Herrera y Reissig (1875-1910), or in the sensual verses of Delmira Agustini (1886-1914), who is considered by some critics as a *postmodernista* (as will be explained later in this chapter). Together with these two, poet María Eugenia Vaz Ferreira (1875-1924), short-story writer Horacio Quiroga (1878-1937), playwright Florencio Sánchez (1875- 1910), essayist José Enrique Rodó (1872-1917) and philosopher Carlos Vaz Ferreira (1872-1958) were considered the precursors of the new intellectual and cultural movement which emerged at the time in

[17] This presents, indeed, a complex political and social scenario. In terms of women's political rights, as Asunción Lavrin explains, 'having obtained the passage of a controversial amendment to the divorce legislation, in 1914, some Colorado Party members became interested in women's political rights' and 'they introduced a bill to enfranchise women at the national level' (1995: 325). Nonetheless, the 'Partido Nacional or Blancos, the Colorado's ideological adversary, and the conservative and Catholic press opposed the bill, arguing that though women were no less intelligent than men, men had developed a leadership that women were unable to equal or challenge' (325).

Uruguay. As Pablo Rocca indicates, the outstanding character of these intellectuals, along with the early and tragic deaths of some of them, made it possible to construct a national, yet incipient, literary corpus able to create 'la propia ilusión de un equipo intelectual ya icónico'(2004b: 191) and to represent the present and future of the modern nation. It came to be known as the cultural Generation of 1900 (1895-1925).[18] Considered the Golden Age of Uruguayan literature (Martínez Moreno 1968: 129), this generation provided a respectable number of writers and intellectuals who helped to construct and shape the nation's identity.

The Generation of 1900 engaged in the political and social context of its time as a constructor, reproducer and performer, but also questioned a society in which – in spite of the progressive and revolutionary measures taken by Batlle y Ordóñez – the great majority of the Uruguayan population was particularly conservative and puritanical. In order to defy that situation, the young male members of this generation adopted an irreverent attitude towards the principles of the growing bourgeoisie, which, in fact, many of them came from.[19] However, while male members of this group dared to adopt a provocative attitude, and were allowed to go out and speak loudly about their ideas and beliefs, a different scenario is described for women writers. Carina Blixen makes clear that, especially for middle and upper class women, 'el rasgo identificatorio sobresaliente era la pasividad, con modelos masculinos imposibles de encarnar' (Blixen 2002: 8). Rebellion and the search for identity were explored by forms of expression which, in the cases of the poets Delmira Agustini and María Eugenia Vaz Ferreira, implied self-destruction and alienation. 'Esas fueron', Blixen continues, 'las maneras femeninas de manifestar la excentricidad' (8).

In that well-stratified, "Europeanised" society, women were restricted in their ability to share their ideas in public spaces, to go out on their own and to meet in the cafes, whereas, at that time, large groups of men exchanged intense debates in those public places. It was the family, especially the parents, who ruled women's lives. This situation was not different for women writers at the beginning of the twentieth century and it did not change much towards the second half.

[18] For the sole purpose of offering an estimated period, I am using these dates as given by Emir Rodríguez Monegal in "La generación del 900" (1950: 37-64).

[19] Such (op)position was colourfully enacted by one of the generation's members: the iconoclast Roberto De las Carreras. De las Carreras intended to denounce, through his extravagant behaviour, the ascendant elite whose direct influence on the official discourses had the power to establish social directives. He declared himself as 'quintaesencia del anarquismo', promulgated free love and the abolition of the Civil Code and marriage. He defended women's right to express their own independence and sexual liberty (Ruffinelli 1974: 72-74).

Regardless of the advanced laws addressing women's political and social rights, gender roles were strongly attached to colonial ideologies. A country that was highly developed socially, in so many ways, remained patriarchal and paternalist. Women had to respond firstly to their "biological destiny" and achieve maternity as their most important duty in life (Peluffo Beisso 1931).[20] Nature, Asunción Lavrin explains, 'had also imposed on women the supreme task of maternity, which demanded most of their energy' (Lavrin 1995: 325) preventing them, thus, from having a political life. Even when the 'earlier state-building integrated women into the public/political sphere' (Ehrick 2005: 13), women – from all social classes – were educated to be the pillar of the family and solely responsible for the domestic chores. Supported by both religious fundaments and by scientific discourses, whose stress was on the biological differences of sexes, motherhood was, Lavrin explains, 'another powerful ingredient in building a special ideology of gender' (1995: 7). Even feminists, Lavrin continues, 'embraced it wholeheartedly as the highest signifier of womanhood' (7). When some women managed to cast off their own assigned confines, it was usually at a very high price (Delmira Agustini's life is a paradigmatic example to illustrate this). Even within the literary realm, male writers were unable to create an independent and rational female character. Yet, Roberto De las Carreras was the only male member of this generation able to portray a different woman character in contraposition to the traditional representation of women. As Blixen also notes, his contemporaries could not possibly imagine an intellectual woman, autonomous and able to make her own decisions (2002: 14).

Soon after her tragic death in 1914 (killed by her ex-husband while they were lovers), Agustini became an important referent for women writers, not only in Uruguay, but also in Latin America. As Luisa Luisi stated in 1925: 'Delmira Agustini no es solamente la primera poetisa de América; es, si no el primero, por lo menos uno de los primeros poetas de América' (171). Although Luisi affirms later that Agustini was '[una mujer] íntegra de todas las potencias de su vida, [pero la] falta de cultura y de disciplina familiar dejó en libertad completa la fogosidad desbocada de su genio' (1925: 174). As expected, the sensual and erotic content of Agustini's poetry was, for a long time, avoided by the critical corpus.

[20] Darwin Peluffo Beisso published several articles on women's political and social conditions in the Uruguayan newspaper *El País* in the late 1920s. Despite the fact that he declares himself as a "feminist", his articles offer a clear understanding of women's assigned roles in the epoch, mainly based on biological and eugenic grounds. Other newspapers at the time, such as *La Democracia*, *El Bien*, and *El Siglo* also published articles in Peluffo Beisso's fashion.

With Agustini and M.E. Vaz Ferreira, women poets managed to enter the national cultural history, but not without a problematic reception. In order to be included in the national canon, their writings were painstakingly selected, greatly reduced and some parts of their works were even obliterated, as in the case of Vaz Ferreira.[21] Whereas Vaz Ferreira was regarded as too withdrawn, Agustini was considered too "savage" to embody the role of the feminine voice for the new civilised and modern society and their inclusion was significantly manipulated. However, it would be with Juana de Ibarbourou (1892-1979) that the nation would find the "suitable" feminine voice, able to speak for all citizens, especially for women and children in the years to come, as I will explain in chapter two.

Women in the Backyard: Avant-gardes, and the Generations of 1915 and 1930

The political and global signs of the end of the First World War started to spread some optimism, which was also reinforced by the success of the Mexican and Russian revolutions and which provoked a new and increasing public interest in the search for identity in Latin America. Constructivism, *Creacionismo,* Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism and Ultraism, were some of the movements that spread across Europe and Latin America in the 1920s. Generally, these cultural movements marked a drastic rupture with their predecessor, Modernismo. By breaking with it, avant-gardes cast off realism and promulgated a *nuevo espíritu*. Far from being a homogenous and coherent tendency, it is generally possible to say that the vanguards had in common the search for the autonomy of art: a radical thesis of post-romantic modernity (Schwartz 1991: 17). More significantly, through prolific *manifiestos*, avant-gardes character-

[21] Arturo Sergio Visca exemplifies this critical strategy of selection and manipulation in "María Eugenia Vaz Ferreira: del naufragio vital al anhelo de trascendencia": 'Dos años después de la publicación de *La isla de los cánticos,* don Alberto Zum Felde, que ejercía un magisterio crítico innegable en el Uruguay, publicó en la revista *La Pluma* (Montevideo, Año II, Volumen VI, mayo de 1928), un artículo sobre María Eugenia Vaz Ferreira afirmando en él que *La isla de los cánticos* "debe ser tenida como expresión genuina de su lirismo, con exclusión de cualquier otra estrofa no inserta en tal volumen". La postura crítica tan tajantemente expuesta en estas líneas, y avalada por la autoridad de quien las suscribía, parece haber determinado las actitudes de la crítica posterior ante la obra de María Eugenia Vaz Ferreira: se redujo su obra, en los estudios críticos aparecidos en los años siguientes, a los 41 poemas de *La isla de los cánticos* y todo lo demás de su obra dejó de existir durante 34 años, hasta que una nueva selección de poemas, realizada por Emilio Oribe, se editó con el título *La otra isla de los cánticos*' (Visca 1979: 89).

ised themselves by aggressiveness and dynamism. In opposition to Modernismo, they promulgated a cult of imagination and *palabra en libertad*, a depiction of instantaneous images and the vast advances of modernity.[22] They summoned a participative, open and oppositional art that based its expression on political and social commitment that defied bourgeois customs. The poetic language sought to be more "authentic" and closer to the continent's reality, finding in the indigenous people (as well as African-American people, peasants and gauchos) the roots for new ways of expression, even if those expressions were articulated and sifted from a postcolonial point of view.

In 1917, concurrent with the flourishing of these artistic vanguards, Uruguay created and promulgated a new constitution that promised important political and social changes in the country by reinforcing democracy and fortifying the sovereign rights of the state. Uruguay's political strategies aimed at building a stable, rising and socially advanced country.[23] By the 1920s, technological advances had arrived, enhanced by an increasingly prosperous, productive and strong economy propelled by *Batllista* politics.[24] Yet, at the end of the 1920s and under other administrations, such as Baltasar Brum's government (1919-23), Uruguay became not a progressive and liberal state, as Batlle had intended, but a rather wealthy country that would foster a satisfied, lethargic and conformist society for decades to come. Overconfident of its achievements, that society grew up apprehensive of the new, resisting innovation as a menace to its success. Hence, the rather good economic and social conditions, supported by political propaganda, provoked a conservative and self-satisfied state, characterised by the immobility of social classes, an avoidance or 'diffusion' of social struggle, and a resistance to change (Caetano & Rilla 2006: 169; 171; 219).

Despite the social advances that the creation of the *estado benefactor* implied, in numerous ways these policies reaffirmed a patriarchal state and a conservative society. The rather prosperous economic situation with its fair distribution of capital, provoked the birth of the urban middle-class, and with it, of bureaucracy. Uruguayan society remained strongly stratified in

[22] Some of these aspects can be observed in Silva Bélinzon's poetry.

[23] 'En los programas [educativos de primaria] de 1917, 1921 y 1925 mantuvieron vigencia las concepciones de hombre, nación, patriotismo, solidaridad, justicia, amor y belleza como ejes de la identidad nacional'. In *Breve análisis histórico de la educación en el Uruguay*, Administración Nacional de Educación Pública, Consejo de Educación Primaria, República Oriental del Uruguay, April 2007:
<http://www.cep.edu.uy/archivos/programaescolar/analisis_historico.pdf> [accessed November 2007].

[24] Although liberalism still appeared as the extended ideological collective consciousness, it had already lost its political and ideological strength.

terms of gender and class, and the questioning and discussion of gender roles in this postcolonial, *hiperintegrada* (homogenised and homogenising) society were greatly impeded. Despite the considerable achievement that women's suffrage would mean in the 1930s, women's social, political and economic situation was still paradoxical in the country.[25] As a report presented in 1944 to the *Congreso Femenino* illustrates, women were still struggling for their rights by the second half of the twentieth century:[26]

> Lo que ocurre con el destino de la mujer en el Uruguay, es bien singular y contradictorio: por su cultura, por su capacidad y su inteligencia, ha adquirido indiscutible y merecido prestigio. No obstante, puede observarse, con extrañeza, comparando su situación con aquella de las mujeres de otros países americanos, que, a pesar de tener tanto nivel en esos aspectos, es una de las que ocupan, estadísticamente, más bajo nivel por los cargos dirigentes que desempeña, en proporción a su competencia, teniendo así, de hecho, mucho menos influencia directa en la vida política, económica, moral y social del país, de lo que podría esperarse por su capacidad. (Cassina de Nogara 1989: 146)

The document also places emphasis on the social and moral prejudices attached to women:

> Asimismo se observa que, siendo tan alto su nivel cultural, es una de las que, moralmente, está más llena de ataduras, más agobiada y coartada por los falsos prejuicios morales, lo que le impide vivir libre y valientemente y adquirir una personalidad propia que no se deje sojuzgar por juicios ajenos o malevolentes. (146)

The article stresses that women only occupied a very small percentage of higher positions, regardless of the presence of female professionals in different areas – including arts and literature:

> A pesar de que, en proporción muy notable, las mujeres obtienen premios en los concursos literarios del Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, salvo este último año, no es costumbre que integren el jurado ni tampoco aquellos de los concursos oficiales del Salón Nacional de Bellas Artes o del Salón Municipal de Artes Públicas. (149-150)

[25] After a long decade of discussion and struggle, women's right to vote was finally recognised in Uruguay in 1932, although the political situation in the country did not allow women to vote until 1938. Thirty-thousand women voted in the election of 1938 (Lavrin 1995: 348-349).

[26] The statement shows a significant similarity with Verónica Pérez's article on Uruguayan women's political representation in the country in the twenty-first century, quoted in the introduction of this thesis.

In terms of the official discourses surrounding national identity, the political and social advances were not necessarily accompanied by a literary corpus capable of exploring new forms of representation for women. The "genuine" Uruguayan identity was supposed to be found not in the European tendencies, customs and lifestyle – widely spread through immigration – but in the *criollo*'s voice. The national(ist) literature had the role of interpreting and representing the "American race", negotiating its history through the description and portrayal of the gaucho and criollo lifestyles through the *nativista/gauchesca* literature.[27] Needless to say, this genre neither left much room for women's writing nor initiated any new exploration of gender roles. On the contrary, this literary expression reproduced and promulgated traditional stereotypes, leaving women, misrepresented, unrepresented and/or excluded from national history and the literary canon.

This literary genre leads our discussion to another important construction 'tied to the politics of national identity' in Latin America, especially in the 1920s and 1930s (Stepan 1991: 105); that is, race.[28] In *Literatura Nacionalista en el Uruguay*, published in 1929, Juan M. Filartigas reclaimed in this book a new literature, able to represent the 'American race' and abandon the parasitic dependency on Europe, stating: 'Y nosotros, hombres de América […] reclamamos en los artistas la presencia en su arte de un espíritu expresivo de raza' (8).[29] To Filartigas, the 'American race' was represented by the gaucho, which, from his point of view, was the first great truth in America (12). Accordingly, a new nationalist literature was needed to go to the very roots of the nation's foundation, although those origins implied a deliberate obliteration of the pre-colonial past.[30]

In contrast to Filartigas' view, in 1926 Alberto Zum Felde claimed that the *nativista/gauchesca* literature had expired by then and suggested that a new (and progressive) form

[27] For a comprehensive study on *gauchesca* and *nativista* literature, see Gustavo San Román's introduction in *José Alonso y Trelles* ("El Viejo Pancho"), *Obras completas* (2005: 13-83).

[28] 'The word race', Stepan states, 'was a salient part of the vocabulary of eugenics in the Latin American cases, and all the eugenics movements were preoccupied with racial questions, especially as they related to sex and reproduction' (1991: 104).

[29] Filartigas was the director of the magazine *Izquierda* that defined itself as a "Revista de la nueva generación uruguaya".

[30] Moreover, Filartigas argued, '¿Qué nos importa que vengan italianos, rusos, franceses, españoles, griegos, ingleses, etc., si son energias [sic] que desaparecen asimiladas en la gran onda que va a plasmar la raza?' (70). Filartigas was proposing here what would be known in the 1930s as fusión de razas, a key concept of a society that was eager to be and feel hyper-integrated and modern (Barrán, Caetano & Porzecanski 1996-1998: 24).

of urban cosmopolitanism had transformed the entire Uruguayan gaucho theme.[31] Zum Felde, amongst other urban intellectuals, had a different perspective on the *nativista* movement, aligning himself to the ecumenical ideology. As Rocca affirms, Zum Felde 'trazó un meticuloso proyecto crítico que ayudó a ese conjunto de creadores emergentes, siendo a la vez funcional al batllismo ascendente' (Rocca 2004b: 196). Rocca explains that 'Zum Felde se resistía a [la literatura] gauchesca porque la veía como una mitificación trivial de la nacionalidad, adoptando así una perspectiva sarmientina (civilización contra barbarie)' (2004b: 196).[32] In this way, historian Gerardo Caetano notes that the *Batllista* era implied a historical and social homogenisation that was supported mainly by a growing urban elite: '[l]a política batllista hiperintegradora con respecto al inmigrante acompaña la visión de la élite letrada que mira hacia Europa. En varias polémicas se acusa a Batlle de hacer sombra a [José Gervasio] Artigas o de olvidarlo en sus discursos' (Barrán, Caetano & Porzecanski 1996-98: 33-34).

At the time these different views were being discussed, a group of writers became known in the cultural scene. Vicente Basso Maglio, Enrique Casaravilla Lemos, Pedro Leandro Ipuche, Carlos Sábat Ercasty, Jules Supervielle, and Emilio Oribe represented, as Luisa Luisi affirmed at the time, 'a complete and homogeneous pleiad' (1925: 244). Nevertheless, a close analysis exposes the group's various artistic tendencies. On the one hand, male members of this group promulgated the *gauchesca/nativista* poetry as a popular form of expression capable of identifying the national character of the rural, *criollo* character (e.g., Serafín J. García). On the other hand, another group of intellectuals congregated around the figure of Eduardo Dieste (1882-1954) in the 1920s-1940s, such as Esther de Cáceres, Adolfo Pastor, Fernando Pereda, Giselda Zani and Justino Zavala Muniz (Real de Azúa 1964: 142). According to Carlos Real de Azúa, this group professed a certain 'simpática adhesión a los "ismos"' (142), as well as a 'repudio a lo académico, rutinario, realista y representativo, su voluntad de una expresión artística adecuada a una época dominada por los nuevos meteoros de la velocidad y la mecá-

[31] Zum Felde wrote at the time: 'Hora es ya de que pase, para dar lugar a un americanismo lírico más acorde con el imperativo de la vida. La sensibilidad de nuestros días se nutre ya de realidades, idealidades distintas. El ambiente platense ha dejado definitivamente de ser gaucho; y todo lo gauchesco – después de arrinconarse en los más huraños pagos – va pasando al culto silencioso de los museos. La vida rural del Uruguay está toda transformada en sus costumbres y en sus caracteres, por el avance del cosmopolitismo urbano.' In *La Cruz del Sur*, Montevideo. Quoted in Mariátegui (1976: 218-219).

[32] A few decades later, Zum Felde kept maintaining this view: '¿Teníamos que europerizarnos antes de llegar a ser americanos civilizados?' (1943: 69). He tries to answer his own question: 'Esto forma parte de nuestra paradoja viviente' (69).

nica' (142). Furthermore, this group, Real de Azúa continues, 'se daba cercano a una postura cristiana, a un catolicismo de acento intelectual, libre de beatería y de gazmoñería, sentido, sobre todo, como afirmación de espiritualidad, misterio y trascendencia' (143). Ángel Rama referred to it in similar terms, pointing out Esther de Cáceres as the most significant expression of the group's religious concerns:

> […] Eduardo Dieste –, aparece, en un país que había vivido la apoteosis del laicismo, una lírica religiosa y celebrante. En ella vendrá a insertarse Casaravilla Lemos, combinando eros y ágape, y en una forma elusiva también Susana Soca (1907-1958) sobre todo por su misteriosa prosa, pero el producto más refinado que ofrece es Esther de Cáceres (1903). (1968: 17)

Despite the multiplicity of literary works and diverse artistic trends explored by these writers, scholars agree that poetry in the 1920s and 1930s became an instrument of the official discourse. Pablo Rocca argues that poetry and progress appeared to be ('más o menos') good fellows, and poets 'benefited' from that alliance:

> El 'pacto' Estado-intelectuales, a la par que probablemente inmoviliza a una tardía vanguardia, rinde excelentes frutos para los poetas, quienes empiezan a ser beneficiados con algunas regalías oficiales en la publicación de libros, sobre todo en sintonía con los programas de enseñanza primaria. […]. [S]e alentó esa poesía que podía ser nativista ([Pedro Leadro] Ipuche, [Fernán] Silva Valdés), metafísica ([Emilio] Oribe, [Enrique] Casaravilla [Lemos], etcétera), o, como la de Ibarbourou, una línea personal a medio camino entre el neorromanticismo, el modernismo y el sencillismo que en Buenos Aires propulsaba con éxito Baldomero Fernández Moreno. (2004b: 193)

Poetry had, Rocca maintains, a more educational, pedagogical aim: 'Esa sociedad entre criolla e inmigrante, en suma, se miraba confiada en sus logros y en ella una naciente clase media veía en la cultura un ascensor para la mejora individual y la integración general al proyecto moderno' (193). Nonetheless, as Rocca notes, future intellectuals, such as those included in the Generation of 1945, failed to show how the official discourse could have influenced, for instance, the works of Sara de Ibáñez, Casaravilla Lemos (200), or Esther de Cáceres, and viceversa.[33]

[33] In a recent article published in *El País* on Uruguay on Juvenal Ortiz Saralegui (1907-1959), Rocca maintains that the Generation of 1945 applied a completely opposite approach to the study of poetry that could have led to this homogenising analysis of this generation and the historical and cultural process: 'Los de *Alfar* estaban muy

Furthermore, critics such as Aínsa, Arbeleche, Mántaras Loedel and Espina also seem to agree with the idea that this generation did not introduce a significant form of expression. They usually draw these conclusions in comparison to the avant-gardes. As Espina affirms in "Vanguardia en el Uruguay: la subjetividad como disidencia", '[l]as transformaciones ideológicas y estéticas originadas a partir de la eclosión de las distintas vanguardias no encontraron respuesta inmediata en una nación que estaba viviendo con inocente optimismo los deslumbres del progreso' (1994: 48). Finally, critics affirm that this group did not conceive of itself as a cultural generation at all and that the new artistic expressions that they discovered and explored were not conceived of as antinomies of its precursors.[34] In fact, the contrary is pointed out, as they believed they were a prolongation of the Generation of 1900 (Arbeleche and Mántaras 1995: 33). The Generations of 1915 and 1930 have been thus perceived and interpreted as a single, long-lasting generation, making clear the limitations of certain categorisations. Within a fairly stable and prosperous period, characterised by the – apparently – good political and social conditions of the country (Arbeleche and Mántaras Loedel 1995: 34; Rocca 2004b: 193), these generations were/are generally seen as perpetuators of the national construct of the country as the "Suiza de América". In this sense, the tendency to homogenise these two generations is also an attempt to reproduce and disseminate the national myth of the country reified as placid and stable. Still, what these interpretations fail to discern is the differences amongst these works and the possible spaces of negotiation, disruption, multiplicity and heterogeneity in the national and literary history.

The study of women's poetry in this period helps to discern this complex cultural scenario in the mid-twentieth century and shows. Women writers across these literary generations expose and distort the pretended cultural homogeneity, the prevailing discourses of the lay liberal state project, as well as the national narrative of *gauchos*, and the masculine urban litera-

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cerca de las regalías del mundo oficial entre el gobierno de Amézaga y el de Batlle Berres (1943-1958), y en esa lucha por el poder, el "45" vino a plantear una suerte de privatización de la vida cultural, ideologema que se impuso en los años siguientes, en particular cuando los sesentas enfrentaron como nunca antes a la intelligentsia con el Estado, que ya poco o nada tenía de liberal. Sólo si se toma distancia de esta pelea, se podrá leer los textos sin prejuicios. Antes, habrá que reconocer que -más allá de sus límites- Ortiz Saralegui entregó su vida por la poesía' (2007: para. 4 of 4).

[34] One of the most relevant figures of the Generation of 1945, Alberto Zum Felde (1889-1976), is often used to explain the correlation of these two cultural generations. In his youth, Zum Felde used to walk arm-in-arm with Roberto De las Carreras; later on, he founded the cultural magazine *La Pluma* (1927-1931). *La Pluma* was, as Zum Felde emphasises in the introduction of the first issue, an independent, purely intellectual and eclectic cultural magazine. See introduction by Alberto Zum Felde, *La Pluma*, August 1927, (1): 7-9.

ture. A close reading of these works exposes and disrupts the more harmonised image that the literary canon aimed to achieve. In this sense, the term *posmodernista*/*post-modernista*, frequently used to describe women writers, reveals the problems of cultural periodisation in Latin America and women's position within the political, social and cultural discourses in the first half of the twentieth century.

What about those *Post-modernistas*?

Absent from the national projects or ambiguously included in the social contract, women's writing not only problematises the hegemonic discourses but also demonstrates its failures. The cultural period of the avant-gardes in Latin America was mainly dominated by men. Despite its apparently shy presence in Uruguay, the persistent discussion of national identity and literature was very much circumscribed to male intellectual circles. Women authors had a minor participation in these cultural movements and their writings were not always aligned to the global or local artistic tendencies. Although some women writers were, to some extent, involved, acknowledged and recognised by the establishment (such as Juana de Ibarbourou), their works were, nonetheless, not always considered representative or as suitable models. For instance, Selva Márquez (1899-1981), who published *Viejo reloj de cucú* (1935), *Dos* (1937) and *El gallo que gira* (1941), is seen as an 'único y tardío ejemplo de surrealismo' (Espina 1994: 48) or as a 'moderado y tardío surrealismo uruguayo' (Rocca 1996-7: 19). Márquez is, in this sense, another great example of a marginal poetic expression, which is seen as an isolated case within Uruguayan literary history and therefore unable to serve as a model.[35] At other times, critics and artists failed to understand and/or interpret those women's works that did not totally fit the then current or dominant cultural movements (such as Silva Bélinzon); alternatively, their revolutionary, polemical, intriguing and/or interesting lives eclipsed the importance of their literary productions. Such is the case of Blanca Luz Brum (1905-1985), who published for the very first time in 1925 and whose fascinating, controversial and tragic life was for many years far more attractive than her own *œuvre*.

While avant-gardes assumed the centre of artistic production in the 1920s, other forms of expression exposed the complexity and heterogeneity of a cultural movement that had differ-

[35] For more analysis on Márquez's work, see Tatiana Oroño's "Selva Márquez: La ciudad del tiempo en cautiverio" (2004).

ent repercussions, impacts and scopes in Latin America. When discussing '[t]he usefulness of a chronological scheme' in Latin American poetry of the twentieth century, William Rowe argues that a 'standard chronological presentation' exposes its limitations (2004: 153). Although Rowe provides diverse examples from various women and men poets in Latin America to prove the inadequacy of those literary labels, he points to the works of Agustini, Ibarbourou, Mistral, Storni and 'other women poets writing between approximately 1910 and 1940' that 'could be called, variously, Romantic, *modernista*, *postmodernista*, and *vanguardista*' (2004:153). 'What needs to be considered', he adds, 'are the ways in which their priorities were different from what those labels are able to indicate' (153). I would argue that it is not exactly about their priorities but about the way women writers had to negotiate and challenge their historical, social and cultural dislocation.

Marginalised or misrepresented from literary histories, women writers have resorted to a series of pre-existent symbols, traditional forms and classical figures in order to subvert fixed ideas on gender and identity. Women writers have demonstrated the great limitations that literary classifications and categorisations have historically implied for them and how their writings have found different strategies to subvert the patriarchal discourses, as Latin American feminist readings have shown about the poetry written by the Chilean Gabriela Mistral, the Brazilian Cecília Meireles or the Peruvian Magda Portal.[36] Subsequent feminist readings have reconsidered their works, arguing that they represented a constant crossing of borders, transfiguration and transformation between 'modernization and the last vestiges of nineteenth-century customs and codes', as Karen Peña shows in the cases of Mistral and Meireles (2007: 13-14).[37] This is also the case for the Argentinean writers Norah Lange, Alfonsina Storni and

[36] Mistral (1889-1957) published *Desolación* (1922), a book of poems that has little to do with the vanguard's principles. The practice of applying the Alexandrine metre and stanzaic structures left her "outside" the cultural activity of the Latin American avant-gardes. In Brazil, Meireles (1901-1964) published *Espectros*, in 1919, just three years before the famous *Semana de Arte Moderna em São Paulo* was erected as a prelude of the Brazilian avant-garde movement, *Modernismo*. Yet, Meireles's usage of classical verse and Parnassian sonnets, which includes traditional tropes, forms and figures, was not considered as "proper" of the vanguards. Although, as Karen Peña observes, 'Cecília Meireles challenges the status quo with a creative power previously unseen in Brazilian literature' (2007: 68). Meireles's poetry, Peña continues, 'work[ed] [as] a barometer for the inconsistencies of Brazilian Modernism. […]', because '[i]t was unconventional to return to form, function and traditional metre in a Modernist period, where vanguard registers were in constant play'. However, 'Meireles's metric manner is a constant dialogue with the tensions of lyric expression at that time' (63).

[37] José Quiroga's essay on "Spanish American Poetry from 1922 to 1975" refers to Mistral's poetry as a bridge between the 'poetry of the Avant-Garde and the poetry that followed it' (González Echeverría & Pupo-Walker

Victoria Ocampo who, as Márgara Russotto points out, 'insertas de algún modo en la perspectiva de la vanguardia, revelan estrategias completamente diferentes para forjarse un espacio de expresión propia' (1993: 816). This is, as this thesis will show, the case of Concepción Silva Bélinzon, too.

Latin American women writers look as if they were standing in the way of the new tendencies, capable of disrupting (or resisting?) any coherent system of periodisation. They problematise the strict and dominant cultural trends and generations, literary categorisations and labels of the first half of the twentieth century. Yet, the active members of this period who were strongly attached to the new cultural movements and poetic discourses, often sexist and misogynist, failed to consider other possible circumstances of enunciation, as well as other artistic explorations outside the innovative and fearlessly dominant avant-gardes. For instance, Jorge Luis Borges, who was devoted to ultraism at that time, stated of Storni's poetry that: 'De la Storni y de otras personas que han metrificado su tedio de vivir en esta ciudá [*sic*] de calles derechas, sólo diré que el aburrimiento es quizá la única emoción impoética [...] Son rubenistas vergonzantes, miedosos' (1926: 14-18).

Significantly, in the case of Alfonsina Storni – as of other women writers, such as Silva Bélinzon – not only gender, but also class, played a decisive role in the reception of their *œuvres*. Whereas for the Argentineans Lange and Ocampo their personal and social connections would offer them a better reception of their works, Storni was considered a writer lacking in "taste". In her book *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930,* Beatriz Sarlo offers an example of one of those critiques:

> [Alfonsina Storni] [e]s cursi porque no sabe ni leer ni escribir de otro modo. [Escribe así] por su incultura respecto de las tendencias de la cultura letrada; por su 'mal' gusto, si se piensa en las modalidades del gusto que se imponían en la década de 1920. (Sarlo 2003:79)

The apparent unawareness of the new artistic spectrum was considered, to some extent, as a consequence of social origins and lack of connections. Taste, as Pierre Bourdieu defines it, is 'a practical mastery of distributions which make it possible to sense or intuit what is likely (or unlikely) to befall – and therefore to befit – an individual occupying a given position in social space' (1984: 466). Sarlo draws attention to the social differences between Argentinean writ-

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1996: 325). However, this definition is problematic. It assumes that Mistral's poetry is a vehicle for mainstream artistic expressions; thus it places her work as a mediator rather than creator.

ers Lange, Ocampo and Storni as an important factor that determined the reception and treatment of their works:

> Borges prologó el primer libro de Norah Lange [esposa de Oliverio Girondo], *La calle de la tarde*, publicado por Samet en 1925; J. Ortega y Gasset redactó el epílogo del primero de Victoria Ocampo, *De Francesca a Beatrice*. Un olvidado nadie, Juan Julián Lastra, firma, en 1916, el prólogo a *La Inquietud del rosal*, de Alfonsina Storni. Las diferencias son tan obvias y conducen tan directamente al origen social y a la futura colocación en el campo intelectual de estas tres mujeres, que casi parece inútil ocuparse con más detalle. (69)

It may be that those differences are too obvious to be worthy of mention, as Sarlo suggests, but they also happen to be frequently overlooked. The inability to recognise and accept the different characters of those *œuvre*s denied a central position within the cultural production to many authors – not only women but also men –who did not practise the new artistic expressions, or who did not get access to the close-knit cultural circles. Hence, in line with Bourdieu's ideas, John Guillory affirms that '[t]he fact of class determines whether and how individuals gain access to the means of literary production, and the system regulating such access is a much more efficient mechanism of social exclusion than acts of judgment' (1994: ix). Guillory has proposed that 'the problem of what is called canon formation is best understood as a problem in the constitution and distribution of [what Pierre Bourdieu has called] cultural capital' (1994: ix). In other words, Guillory affirms that the 'problematic of representation concerns with the distribution of cultural capital' (16). More specifically, Jorge Larrain explains that class and contacts have also been a fundamental aspect in determining the access to cultural or political positions in the continent: 'education, acquired skills and personal achievements are not enough to secure access to certain political and cultural jobs. Well-placed "contacts", "godfathers" or "friends" are required to facilitate entry' (2000: 192), and, as he also affirms, '[...] institutions are almost impenetrable for those who do not belong to the group that controls them' (192).

In other words, to write outside of the dominant cultural trends implied, on the one hand, a lack of "touch" and taste, and on the other hand, being viewed as old-fashioned or, in some cases, as ignorant. What those perceptions actually reveal is a disguised discourse on class and gender. The access to the 'cultural capital' has been historically more conspicuously restricted to women writers within patriarchal societies, and even more to those women from lower social classes and/or non-white racial backgrounds.

As Nicola Miller points out, gender played a particularly important role in the reception of women's works in the twentieth century. Women writers, she argues, were not allowed to embody the Latin American intellectual construct, even for those writers heavily involved in the cultural life:

> Latin American women from all classes were systematically denied the prestige and power attached to occupying a public platform as 'an intellectual' who was entitled, indeed expected, to cast authoritative judgement upon national and world affairs. A few wealthy women carved out a role as cultural patrons (such as Victoria Ocampo in Argentina), but their own creative work was usually received with indulgence rather than genuine interest. The only socially sanctioned ways for Latin American women to participate in national cultural life during the early 20th century were as lyric poets (that most personal of literary genres) or as schoolteachers (working in a public space, but one customarily represented as an extension of the home). (2005: 134-149)

In the 1920s, Uruguayan suffragette Luisa Luisi expressed the incapacity to embody the intellectual construct as a woman. In her preface to a critical book on Uruguayan literature, she makes it clear that she is not a 'crítico' [*sic*]. She says that 'pure feelings, pure pleasure' is what motivates her. One of the first Uruguayan feminists warns the reader and states that what s/he will find in her book is the result of her honest, sincere opinion and '[n]ada más' (1925: 11-12):

> Yo no creo en la función directiva que se arroja con más presunción que eficacia la llamada orgullosamente crítica. […] Sólo he intentado, por placer, por hondo placer, por hondo placer estético, acaso tan hondo como el escribir versos, – las dos únicas formas de creación literaria que me seducen – traducir mis propios sentimientos frente a libros que me han interesado vivamente. Y en esto principalmente, reconozco que no soy crítico. (10-11)

What Luisi's words reveal – and somehow request – is that, as a woman, she was unable to embody the existing, dominant intellectual construct (*crítico*), a clear gendered word incapable of including women. The choice is an ambivalent one: to reproduce the traditional discourse attached to women and write from the place they were assigned, or to step down and mark the difference from a genre that does not represent their gender identity and aspirations.

Women's poetry followed similar disjunctives. A few decades later, Silva Bélinzon would also privilege the spiritual position over the intellectual: 'Yo siento, más que pienso. Rechazo

las intelectualizaciones' (Richero 2005: 390), and '[m]ás espiritual soy que intelectual.'[38] The explanation for this position started to be disentangled by Anglo-American feminist critics a few decades ago. If '[w]omen are denied the right to create their own images of femaleness', instead, they 'must seek to conform to the patriarchal standards imposed on them' (Moi 2002: 57). Bearing in mind that poetry was seen as a permitted area where women could express their feelings, it should not be surprising, then, that the first half of the twentieth century in Uruguay is characterised by a large number of women poets.[39] Facing this cultural restriction, women poets were usually devalued under those conditions. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have famously argued in *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, that male critics usually (but not exclusively) 'assume that the art of a woman poet must in some sense arise from "romantic" feelings (in the popular, sentimental sense), arise either in response to a real romance or as compensation for a missing one' (1979: xix). Hence, as women's studies have been trying to expose, sensuality, mysticism, romanticism and even delusion have been traditionally assigned to women's writing as gendered subjects. Uruguayan critic Alberto Zum Felde exemplifies this view when describing the poetry of Agustini, Vaz Ferreira and Mistral:

> Si Delmira Agustini es el tormento del supremo amor nunca alcanzado, cuyos ardientes ojos sonámbulos aman más la profundidad del sueño que la realidad de los días, si Gabriela Mistral es el alma que ha triunfado de la tragedia del amor, purificándose en una transfiguración mística, María Eugenia Vaz Ferreira es la desolación del amor encadenado en una torre de orgullo, la tristeza de la carne convertida en cenizas mortuorias sin haber sido llama. (1941: 339)

Women writers, in this sense, have been treated differently by a traditional critical corpus that has denied them the place they deserve. When those writings challenged literary paradigms and master discourses, the critical corpus was able to mend, snip or disregard such expressions. While fixed categorisations failed to define certain literary expressions, a new label appeared to describe the more heterogeneous historical moment set roughly between the 1910s and 1920s and whose description carved a niche for women's writing (amongst other excluded minorities), namely the alleged *Postmodernismo*. *Postmodernismo* was, as John Beverley and José Oviedo explain, a Spanish-American 'short-lived and transitional movement in poetry around 1910 in reaction to the hegemony of modernista aestheticism' (Bever-

[38] CSB's archive, BN. Transcribed interview for the newspaper *La Mañana*, [n.d.].

[39] Jorge Oscar Pickenhayn speaks of at least sixty remarkable women poets (1999: 7).

ley, Aronna and Oviedo 1995: 2). However, in principle, *Postmodernismo* did not follow the new premises of the avant-gardes. The term has been used to include those "minor" writers whose style and subjects, such as nostalgia for the past, regionalism, and provincialism, were contrary to those of the new artistic movement of the avant-gardes. Hervé Le Corre explains the concept with these words:

> El término 'postmodernismo', algo atribulado por la mácula inicial de su prefijo, se ve así asociado con la imagen de una estética anacrónica, feble eco de las voces mayores del modernismo, y reaccionaria, sintomática de una inexcusable sordera a las propuestas revolucionarias de las primeras vanguardias de las que es contemporáneo y que, para la crítica, precipitan su muerte. (2001:14)

Seen as anachronistic, reactionary and indifferent to the revolutionary efforts of the avant-gardes, the term *Postmodernismo* thus acquired negative connotations. Squeezed between two hegemonic and opposite movements, *Postmodernismo* occupies a rather marginal and unclear position in cultural history. However, as Le Carré suggests, *Postmodernismo* is not only a transitional movement but also an interstitial, hybrid space: '[l]os postmodernistas, en general, trabajan con una lengua heredada pero la mutilan, la podan, la cruzan y la mestizan, mezclando lo culto con elementos populares, el alto lenguaje con el habla cotidiana, abriéndose espacios donde quepan voces tradicionalmente calladas' (255).

More recently, *Postmodernismo* has been analysed as a faction outside of the hegemonic discourses, as Amós Nascimento explains in his analysis of *Postmodernismo* in Brazil:

> The term [*Postmodernismo*] was known in Hispanic American literature in the early twentieth century; in 1934 Federico de Onís used it in his *Antología de la Poesía Española e Hispanoamericana* to qualify a tendency that came after "modernism" and had no specific stylistic characteristics. Perhaps because of this ambiguous definition, some authors who comment on the postmodern debate and mention Onís avoid referring to Latin America, arguing that this reference does not contribute to the understanding of the contemporary discussion. However, if one looks at the movements mentioned by Onís, there is a clue for understanding postmodernism: the majority of the authors he cited were members of minorities at the margins of society; emancipated women, Natives, ex-slaves, homosexuals and foreigners who dared to bring their art to the public. In this sense, *post*modern is not what comes after, but what is outside of the official definition of modern. (Mendieta 2003: 125)

Not surprisingly, the term is particularly used to describe the works of aforementioned poets, such as Mistral and Storni, and the Uruguayans Agustini, Vaz Ferreira, Ibarbourou, and even

Sara de Ibáñez (who published for the first time in 1940). In effect, on the one hand, the term shows 'one of the difficulties to periodizing Spanish American poetry at this time' (Shaw 2008: 8) but also exposes the great obstacles posed by homogenising cultural movements in a specific country, and even more so in a subcontinent. On the other hand, as Nascimento argues, *Postmodernismo* can be defined as that which has been excluded from the hegemonic discourses of modern nations. According to Nascimento, *Postmodernismo* is not 'what comes after', nor even what it is in-between, but what is *ouwith* the official and supposedly homogeneous narratives of modernity.

As I will continue analysing here, before conducting a full analysis of women's cultural position in the next chapter, women poets in twentieth-century Uruguay were very much at the periphery of critical history and the literary canon. If they were *postmodernistas*, it was because they were writers excluded from the canon and the normative historical understanding of national identity. In this sense, the term unveils that, specifically in Latin America, there was more than one history and national identity and, indeed, more than one gender.

No Country for Old Women: The Literary Generation of 1945

By the second half of the twentieth century, women's cultural situation had changed very little. A poetry that was inscribed within a Hispanic tradition and still strongly attached to the Symbolist inheritance was no longer representative of the new reality in Uruguay and Latin America (1966: 49), in the words of Emir Rodríguez Monegal – a fundamental figure of the Generation of 1945. According to the critic, Uruguay's political, cultural and social reality from the second half of the twentieth century onwards was far away from the national myth of Uruguay as the "Suiza de América", which, in his view, was an expression that only signified a 'comfortable pre-electoral abstraction' (Rodríguez Monegal 1966: 15). Such phrases were disallowed with remarkable irony in an article written in the magazine *Marcha* in 1950 by Manuel Flores Mora: 'Uruguay se parece tanto a Suiza como Homero a un cronista de cine' (1986: 753). Rodríguez Monegal also claimed that Uruguayan literature towards 1925 started to decline in originality and creativity and, subsequently, assumed a literature 'con mentalidad y perspectivas jubilatorias', maintaining that '[l]os escritores empezaron a parecer, melancolica y vergonzosamente, empleados públicos' (1966: 49). Such statements were clearly criticising a society that had grown complacent and self-satisfied, but also inactive under a

rather paternalistic and largely bureaucratic government. This was a situation that started to deteriorate towards the end of the 1950s in, what Barrán calls, 'the third stage' of the history of Uruguay in the twentieth century (1959-1985), when, in 1958, Uruguay suffered an important economic and institutional crisis that slowly paved the way for the conflictive times of the 1960s.

As the quotations from Rodríguez Monegal and Flores Mora show, at the turn of the 1940s a new wave of intellectuals, journalists and writers (opposed to the vision of Uruguay as a European idyllic retreat) arrived to transform that *anquilosada* society. Periquito el Aguador, *nom de plume* of the quintessential Uruguayan author Juan Carlos Onetti, posed the ongoing question of the Uruguayan cultural situation when he wrote in an article for *Marcha* in 1939: '[se] necesita una literatura rioplatense. Una voz que diga simplemente quiénes y qué somos, capaz de volver la espalda a un pasado artístico irremediablemente inútil y aceptar despreocupado el título de bárbara' (1994: 10). If history was believed to be linear and progressive, Onetti and his contemporaries were proposing to leave the past behind and gaze "forwards", looking for a new literary corpus able to represent change and evolution.

A close-knit cultural group was mainly formed by the male literati of the time, such as journalist Carlos Quijano (1900-1984), critics Rodríguez Monegal (1921-1985) and Ángel Rama (1936-1983), philosopher Manuel A. Claps (1920-1999), and multidisciplinary writers Mario Benedetti (1920-2009), Domingo Luis Bordoli (1919-1982), Sarandy Cabrera (1923-2005), Flores Mora (1923-1985) and Carlos Maggi (1922-). Notably through the magazine *Marcha*, and with less international repercussions, through cultural journals such as *Asir*, *Clinamen*, *Cuadernos de la Licorne*, *Número* and *Letras*, this heterogeneous and multifaceted generation promoted and created its own cultural industry and place, and fought to change the Uruguayan and even the Latin American cultural location. Predominantly urban, intensively anti-fascist, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist, this fecund generation was characterised by a sharp critical attitude and political commitment that provoked the formation of a new aesthetics and advocated a new way of writing and criticism in Uruguay. From the 1930s, poetry started to be conceived of as a social task, and the poet as a militant (Franco 1989: 44). *Marcha* and its members were 'readjusting' to this new 'role of the poet and the intellectual' in Latin America (Franco 1989: 46).

An intense reconsideration of the Uruguayan literary canon as well as the question of national identity, came into sight in a considerable attempt to change Uruguayan culture. This generation reviewed, criticised and pushed aside its predecessors in order to find its own central location within a cultural scenario that they believed remained immobile and detached

from social and political issues. Donald L. Shaw more generally explains this cultural process in Latin America:

> We can plausibly assert, […] that as the vanguardist period came to an end, a split was developing between poets in the universalist 'High Culture' tradition of a search for humanist values in a world where they seemed to have disintegrated, and poets who were much more interested in re-establishing direct communication with the real, with the here-and-now, with lived experience rather than abstract intellectual exploration of the human condition. (2008: 11)

With many of its members born at the time of the construction of the "Suiza de América", this generation lived through a conflictive, changing and revolutionary era marked by a series of events that shook the world, such as the Second World War and the Cuban Revolution, as well as the difficult socio-economic circumstances in the country from the 1960s onwards. Politically and historically, the Generations of 1930 and 1945 have been perceived and constructed as two different expressions of a country that was totally altered after the second half of the twentieth century. The Generation of 1945 would identify and embody literature and criticism as powerful political tools, diminishing any production not directly associated with a strong sense of political and social commitment. Even if the Generation of 1930 had shown some respectable artistic production, offered good writers, and was also politically active, the Generation of 1945 would make sure that those writings were going to be meticulously examined and the Uruguayan cultural milieu transformed in an attempt to refresh the country's cultural scene. The members of the Generation of 1945 were united against a conception of poetry that they considered extremely cultured, refined and exquisite, but above all, out of date (Rodríguez Monegal 1966: 120). Rodríguez Monegal described the situation with these words, '[l]os poetas anteriores a 1940 habían practicado una poesía exquisita, de gran perfección técnica, de enorme pudor expresivo. Una poesía en deuda con la poesía' (Monegal 1956: 20).

To this cultural generation, the present was exposed as bleak and pitiful, while the past was revealed as a fraud (Rama 1972: 11), and the official literature as the country's most infamous representative. Certainly, the Generation of 1945 conceived of a writing that would not follow the aesthetics of the previous literary generations and their spokespersons. The members of this group constantly criticised and disallowed the previous artistic productions that they considered vacuous, obsolete and isolated from the new reality. Deeply dissatisfied with the previous creations, the new cultural group proposed a new literature able to renovate that – ap-

parently – dull reality. A few decades later, A. Rama retrospectively explained the aims of the emergent cultural generation by emphasising:

> Contra el intento de celebración que, de la sociedad a la literatura transformaba todo en una rosa perfecta, [generación del 45, or generación crítica, as Rama labelled it] opuso el análisis desintegrador que ve las espinas, el marchitarse del color, la caducidad de las formas, así como lo grotesco del arrebato celebrante. […] Contra las formas brillantes que han devenido herméticas no por necesidad interna sino porque nada tienen que comunicar, opuso la grisura y la sencillez, el coloquialismo despojado, la verdad vecinal y concreta. (Rama 1972: 34)

Decades later, in an interview with her fellow poet Mario Benedetti, Vilariño explained the eruption of this literary group in times of complacency and literary ennui: 'En un país que vegetaba, o se pudría opacamente, y en un medio literario que seguía el mismo camino, teníamos una tarea cultural y alienada, pero necesaria y creadora en las manos' (Larre Borges 2007: 65).

What differentiated this generation from previous ones was its consciousness and willingness to become a reliable cultural group capable of mobilising and reactivating what they believed was an ossified Uruguayan cultural scene. This group was very much aware of its potential power and ability to modify and control the cultural capital. The recently acquired concept of *generación literaria* was often debated and disputed, and was later eagerly applied by its most active members. Rodríguez Monegal brought the subject to light when, in 1951, he wrote an article in *Marcha* asking '¿[e]s legítimo aplicar a la literatura hispanoamericana el método de las generaciones?'(15). The question seems to be a rhetorical one, since in that very same year, Rodríguez Monegal applied the concept and named the new, emergent, yet heterogeneous cultural Generation of 1945, establishing 1940 as the year when this generation 'comienza a polemizar con la generación anterior para hacerse sitio' (1966: 33). If until that time, the concept of cultural generations was a vague idea, a theoretical term unable thus far to fully explain and represent the new cultural phenomena in the Hispanic-American world, the Uruguayan intellectuals of 1940s would delineate and embody the concept. The generation was baptised at least twice: firstly by Rodríguez Monegal and later by his intellectual opponent, Ángel Rama. In 1972, Rama proposed a revision of the cultural process of Uruguay in the second half of the twentieth century and defined the generation as *Generación crítica*, establishing the dates of its activity as 1939-1969.

The subsequent works of this generation's struggle to challenge the Uruguayan literary canon reveal a persistent conflict between the canonised and non-canonised authors, as well as a clash between different ideologies and aesthetic conceptions at the time. It also shows how, within a cultural system, the very members of this literary group endeavoured to impose their own models in order to gain and maintain control, while other organisations, such as the Uruguayan Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, and Asociación Uruguaya de Escritores (A.U.D.E.), were trying to institute and consolidate other repertoires. Women writers, however, remained very much at the peripheries of this group and their own struggle has also been diminished or silenced.

In contrast to a critical corpus, which sees this cultural generation as homogeneous (Brando 2002: 5), it was neither a uniform nor a coherent group. On the contrary, diverse voices and vehement discussions about different political, cultural and social issues were documented in the editorial columns of the magazines and publications they created. The generation's discrepancies were roughly divided into two different groups and named, somehow ironically, by Carlos Maggi as the "entrañavivistas", formed by Amanda Berenguer and her husband José Pedro Díaz, Líber Falco, Manuel Flores Mora, Maggi himself and (his wife) María Inés Silva Vila, A. Rama and Ida Vitale (married at the time), and the "lúcidos" including Mario Benedetti, Sarandy Cabrera, Manuel A. Claps, Carlos Martínez Moreno, Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Idea Vilariño, among others (Rodríguez Monegal 2003; Raviolo & Rocca 1996-1997; Rocca 1992 & 2004; Silva Vila 1993). The two groups proposed two dissimilar and alternative visions of literature and criticism in contrast to the official literature, and their divergences were largely intersected and imprinted in the groups' magazines. In an interview with César Di Candia, Carlos Maggi cautiously illustrates these two notions: 'Digamos, sin entregar las banderas, que los lúcidos hacían una crítica erudita y miraban todo desde afuera. Y digamos que los entrañavivistas concebíamos la literatura como un hecho de la vida. Y vamos a dejarlo ahí' (2005: 7). Rodríguez Monegal also recognised the existence of two groups:

> [La] diferencia entre la dirección y el equipo de arte [de *Marcha*] fomentó el establecimiento de una curiosa rivalidad y a veces hasta una lucha interna (a menudo sorda pero también pública) que revelaba ya en la mejor época la existencia de dos grupos generacionales y hasta de dos marchas [sic]. (1966: 42)

That conflict exposed the multiplicity and complexity of this new group and their efforts to create a new political, social and cultural consciousness in the country and in Latin America. There was no other cultural generation in Uruguay so consciously created, so intentionally determined to challenge their cultural and political milieu as this group. Gender was not, however, one of their main concerns, a factor which is most apparent if we consider, as the next chapter will do, the experiences of the women writers involved or, even more specifically, the critical views that the most influential members of this group had on women's writing. Indeed, a literary generation that was showing an increasing interest in political and social issues was unable, in contrast, to rethink and question gender roles.

This generation, with the magazine *Marcha* (1939-1964) as its most popular cultural exponent – 'arena donde se debatió la jefatura de la generación' (Rodríguez Monegal 2003: 384) – was conceived as a collective cultural project, responsible for the renovation of Uruguayan literature (Rocca & Raviolo 1996: 20). Above all, the magazine was used as one of the most powerful resources to generate a new readership. Rodríguez Monegal described the magazine, emphasising the fact that the publication created an intellectual Leftist elite keen to discuss literature as well as national identity, which was firmly contrary to the country's official myth (1966: 31). The weekly *Marcha* became the perfect cultural locus to discuss and divulge the current political and cultural issues. The magazine, run by the new, urban and progressive cultural elite, presented articles written by some of the most remarkable intellectuals at the time, such as the already mentioned Real de Azúa, Rodríguez Monegal, A. Rama, Arturo Ardao, J. C. Onetti, as well as younger members (who later became the most popular Uruguayan authors), such as Mario Benedetti and Idea Vilariño. According to many critics, *Marcha*, in particular, performed a powerful cultural role able to renovate, influence and control the public opinion, transforming, as Moraña maintains, the essentialist national and regional discourses (Moraña & Machín 2003: 10).

Nonetheless, other critics have exposed the limitations and failures that the Generation of 1945 comprised. Espina argues that the Generation of 1945 constituted, in fact, a "neutraliser" rather than a questioning enterprise of the *Batllista* society:

> Desde principios de la década del cuarenta el mercado literario contó con otro elemento desestabilizante o, mejor dicho, neutralizante. La fundación de Marcha en 1939 actualizó las ideas antiimperialistas de Rodó al impulsar la consagración de un ideario hispanoamericano y propiciar el rescate de un pensamiento vernáculo, más caracterizado por la vaguedad que por otra cosa. Vino a crear también un nuevo tipo de elitismo ideológico y artístico – además del oficialista que ya esta-

> ba en vigencia – del cual, incluso hasta el día de hoy, gran parte de la literatura uruguaya no ha podido liberarse. El aura de un nacionalismo a ultranza que Marcha respaldó con insistencia más que con pluralismo, y que en nada contradecía la programática reformadora de la identidad uruguaya iniciada por el absolutismo batllista, instauró una nueva clase de dogmatismo. (1992: 945)

This generation, Espina continues, 'apostó a lo que se suponía era "la auténtica literatura uruguaya", haciendo culto a la solemnidad de una moral laica que dejaba a los disidentes sin otra salida que el solipsismo y la soledad' (936). Espina goes even further in his view on this generation, affirming that the new aesthetics devalued different forms of poetic expression: '[l]a grisura, la idolatría del aburrimiento, la tristeza de los signos (sobre todo para un lector exigente) y el simplismo vinieron a sepultar definitivamente la audacia y el espíritu de aventura de toda una época' (936). He analyses Selva Márquez's poetry to show how a hyper-symbolic, imaginative, surrealist and disorderly writing, such as hers, contradicted not only the national projects of the nation but also the Generation of 1945: '[p]ara una crítica que veía a la poesía como un ejercicio de solemnidad y de información ideológica, era improbable que todo disparate cercano al surrealismo pudiera ser celebrado y promocionado como una opción completamente pertinente' (935).[40] Espina argues that those kinds of expressions were in clear contrast with the concepts of order and progress that the modern state, or 'estado modelo', wanted to promulgate. As the case of Silva Bélinzon will demonstrate, any poetry considered subjective or detached from reality was kept out of the national discourses of the new nation:

> La originalidad y el uso de la imaginación resultaban prácticas peligrosas. La originalidad venía a significar el regreso al origen, a un estado irracional carente de cualquier tipo de atributos. La imaginación, por su parte, llevaba a la voluptuosidad del desorden, a la semibarbarie, a una escritura incomprensible sin ninguna función social. (1992: 945)

[40] Tatiana Oroño supports this view: 'La poesía de la autora fue publicada entre 1936 y 1941, período coincidente con el proceso de reconfiguración del canon literario uruguayo cuya custodia pasaba en aquellos mismos años a la generación del 45, al tiempo que − precedida por la Guerra Civil Española − se desencadenaba la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Su obra no fue tomada en consideración por la crítica hegemónica. A su invisibilidad habría contribuido la propia autora al cancelar, en la temprana fecha de 1941, sus ediciones en libro.' See "Selva Márquez: la ciudad del tiempo en cautiverio" (2004: para. 7 of 66).

Espina also points out that the Generation of 1945 has recently been criticised for being extremely harsh in its review of the past, whilst it had previously been accused of being whimsical, egotistical and even parricidal. Vilariño herself recognised this point of view in an interview in 1994, just recently published:

> Los [que publicamos la revista] *Número* tuvimos una actitud de rigor a menudo excesiva, que nos llevó a rechazar materiales de [Pablo] Neruda, de [Jorge Luis] Borges, de [Juan Carlos] Onetti (que iban a parar a Marcha), que a veces llegó al asco visceral de Emir [Rodríguez Monegal] por Felisberto [Hernández] o se quedó en la indiferencia frente a la obra de [Emilio] Oribe o la de Esther [de Cáceres]. Fuimos, como sucede una y otra vez, parricidas. (Larre Borges 2007: 24)

For his part, Espina affirms that the criticism applied in *Marcha* was not '"implacable" como todavía se vanaglorian algunos de sus defensores' but 'parcialista y conservadora' (936).

Despite these views, the Generation of 1945 occupies a crucial position in Uruguayan cultural history. The prolific cultural activity of this generation was drastically interrupted in the 1970s when a *coup d'état* transformed the country's history. The preventive repression imposed by the military government (1973-1985) meant the end of this generation and, of course, the transformation of the cultural activity and socio-political life of Uruguay forever. The personal and cultural price was high: some writers and intellectuals, such as Benedetti, Rodríguez Monegal, Rama and Vitale went into exile; others were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and murdered, such as Julio Castro.[41] However, after a long period of suffering and silence, the persuasive voices of the great majority of the members of the Generation of 1945 found a privileged position in the Uruguayan and Latin American literary canon and cultural history. The myth of the country as the "Suiza de América" was reinforced after the ominous period of military rule. In the collective imaginary, the Generation of 1945 became part of that time of active democracy, welfare state, independence, peace, freedom of speech and pluralism, before the political debacle of the dictatorship. The history of diversities and differences previous to the 1970s was erased, and one single history became collectively recognised and preserved under the myth that the brutal dictatorship (unintentionally) helped to reinforce. The myth of *culturosos* found in the Generation of 1945 an ideal paradigm to validate its "truth": a small country able to produce great artists and intellectuals, such as Rama and Rodríguez Mo-

[41] Castro's remainings have been recently found at an army base in Montevideo, on the 21 October 2011, after decades of search. Forensic analysis has confirmed that he died a few days after being held, and as a result of torture. Castro was 69 years old at the time he was arrested.

negal, or powerful voices able to move the masses, such as Mario Benedetti and Idea Vilariño. As Lisa Block de Behar affirms, the Generation of 1945 has turned out to be 'razón de conflictivas nostalgias' (Rodríguez Monegal 2003: x).

In conclusion, by describing the Uruguayan cultural map of the first half of the twentieth century, I have outlined the diffuse, ambiguous and restricted space that women poets have occupied in literary history. In the next chapter, I will focus on the analysis of women poets who wrote under the two contrasting Generations of 1930 and 1945, in order to show the problematic cultural location for women and, especially, for Silva Bélinzon, who started to publish her work at the dawn of this cultural generation.

CHAPTER TWO
(De)Gendering Cultural Generations: Mid-Twentieth-Century Uruguayan Poets

I'm Nobody. Who are you?
Are you -Nobody-Too?
Emily Dickinson

In the "Palabras preliminares" of the first publication of the complete work of Juana de Ibarbourou, Ventura García Calderón seems to be surprised about the emergence of a poet such as Ibarbourou: '¿De dónde vino y cómo surgió en nuestro amanecer, aquella musa autóctona, sonriendo entre calandria pagana y la golondrina de Nuestro Señor? Historia extraña y sin precedentes' (Ibarbourou 1953: XVII).[42] Decades later, critics still struggle to find literary connections amongst women poets. They might be right. They have been keeping women writers *out* of, or partially included in, the national cultural history, and this makes it difficult to trace artistic and stylistic relations with their fellow writers.

This chapter examines how the works produced by women poets in mid-twentieth-century Uruguay have been excluded from the literary canon and/or misrepresented in national history. Although the remainder of the thesis will look at Silva Bélinzon, here I will discuss several of her women contemporaries in order to prove that she is a standout example of a greater trend.

The Poetesses

One of the clear differences between the women poets from previous cultural generations and the Generation of 1945 was the difference in naming them. Prior to the latter cultural generation, women poets were referred to as *poetisas*. The term, which started to decline in use to-

[42] García Calderón also writes: '[…] fué [*sic*] la sorpresa de los poetas de América cuando nos llegaron del Uruguay los primeros poemas de Juana de Ibarbourou. No podíamos creer en ese milagro de simplicidad' (Ibarbourou 1953: XVIII).

wards the 1950s − but even now confers a sense of linguistic ambiguity and uncertainty − denoted a group of women poets whose writings were still attached to the intrinsically feminine, romantic self, and includes poets such as the aforementioned Agustini, Vaz Ferreira and Ibarbourou.[43] This problematic term confers women poets' fixed conventional ideas of gender and identity. As Debra Castillo explains, '[o]ften women in Latin America are denigrated and safely categorized under the heading of *poetisas* (the poetesses) whose supposedly delicate, 'feminine' lyrics are the equivalent of their painstakingly beautiful, equally ornamental, implicitly useless embroidery' (Castillo 1992: 27).[44]

Towards the second half of the twentieth century, women tended not to use masculine names or pseudonyms to publish their works; yet, in conjunction with the term poetisa, another mark inscribed in the married women writers' names established the cultural and social difference between the poets of the previous generations and the younger ones of the 1945 cultural group. That is the use of the preposition 'de'. Traditionally in Hispanic culture, married women's maiden names are followed by the preposition 'de' ('of') and the husband's surname. The most significant poets of this and previous literary generations followed this convention; Ibarbourou, married to captain Lucas Ibarbourou, Esther de Cáceres (1903-1971) married to doctor Alfredo Cáceres, and Sara de Ibáñez (1909-1971) married to doctor, critic and poet Roberto Ibáñez. These women writers are clearly known by their husbands' surnames, who coincidently occupied important and influential positions in their respective disciplines.[45]

However, seen as a mere circumstantial detail, this preposition placed between names marks one of the most subtle – as well as patent – differences amongst women poets from these cultural generations. It suggests the political, cultural and social space of transformation, negotiation and difference of gender identity. Even when, to a greater or lesser extent, women writers of the first half of the twentieth century shared the heavy load of a patriarchal and European-style tradition, many of the women poets of the Generation of 1930 carried in their names gender identity assumptions that some of them, nevertheless, managed to articulate and

[43] For more on this discussion about the term applied and used by contemporary women writers in Spain, see the article: "¿Poeta o poetisa?" (De Andrés Castellanos 2003).

[44] Silva Bélinzon is alternately referred to as poetisa or poeta. If the critic in question is somehow aware of the use of this problematic term, s/he would use instead the masculine form, as poet Líber Falco did when eulogising Silva Bélinzon's poetry: "Digo que usted es *un poeta* y alguien a quien admiro […]." In prologue, *AODH* (my emphasis).

[45] Hereafter "Ibáñez" and "Cáceres".

contest under their disguised traditional writing. After the 1960s the use of the husband's surname started to decline, leaving behind a large group of women writers associated with a more conservative and patriarchal society. This would virtually divide women of these cultural generations into the traditional, more conservative, religious ones and a liberal, progressive and agnostic group. Undoubtedly, Juana de Ibarbourou is the writer who most clearly personified the former.

In 1925, Uruguay celebrated the centenary of its independence. Five years later, the country commemorated the centenary of the promulgation of its first constitution, and its football team won the first ever World Cup. On such a historical occasion, along with the state's modernisation process, the *Centenario*'s celebrations offered the perfect backdrop against which to redefine and affirm the country's national identity. At the time of the *Centenario*, it was imperative for Uruguay to affirm itself as a nation and to be introduced into the modern world. History had to be coherently and powerfully told, and national identity had to be promptly shaped. The country required a consistent literary corpus able to help to construct and configure the new nationalist goal.[46]

Culturally, the literary canon remained somewhat faithful to the Generation of 1900. However, a new voice appeared to satisfy the ideals and aims of the nation. Born in the town of Melo, in the Northeast of Uruguay, Juana de Ibarbourou would turn out to be the perfect representative to conciliate the political and social dichotomies that the country was facing: countryside versus capital, urban versus rural.[47] Having published her first book of poetry, *Las lenguas de diamante*, in 1919, Ibarbourou embodied the feminine national voice that Agustini ambiguously occupied. Ibarbourou was named "Juana de América" by the Uruguayan government in a historically unprecedented solemn ceremony held in the *Palacio Legislativo* in Montevideo in 1929. While also proclaiming her as poet of the Americas, Uruguay was repositioning itself as a culturally leading country in the continent. Juana de América thus became a national icon to represent the "feminine" voice that the political scenario required to express the positive, inclusive and enthusiastic feeling of patriotism; she embodied a maternal voice able to speak in terms of nature and life. Luisa Luisi's comments on Ibarbourou's work plainly illustrate this view: '[f]resca, juvenil, encantadora, Juana apareció en el escenario lírico de América, en el instante propicio que necesitara su triunfo' (1925: 246).

[46] *Literatura nacionalista* by J.M. Filartigas, published in Montevideo in 1928, is a good example of this attempt to create a national literary corpus able to represent national identity.

[47] See Amir Hamed's introduction in *Orientales a través de su poesía* (1991).

She would be portrayed as an innocent and beautiful creature, almost unaware of her own creative potential, as Luisi's account suggestively shows: '[c]omo una voz de la Naturaleza que nada sabe de sí misma, esta chicuela venida de Melo por los azares de un matrimonio juvenil, cantó su verso, ignorante e inconsciente de su propia oportunidad' (248). Manuel Ugarte also mentioned Ibarbourou as 'the delicate Uruguayan poetess' (1931: 239). When comparing the works of the Uruguayan poets Agustini and Ibarbourou, Zum Felde reveals an interesting conception of women's writing at the time:

> Juana de Ibarbourou es, en cambio, lo más alejado que pueda concebirse al tipo intelectual: es una intuitiva, más aún, una instintiva. Su cultura es escasa; y felizmente para ella, porque no los necesita, ha leído pocos libros. (1941: 474)

In this sense, Zum Felde defined Ibarbourou as Agustini's sister, a poet able to renew the 'essential feminine nature': 'Juana de Ibarbourou venía a renovar la poesía de la feminidad esencial, que Delmira, la hermana mayor había iniciado' (1941: 466).[48] Then, Zum Felde adds, '[l]as figuras de estas dos poetisas eróticas aparecen, en el horizonte espiritual del primer cuarto de siglo, como dos hermanas de perfil distinto… Delmira es más profunda que Juana; pero Juana es más fina que Delmira' (466). That 'finesse' in Ibarbourou's work then probably related to the fact that, according to Zum Felde, she expressed the erotic desire in a rather less conspicuous way than Agustini. Again, Zum Felde defines Ibarbourou's poetry as a celebration of the simple love, life and instincts, and nature.[49] She is described as a little wild and innocent child (*criatura*) discovering and loving the natural world that she seems to belong to, but which she is not able to realise:

> La poesía de Juana de Ibarbourou es gozo de vivir y plenitud de amor. Canta esta poetisa pagana en sus primeros cantos el sabor de la vida terrena, y el sano y simple amor de los instintos, sus complicaciones psicológicas y sus tristezas morales. […] Ella ama y disfruta – como una criatura inocente y salvaje- de todas las cosas naturales. (467)

[48] Luisi also finds resemblances between the two poets in a similar fashion: 'de Delmira Agustini, tiene Juana el erotismo franco, aunque también sano, más fresco y más ingénuo [sic]. Hay analogías profundas entre estas dos mujeres, por más que ellas no sean las que acostumbran a señalar con demasiada frecuencia los críticos' (1925: 252-253).

[49] As Jorge Arbeleche suggests, Agustini and Ibarbourou have been placed in literary history next to each other, as if they were 'competidoras en algún campeonato inverosímil' (San Román 2011:140). In a similar way, Silva Bélinzon and her sister would also be placed as creative competitors (see chapter three).

As these comments illustrate, the maternal and natural character of her work was widely eulogised. Many poems written by Ibarbourou, such as "La higuera" and "Otoño", have been taught and recited in primary schools for generations.

However, "Juana"'s complex and multifaceted poetry was historically mutilated by the traditional critical corpus that saw in her work the ideal female representative of the nation's values (her most erotic poems were, for instance, ignored). Whereas poetry written by women was supposedly created to be read by other women (and sometimes children, the "future of the nation"), their writings were assessed by male critics as authorising figures with the main purpose of endorsing readings. According to phallogocentric discourses, the *poetisa* was there in order to speak to "the feminine hearts" about their female condition from her feminine soul. She possessed a special gift that was given to express the true essence of the feminine self. In a commentary on Ibarbourou's work written by poet Arsinoe Moratorio in her book *Mujeres del Uruguay* (1946), she states: 'como todas las poetisas, ha sido destinada, por esas fuerzas grandes de la vida, a cantar por su boca en un verbo en singular, las emociones de todos los corazones femeninos' (1946: 20).[50] Moratorio also describes the poet as 'solitaria y silenciosa' (19). Raquel Sáenz, winner of the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública prize for her significantly entitled book *Voz y silencio* (1936), is also described by Moratorio 'desde su soledad' (45) and sadness (46).

Silence, solitude and, sometimes, martyrdom, are underscored in relation to women poets. A Judeo-Christian tradition of suffering and pain that redeems the human being and makes women more "human" is highlighted in Luisa Luisi's account of Ibarbourou's poetry: '[n]ada ha perdido de su gracia, que es en ella don del cielo; pero ésta se ha hecho más grave, con una melancolía dolorosa que la hace más amar por más humana' (1925: 250). And then '[p]orque sólo el dolor nos acerca verdaderamente, y el placer nos separa, sin unirnos más que con vana apariencia pasajera' (250). Luisi's words echo in Moratorio's book two decades later when she describes Ibarbourou: 'como a todas las mujeres del mundo a su corazón le ha llegado la hora del sufrimiento' (21).

Women writers in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s were usually considered as solitary or dislocated figures. As these examples show, Moratorio describes almost all Uruguayan women

[50] Although recently some critics, such as Jorge Arbeleche, have revisited Ibarbourou's work (see San Román 2011:139-155), exploring different aspects of her work in order to emphasise its multifaceted character, "Juana", as she is usually referred to, is still entrapped in stereotypical discourses that will take some time to deconstruct.

personalities of the first half of the twentieth century as isolated and silent; two concepts traditionally attached to women. Moratorio, a poet herself, is unable to break with those conceptions, even as she attempts to speak about women intellectuals in Uruguay, which can be seen as an important step in challenging a history that has silenced women's voices: 'Encuentro a la doctora Paulina Luisi entre el silencio de su casa grande […]' (1946: 17). She reiterates this image later: 'La veo sola como se la ha visto en su enérgica y agitada vida' (17). Again, on María Stagnero de Munar, Moratorio emphasises the same (natural?) condition: '[…]vivió toda su vida modestamente, silenciosamente, trabajando alejada de la fría pomposidad de la ostentación' (23). The same rhetorical pattern is found throughout the book. With regard to Luisi's sister, the first woman lawyer in the country, Clotilde Luisi de Podestá, Moratorio refers to her 'carácter reservado' (43), despite her considerable and indefatigable political activity to achieve women's rights. Moreover, when referencing Uruguayan women occupying influential political or social positions, Moratorio draws attention to the fact that they have not lost their feminine condition. Certainly, Moratorio exposes the then existing debate on gender and women's rights: 'Se tiene aún el prejuicio de pensar que una mujer que ha elegido una carrera universitaria, es un símbolo de emancipación femenina que es posible colocar junto al hombre no sólo por su intelectualidad y por su carrera, sino por su situación liberal en el ambiente' (66).

In the almost four decades of women's rights struggle, feminism and femininity were widely confronted. Women activists had to attest their femininity as a political strategy in order to succeed in their fight for gender equality. As Asunción Lavrin points out, in the Southern Cone in the first four decades of the twentieth century, a 'feminist's worst enemy was women's fear of becoming masculine if they participated in politics' (1995:37). The philosopher Carlos Vaz Ferreira, in conferences given in Montevideo in 1914 and 1922 and published in Buenos Aires in 1945, explained the problematic term "feminism" and its reach. Briefly, Vaz Ferreira suggests several biological, psychological and social arguments in order to understand this issue and offers what he calls a 'psicograma' in order to explain it:

> Cuando un hombre y una mujer se unen, a la mujer se le forma un hijo; al hombre, no le sucede nada. Encontrar ese hecho muy satisfactorio es ser "antifeminista". Ignorarlo es ser "feminista" (de los comunes: de los de IGUALDAD). Tener presente ese hecho; sentir lo doloroso e injusto de algunos de sus efectos, y procurar su COMPENSACIÓN – que podrá ser igualando o desigualando, según los casos – sería el verdadero buen feminismo. (1945: 25)

However, '[i]f feminists rejected the option of motherhood', Lavrin adds, 'they were bound to lose their battle' (37). Therefore, they did not refuse their "femininity". They embraced it and promulgated it, as Moratorio's comments illustrate. Referring to the feminist activist Sofía Alvarez Vignoli de Demichelli, Moratorio makes clear that her femininity has not been weakened by her feminist activities: 'Ella misma, con una ancha sonrisa dichosa, me habla de sus satisfacciones hogareñas, de su felicidad de madre y esposa, nunca interferida la tan agradable y femenina tarea de la dueña de casa por las, sin embargo, absorbentes preocupaciones profesionales' (57). Likewise, on the first Uruguayan woman to obtain a high-ranking post in academia (as *Profesor Agregado* in the Faculty of Medicine), María L. Saldún de Rodríguez, Moratorio emphasizes her 'perfectamente femenina' and maternal attitude as 'mujer de su hogar' (66). As a doctor, she has also been able to 'velar por todos los hijos, junto a todas las madres' (66). This is something that greatly surprises the author of the book as well as pleases her: 'Esto me sorprende y me satisface plenamente' (66). The stereotypical descriptions also include the maternal condition of the women poets, as noted in the portrayal of Sara de Ibáñez as 'limpia, clara, sencilla. Y más aún bella' with a 'espíritu fino y delicado' […] palpita en la existencia de sus hijas, a las que las une, además del sentimiento materno, el lazo fuerte de la juventud' (70). The examples could continue.[51]

In the poetic realm, Carlos Brandy, writer of the Generation of 1945, prefaces Clara Silva's book (*Los delirios*, 1954) with a poem precisely entitled "Clara Silva". The very suggestive verses imply similar paradigms of gender identity:

> […] vienes segura y solitaria / austera, tierna, grave / como un misterio de nieve y lirios fríos / vienes (velado el llanto, no la mirada) / de la soledad de un mundo silencioso / con tu corazón latiendo, / tu pasión, tus presagios; / vienes con tu verdad sombría / como el filo de guerreras espadas, / o el incendio de un bosque en la alta noche / creciendo en el furor y en la angustia de sus llamas. (7-8)

Although Brandy decribes Silva as a confident and powerful woman able to create and destroy, he also mentions her solitude. She is, Brandy writes, coming from the solitude of a silent world.

In literary critical terms, the solitary character of women's lives and *œuvres* is extended to their *desfasada* appearance and their "late arrival". Esther de Cáceres, Sara de Ibáñez, Selva

[51] Although it can be argued that the Generation of 1945 openly rejected this sort of analysis, it was, however, unable to provide a new discourse on women, gender and identity. On the contrary, persistent conventional discourses made it more difficult to include and fully examine women poets that emerged at the time.

Márquez, Clara Silva and Silva Bélinzon, amongst other women poets, are ambiguously situated either in the period of the avant-gardes and/or as part of the Generations of 1930 or 1945. In his extensive anthology, Ginés de Alvareda stresses the religious and hermetic, 'complicated' and 'strict' literary characteristics of these poets' works (1968: 39). His attempt to place and name this large number of women poets in Uruguay is diminished by the fact that their poetry is described as isolated, as well as 'sensitive and nostalgic', 'personal', sometimes even 'pathetically' and 'disconcertingly religious' (39-40). A similar critical approach would be followed by the young members of the Generation of 1945, who refused any vestige of a hyperbolic and hermetic writing, seeing with suspicious eyes any sort of religious and/or mystical expression. Their 'terror a la cursilería' (Raviolo & Rocca 1996-1997: 20) rejected any trace of an emotional (feminine?) tone or hyper-symbolic accent. Even when Ángel Rama praised the work of Ibáñez, he also missed the point when affirming that her poetry arrived tardily in the Uruguayan cultural scene:

> En el libro *Canto* con que en 1940 irrumpe *tardíamente* Sara de Ibáñez, encontramos el canto del cisne de una época y de un estilo: ella ofrece la perfección artística de un tiempo que ha entrado en agonía y cuyo ajuste estético es casi *epigonal*. (1972: 35; my emphasis)

Furthermore, in the fascicle entitled "Los poetas del 45" in *Capítulo Oriental: Historia de la literatura uruguaya* (one of the most important critical works created by the members of the Generation of 1945), in one inset named "Una solitaria", Enrique Fierro refers to the work of Orfila Bardesio (1968: 506-507).[52] In the other one, originally entitled "Otra solitaria", Fierro briefly describes Silva Bélinzon's poetry, locating it in a remote and distant time and place (507), even when her work is published approximately at the same time as the other poets of the Generation of 1945.[53] Fierro, in fact, includes her as a member of this cultural group. He says: 'Allá por el 1943 aparece con el "El regreso de la samaritana", Silva Bélinzon una '"reservista" nacida hacia 1904' (507). The label was also applied to Clara Silva by Ángel Rama (1972: 35) and by Rodríguez Monegal, who pointed out: 'Clara Silva (una reservista de la generación anterior o una adelantada de [la generación del 45])' (2003: 382). Following

[52] Fierro analyses the works of Mario Benedetti, Amanda Berenguer, Carlos Brandy, Sarandy Cabrera, Humberto Megget, Ricardo Paseyro, Idea Vilariño, Ida Vitale, among others.

[53] Fierro, who later married Ida Vitale, developed a friendship with Silva Bélinzon. A few letters found in her archive revealed this relationship: 'Claro que sabemos que siempre vas invisible, al lado de nosotros, ¿no oís cuando te hablamos?'. Letter dated in Mexico, 21 November 1979, CSB's archive, BN. Some of those letters reveal a preoccupation for Silva Bélinzon's health.

these interpretations, in recent times, Sofi Richero also speaks of Silva Bélinzon and Clara Silva as "reservistas":

> El término "reservista" ha tenido la felicidad, puntual y estéril, de acompañar el nombre de Concepción en casi todas sus semblanzas. "Reservista" como su hermana Clara, por haber comenzado a publicar tardíamente, hacia el 45. Ambas comenzaron a editar alrededor de los cuarenta años, así que por eso "tardíamente": sin pertenecer, cronológicamente hablando, a esa generación. (2005: 393)

In *Panorama de la literatura uruguaya 1915-1945*, Jorge Arbeleche and Graciela Mántaras Loedel also recognised Clara Silva as a reservista: 'Clara Silva fue lo que en el lenguaje bélico que a veces usan las historias literarias se llama una "reservista"' (1995: 82), and, in her "belatedness", she is also compared to Ibáñez: 'Un lustro más tardía en su aparición que Sara de Ibáñez y aún más tardía en su aparición como narradora' (82).

The word *reservista* needs special attention here. The term is used in literary studies to define the (late) emergence of a certain writer within a literary generation or period. It is in this sense, one of the most striking terms that explain women's cultural and historical displacement.[54] It marks one of the most interesting and complex aspects of women's position in the national literary history, not exactly their "no-place" but more like their *not-yet*-place.[55] The label seems to suggest, making use of Bhabha's words, not only a sense of 'belatedness' but also 'secondariness' in Uruguay's literary history (1994: 222 and 339). Nevertheless, no question has been raised about how and why these women writers seemed to arrive "late" in the Uruguayan cultural milieu of the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, such description suggests the historical and cultural marginalisation of women writers and their unprivileged position in relation to the production of meaning. It makes evident the impossibility of locating these women poets within fixed historical temporalities and literary categorisations that place their works in a position of subordination. Availing myself of the simple metaphor, if these poets were considered as *reserves*, they would never be able to be *avant-garde*.

[54] Although the term was also used to categorise some men writers, the argument can be taken in similar lines, by understanding "reservista" as someone who breaks with the normativity or homogeneity of a given literary group, movement, trend, etc. Líber Falco was also considered as a reservista by Ángel Rama (1972: 35). However, as Enrique Anderson-Imbert suggests, his work can be seen as an interruption of the continuity of the Generation of 1930 (1969: 609).

[55] In *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture*, following Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender*, Ben Davies and Jana Funke argues that 'queer comes to be defined as the *not-yet*' (2011).

‘Passengers in Transit’

Women poets not only appear to arrive late, they also turn up on their own in the literary scene. Certainly, critics tend to enumerate the great number of women’s works that were published in the first half of the twentieth century, but the possible connections between these writers have been largely diminished, denied or ignored in order to be consistent with the coherent narrative of cultural hegemony. In *Literatura uruguaya de medio siglo* (1966), Rodríguez Monegal recognised Sara de Ibáñez, Esther de Cáceres and Clara Silva as precursors of a ‘práctica de poesía endémica’, which, in his words, characterised Uruguayan literature in the first half of the twentieth century (110). Here, Rodríguez Monegal finds certain aesthetic correlation between the *œuvres* of Ibáñez and Silva, and those from the Spanish generation of 1927 (118). Despite the fact that Rodríguez Monegal only highlights Ibáñez’s poetry within a Hispanic lyrical tradition, conceiving of it as ‘perfección formal [...], tan helada e insensible a otros valores que los funcionales’ (118). He finally admits that Ibáñez’s style has its antecedents in Uruguayan literary history: ‘aunque cuenta con copiosos antecedentes, y no sólo con Herrera y Reissig’ (118). At last, Rodríguez Monegal admits Ibáñez’s own merits and highlights the visuality of her poetry: ‘Nadie ha llevado, sin embargo, como Sara de Ibáñez el verso a ese absurdo lírico tan espléndido: el frío ritmo descarnado, la fusilería de imágenes sin otra dimensión que el objeto que invocan visualmente’ (118).[56] However, Jorge Ruffinelli denies the literary associations between Ibáñez and Silva:

> Pero nada tiene que ver con la obra de un Líber Falco – de 1940 […] y Clara Silva, que surge en 1945 con *La cabellera oscura*, mantiene una relación casi de antítesis, por su efusividad lírica, tanto en la forma como en la concepción de la poesía. (1979: 290)

He finds affinities between Ibáñez and her husband Roberto Ibáñez ‘con cuya obra guarda el compañerismo de las formas perfectas, en particular a partir de *Mitología de la sangre*’ (1979: 290), and two other possible artistic associations with Fernando Pereda (1889-1994), who published for the first time at the age of ninety in 1990, and Cáceres.

The inability to trace common literary affiliations, not only with their male contemporaries, but especially with other women writers, is also exposed in a comment about Ibáñez’s poetry.

[56] Instead, for Ángel Rama, Sara de Ibáñez is ‘la más pura voz del movimiento […] que en 1940 publica un fresco *Canto* lleno de color y de vibración. Es el canto de cisne de un estilo’ (1968: XXXVII).

In their book, Arbeleche and Mántaras Loedel maintain that Ibáñez's *œuvre* has not much in common with her contemporaries: 'Es poca la relación que puede establecerse entre la poesía de Sara de Ibáñez y la de las otras poetisas que la precedieron o la continuaron, tanto en Uruguay como en América' (1995: 93). Nonetheless, they identify some literary affiliation between the writers of the Generation of 1930: 'cultivaron varias líneas poéticas. […] Una mayoritaria en número de autores, de riqueza metafórica; de simbolismo, a veces hermético; de perfección formal; muy atenta a la lección del simbolismo' (78). Here, Arbeleche and Mántaras Loedel include women poets such as Silva Bélinzon and 'partially' Cáceres, Ibáñez and Susana Soca (78). Then they separate the religious poetic style, embodied in the works of Cáceres and Clara Silva, and finally note a colloquial tendency influenced by the avant-gardes as expressed in the poetry of Selva Márquez (78).[57] They also argue that 'el "yo" poético que Sara [*sic*] expresa muchas veces bajo la manifestación masculina [es] un rasgo distintivo peculiar señalado por Roberto Ibáñez' (93). However, they failed to notice that the apparently distinctive and peculiar characteristic in Ibáñez could be easily spotted in Silva Bélinzon's poetry. They consider that this attribute 'responde a la necesidad de trascender los límites de la propia individuación para expresar más cabalmente al hombre en tanto que tal' (94). Although they associate and compare Ibáñez's poetry with seventeeth-century Mexican writer Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, they fail to analyse this fundamental aspect. To a certain extent, Jean Franco's analysis of Sor Juana's writing can explain Ibáñez's use of the masculine form. Franco affirms that Sor Juana's variable use of the masculine form works as a 'parody of [the] conventional poetic voice' (1989b: 29). She states here that 'the different positions of enunciation [constitute] a move within a particular set of rules and frequently it is a destabilizing move' (29). This is, Franco continues, 'either because the enunciating and gendered voice mimics the convention to the point of parody, or because it takes gender differentiation out of the rules of the game' (29). This is a frequent strategy that Ibáñez employs in her poetry, and which strikes the reader at first glance:

> Pegada a mi garganta, envolviendo mis gritos desahuciados
> con las frías volutas de una boa de algodón y ceniza,
> la tiniebla porosa me rodeaba.
> Prisionero en el último dédalo del espanto,
> la muerte germinaba entre mis huesos
> a la velocidad convulsa de la asfixia. (1970: 14)

[57] As already mentioned, Márquez's work has been little considered by the hegemonic literary criticism.

More significantly, what Franco also stresses is the fact that these interventions 'suggest a problem around the constitution of women's subjectivity and around constituting woman as an authoring subject' (1989b: 29). This exposes what Franco calls 'the struggle for interpretive power' (56).[58] In this sense, the use of the masculine form is a literary strategy used by women poets, as Silva Bélinzon also does, to reposition their writings into a (patriarchal) tradition, thus trying to appeal to the "universal" self, conceived of as masculine. Along the lines of Franco's argument, in "The Battle to Create" Marci Sternheim notes that in the poetry written by Ibáñez such a strategy implies a creative struggle:

> Through her poetic virtuosity Ibáñez wages her own creative struggle on masculine territory: the verbal androgyny that is the hallmark of her poetry is set in strong relief as the poem's pervasive female sensibility. The result is a work in which Ibáñez boldly establishes her poetic presence in relation to the predominantly male tradition in which she wrote […]. (Valis and Maier 1990: 64)

Arbeleche and Mántaras Loedel also struggle to find connections between Ibáñez and her female contemporaries: 'No hay afinidades espirituales importantes con las poetisas coetáneas suyas como Esther de Cáceres o Clara Silva', despite the fact that they recognise in these three women poets 'el sentimiento religioso' (94). Surprisingly enough, both critics confirm, in the very same book, that '[Arturo Sergio] Visca ha mostrado con aciertos las continuidades entre los propósitos y realizaciones de los escritores del 17, del 30 y del 45'.[59] Nonetheless, in an informal interview, Arbeleche recognises that the poetry of Esther de Cáceres, Sara de Ibáñez, Clara Silva, Orfila Bardesio and Silva Bélinzon are 'enmarca[das] dentro de un aire de misticismo que sopló en la poesía de las décadas del 30 y 40'.[60] However, (formally) women poets seem to be fractured from that literary tradition. As Mercedes Estramil also suggests in an article written for *El País Cultural* on Orfila Bardesio:

> Por edad, pertenece a la generación de Idea Vilariño, Amanda Berenguer, Ida Vitale y Gladys Castelvecchi. Si bien partieron de un mundo común de sensibilidad e imágenes, el desarrollo de sus obras muestra que Orfila no se parece a ninguna. No sólo porque el desarrollo posterior de sus escrituras difiere, sino porque el grado de recepción y reconocimiento hacia ella fue siempre menor, casi inexistente. Tiene que

[58] See also Franco in "'Si me permiten hablar': La Lucha por el poder interpretativo" (1992: 111-118).

[59] There is nothing else in the section that may suggest that 'escritores' is only referring to men writers, although that may be the case.

[60] Interview by email, on 16 October 2009.

> ver un poco con su alejamiento del ambiente, con cierta renuncia a figurar en las góndolas de la oferta cultural, pero también con su propia elección poética, férreamente autolimitada, encerrada en un universo de "bellas letras". (2007: para. 2 of 10)

Despite the fact that Clara Silva was one of the few women writers granted with the "privilege" of being acknowledged by the main figures of the cultural elite, not only in Montevideo, but also in other Latin American countries, it is also possible to observe some critics being unable to locate her writing. In the introduction to Clara Silva's first book of poems, *La cabellera oscura* (1945), Guillermo de Torre analyses the poetic production in the period 1920-1945. After describing and examining the different literary tendencies, de Torre asks '¿Dónde situar, con referencia a las corrientes esquemáticamente delineadas, la poesía de Clara Silva?' (13). The question seems to imply that he is, in fact, unable to locate Clara Silva's writing within his linear and schematic description of literary tendencies that dominated those twenty-five years. However, he manages to answer the question along the same lines of his contemporary fellows: 'Ninguna filiación concreta, ninguna influencia absorbente cabría descubrir en sus versos, ni sombra del duple o alternado reflejo [*sic*]' (130). Once more, the critical corpus abounds in examples.

In contrast to these critical accounts, many women poets did consider their works to be connected to those of their peers, even if they did not necessarily believe themselves to be part of a coherent movement. In a famous letter written by Idea Vilariño, but signed as "Las Erinnias", published in *Marcha* in May 1949 and addressed to Emir Rodríguez Monegal – at that time responsible for its Literature Section, the author publicly raised the issue of women's literary history in mid-century Uruguay. She accused Rodríguez Monegal of favouring exclusively the work of Idea Vilariño (the disguised sender herself) and ignoring or prejudicing the work of other Uruguayan women poets:

> En un país como el nuestro, tan pródigo en mujeres que "hacen poesía", no leemos a través de "Marcha", el más breve comentario sobre la producción femenina. (Sólo en diciembre del 48, "Sobre la poesía de Idea" y, en los últimos meses pasados, Paseyro sobre Clara Silva. También fueron publicados tres poemas de Silvia Herrera) ¿Por qué nada más?
> Los críticos de "Marcha" y usted en particular, desconocen sin duda, intencionalmente la poesía de Orfila Bardesio, de Concepción Silva Bélinzon, de Ida Vitale, de Sara de Ibáñez, de Amanda Berenguer Bellán de Díaz, de Selva Márquez, de Edgarda Cadenazzi, de Paulina Medeiros, Elia Gil Salguero, Esther de Cáceres, Giselda Zani, Mirtha Gandolfo, Lucy Parrilla, Ibis de Reyes, etc. […] Y aunque es la au-

> sencia de crítica, el abandono, el olvido, el ostracismo a que condenan a la joven generación femenina de poetas, lo que motiva nuestra carta, también queremos expresar un tanto aparte, que su crítica, Sr. Rodríguez, está viciada de afectividad exagerada, de agudo personalismo, de falta de responsabilidad […].[61]

The letter not only claims the inclusion of women's writing ('¿Por qué se olvida de la poesía femenina?'), but also demands acknowledgement of a female literary production and tradition in the country.[62] In so doing, the real author of this letter cites one of her very own verses in order to confirm those connections: 'Y siguiendo, cualquiera menos quien lo quiera, hallará una Delmira reencarnada en estos versos "ese incienso divino que me quemas, sueño ascendiendo abismos con vértigos de sombra, etc." para luego retomar otra vez a Neruda y Jiménez […]'.[63]

Women poets of the time dedicated many poems and books to other contemporary women writers from different cultural generations and countries, and recognised –although shyly– their artistic connections. For instance, Orfila Bardesio (1922-2009) dedicated her third book *Uno* (1971) to Silva Bélinzon. Marosa di Giorgio, who was frequently reluctant to mention a writer as an influential figure, only recognised a few women writers as 'almas gemelas'; one of them was Silva Bélinzon (Olivera-Williams 2005: 413). In this respect, Sofi Richero seems to agree on the literary affiliations between these two poets and, although at first glance her attempt to find such similarities seems to stress the two authors' eccentric writings, Richero offers an extremely suggestive definition:

> [Marosa di Giorgio fue] una de sus más fieles amistades y posiblemente la poeta uruguaya más cercana a su literatura. Ambas parecen comulgar en la originalidad compacta de sus mundos, ese drástico pa-

[61] Original letter *Archivo de Prensa* (1949) <http://www.archivodeprensa.edu.uy/biblioteca/emir_rodriguez_monegal/correspondencia/carta_18.htm> [accessed on 2 October 2010]. Notice that Vilariño uses here Amanda Berenguer's husband's surname.

[62] Citing this letter and using Jean Franco's analysis (1992), Hugo Achugar affirms that Vilariño's letter would reveal 'una lucha por el poder interpretativo' (Guariglia et al 2005: 210). In "Clara Silva: Campo de batalla de la generación del 45", Achugar outlines the situation in the Uruguay of the 1940s and 1950s, saying that, 'las condiciones de lectura, o si se quiere el horizonte ideológico de la lectura crítica, estaba signada, entre otros elementos, por el género' (209). Because, as he states, 'no se podía leer lo que era propio de una escritura o de una sensibilidad de mujer o, mejor dicho como solo algunas mujeres podían hacerlo' (211).

[63] Ibid.

> recerse a sí mismas, esa inflexión estilística, literaria pero también existencial, que las hace lucir como *pasajeras en tránsito*, pasajeras aquí aunque iluminadas todavía de señales de ese otro origen de donde parecen provenir. (2005: 394; my emphasis)

Richero indeed finds an ambivalent term to locate Silva Bélinzon and di Giorgio's works in the cultural scene, that is, as 'passengers in transit'. On the one hand, this label suggests that they are writers in almost continual movement from one stage (or state) to another, in a frantic, almost schizophrenic way. In doing so, Richero not only seems to place them in the realm of the delusional, describing the two writers as almost extraterrestrial beings, but it also suggests the impossibility of pinpointing these writers in the sequential line of literary history, putting them in a virtually perpetual transit. On the other hand, although Richero does not explore this point, the term can propose a non-normative identity that refuses stasis. In this sense, the poetry of these two contentious women writers can be seen more as *journeys* than fixed expressions; more as wandering and connective writings than isolated cases; more like translational representations than predetermined classifications. If so, their writings can be seen as spaces of transformation, exploration and negotiation, and their identities in motion, in process. As Judith Butler famously stated in *Gender Trouble*, following Simone de Beauvoir's ideas:

> If there is something right on Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification. (1990: 33)

In a recent documentary about her own life and work, Butler speaks of the impossibility of defining her identity under one single label (as a woman, lesbian, Jew, American, philosopher, etc.). She ends up saying: 'It seems to be that we travel. I travel.'[64] Therefore, in line with Butler's ideas, the image of a passenger in transit can propose a way of understanding gender as a non-static identity (Salih 2004: 21), as an endless re-creation of the self, now using words of Frantz Fanon and H.K. Bhabha (Bhabha 1994: 12). A decade before, Uruguayan poet Cristina Peri Rossi had also defined identity in a similar fashion: 'No creo para nada en

[64] *Judith Butler, philosophe en tout genre*, dir. by Paule Zajderman (France, 2006): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q50nQUGiI3s> [accessed 3 July 2011].

la unidad del Yo…la identidad es un proceso y como proceso es contradictorio, admite los opuestos' (Dejbord 1988: 73).

The term 'passengers in transit' is particularly relevant to understanding Silva Bélinzon's writing. As chapter five will develop in more detail, her poetry is the source and place from which to perform and negotiate identity. Her hypersymbolic poetry delineates a labyrinthine journey that challenges fixed ideas of time and gender.

The Unusual Re(li)gion

> [...] la *región insólita* que aparecía en muchos de nuestros escritores […] era una comarca extrageográfica, con una fauna y una flora tímidamente librescas y una total ausencia de reales asideros. Eso ya no era evasión sino ajenidad.
>
> Mario Benedetti (1997: 30; my emphasis)

Religion has been seen as one of the fundamental thematic connections between women poets in Uruguay in the mid-twentieth century. However, in the context of a lay state, with an important leftist intelligentsia, this could also bring a biased reception. Certainly, religion was another fundamental factor to displace the works of some of Generation of 1945's predecessors, and especially the mystical and religious poetries of writers, such as Cáceres or Ibáñez. A proudly secular state, that in the first years of the twentieth century removed all the crucifixes and Catholic symbols from public institutions, such as schools and hospitals, was in collision with an important sector of the country's population that claimed to be religious and Catholic. Yet, this important vein of religious and mystical poetry was frequently disregarded for being in contradiction with the secular projects of the modern nation. As Gerardo Caetano and Roger Geymonat explain, the process of secularisation in the country provoked a clear separation between the public and the private spheres, and the adoption of 'posturas oficiales fuertemente críticas respecto a la religión institucional hegemónica (en este caso la Iglesia Católica)' (1997: 37-38). Women poets who expressed religious and/or mystical concerns

were considered as confessional and subjective, and hence, apolitical and antipolitical. As Pablo Rocca states on Ibáñez, 'hizo gala de un apoliticismo total' (2004b: 200).[65]

In an analysis of twentieth-century Uruguayan literature, Jorge Medina Vidal discussed, in a separate chapter, the 'problems of the feminine poetry' (1969: 101). He notices that some women poets in the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s explored the '"motivo" religioso, como creador de poesía; ya sea en un momento determinado de su vida, o como motivo casi constante de su obra' (101). Medina Vidal sees that form of expression not as 'un objeto experimentado sino una reiteración de forcejeos alrededor de rasgos prestigiosos por sus implicancias metafísicas' (101). He interprets, then, these women's works as vain, ineffective and full of clichés:

> Hay deliquios, interrogaciones, ofrendas, pero todas ellas dentro de lo que en crítica literaria llamamos 'emblemas', en su aspecto negativo de ser 'clisés' del pensamiento. Parten de una actitud de separación y angustia injustificada, y lo 'divino', comúnmente es excusa para derramarse sobre el lector. Tampoco se justifica su pensada separación y horror al mundo, o su aferrarse a la ilusión de los sentidos para exigir de lo trascendente una ayuda, que en su juego, ellas no esperan, ni solicitan con avidez. En una palabra, agitan todo el aparato sublime del más allá o el más acá, para exponer lo sicológico, olvidándose del ser total, el hombre, que ellas en ese momento representan. [He cites Clara Silva's book *Las bodas* as an example]. (101)

Despite the fact that he dedicates a chapter to the analysis of 'feminine writing', he is assuming a conventional critical examination. In his view, the "problems" of these women poets stem from their inability to express themselves in a more robust and universal manner. They are seen as egotistical and self-indulgent writers, unable to represent the universal self. From this perspective, not only religion but also gender are the two conditions impeding women poets from reaching that "universality". It is not surprising, then, that Medina Vidal concludes that Uruguayan women poets in this period did not manage to achieve the poetic expression or

[65] Despite this view, it is interesting to note that one of the most popular political figures in Latin America and in the world, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, considered Sara de Ibáñez one of his favourite poets. Some biographers also include Ibarbourou amongst them. See in Alejandra Varela, *Ernesto Che Guevara: ensayos* (2003); Hilda Gadea, *Che Guevara: años decisivos* (1972), *Mi vida con el Che* (2005); and Joseph Hart's edited collection where Hilda Gadea recounts: 'In particular he loved [Ibáñez] [...] to whose work I introduced him. He considered her the best *postmodernist woman*, and I agreed with him. He used to recite "Los pálidos", "Pasión y muerte de la luz", and his favourite "Tiempo III"' (2003: 98; my emphasis).

'grado de preocupación' of their male contemporaries such as César Vallejo, Gerardo Diego or Jorge Guillén (102).

If modernity was characterised by its resistance to religion, and religion as opposed to progress and reason, as Nelly Richard argues, the disdain for religious expression also mutilated and erased the possibility of identity in Latin America:

> As a functionalist and secularising proposal, modernity has not only erased all the ritual dimensions of a culture to which the philosophy of the Logos is profoundly alien, but it has also suppressed that culture's "Catholic substratum", a popular religiousness whose stock of symbols forms an integral part of the Latin American 'ethos'. (1987: 8)

In this sense, religion, from a secular conception, is understood as a "pre-modern" temporality, which would impede progress and "freedom" and, therefore, the development of modernity.[66] 'In order for a society to be modern,' Talal Asad argues, 'it has to be secular, and for it to be secular it has to relegate religion to non-political spaces because that arrangement is essential to modern society' (2003: 182). Asad argues that '[t]his response saves the secularization thesis by making it normative' (182). It is not surprising, thus, that, within a lay state proud of its political and social reforms achieved in the early twentieth century, Uruguayan women writers who expressed religious concerns faced a more challenging and problematic position within the national literary tradition. As Hugo Achugar admits, '[sí] hay [una poesía religiosa]. Lo que pasa que en un país laico predominantemente como el Uruguay, es como una línea subterránea. No tiene la prensa, la difusión, el interés de la gente' (Galemire 2001: para. 29 of 34).

This complex scenario presents a few paradoxes. On the one hand, if women were allowed to express themselves within the realm of religion and nature, their writings had very little room in the national discourses. Against the modern and secular projects of the nation-state, this poetry was seen as incapable of connoting reality. On the other hand, although religious discourse is understood as a form of social repression that 'established the standards of morality […] for the woman' (Beverley, Aronna and Oviedo 1995: 194), religious or mystical poetry offered women writers the possibility to find a place from where to express themselves within a national discourse unable to include them.

[66] See Judith Butler's "Sexual Politics, Torture and Secular Time" in *Frames of War* (2009: 101-135) for an interesting analysis on secularisation in the contemporary world.

Indeed, the number of women poets who expressed a mystical or religious imagery in mid-twentieth-century Uruguay is striking at first glance. Religious and mystical poetry was a frequent motif used by women writers to subvert their own cultural and social displacement. Luce Irigaray interpreted mystic discourse as 'the only place in Western culture where woman speaks and acts in such a public way' (quoted in Moi 2002: 135). 'Though still circumscribed by male discourse', Toril Moi explains, mysticism 'is a space that nevertheless is vast enough for her to feel no longer exiled' (136). Indeed, if women are 'exiled from representation' (2002: 135), as Moi explains, mystical poetry is the space to exorcise such dislocation. To illustrate this point, Uruguayan poet Esther de Cáceres published, in 1963, a book significantly entitled *Los cantos del destierro*. A clear religious and mystical book of poems is overwhelmed by a Christian and Biblical imagery, which abounds in words such as exile and silence, time and solitude. Displaced from a historical linear time unable to include and represent women, the poet creates a mystical writing produced from the margins of (or in opposition to) the secular national discourses. Even if that woman was, say, a doctor, wealthy, married and well connected, she also expresses such displacement. Using a recurring atemporal figure, such as the angel (evident in the poems' titles: *El ángel del mar*, *El ángel del jardín*, *El ángel del llanto*, *El ángel del secreto*, etc), Cáceres situates her poetry in a remote, almost magical, location that oscillates between a mystical, sacred time and the time of exile. This idea of being "outside" or "away" is reinforced by the use of verbs that denote travel and transit, thus creating an idea of a wandering text. Certainly, she might be another 'passenger in transit'.

If, as Jean Franco notes, women 'struggled to find spaces for themselves within the debate on national formation' (1989b: 92), religion provided some Uruguayan women poets of the mid-twentieth century with a symbolic realm from which to speak. In this sense, women use(d) a double-voiced strategy that constantly contains both hegemonic as well as "silenced" voices. Using a Bakhtinian notion, and in line with Gilbert and Gubar's idea of palimpsest, Elaine Showalter has famously argued that 'women's writing is a "double-voiced discourse" that always embodies the literary and culture heritages of both the muted and the dominant' (1981: 201). Hence, the use of such motifs reveals complex discursive strategies that offered women poets the possibility of expressing ideas beyond the secure areas of self-representation. On her part, in Latin American feminist studies, Debra Castillo has argued that women's writing is a 'multiply voiced' that 'operate[s] within a field of sinuous and shifting positionalities' (1992: xxii). Although Castillo's concept is embedded in my own analysis, I prefer to use Showalter "double-voiced discourse" in order to connect it with Homi K.

Bhabha's concept of the nation as a process of 'double writing', 'between the pedagogical and the perfomative' (1994: 212). In other words, between the master discourses and the 'counter narrative of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries' (213), as this thesis will continue to explore through the analysis of Silva Bélinzon's work.

The *Totas Pérez Smith* or Women as Social Reproducers

The Generation of 1945 found a rather keen audience to reject Uruguayan Catholic society, usually identifying women as the main devotees, whereas religious and mystical poetry was treated in a condescending way. Even if this generation proposed to examine the existing national narrative, 'the celebratory romance of the past' in the words of Homi K. Bhabha (1994: 13), women's writing was left unquestioned, misrepresented and/or misunderstood, being usually associated with the most traditionalist expressions of Uruguayan society. Although this generation criticised the picturesque and conservative Uruguay that the official literature intended to disseminate, it was unable to question gender assumptions. Testimonies, articles and critiques in mid-twentieth-century Uruguay convey gender/sexual politics as highly conventional. From the official literature, women were viewed according to traditional stereotypical conceptions of gender, or they were simply not represented at all; but, for the Generation of 1945, women not only played the role of embodying the most conservative aspects of Uruguayan society, they were also confined to doing so. Women became the perfect ground from where the self-satisfied and ossified society had to be contested. In the magazine *Marcha*, Periquito el Aguador used the fictionalised female character "Tota Pérez Smith" to disapprove sarcastically of the Uruguayan cultural situation in the late 1930s and beginning of the 1940s:

> Si usted escribe […], la Tota le pondrá sitio, lo desesperará y conseguirá al fin que usted concurra a su "jueves literario". Si usted pinta, terminará por caer con algún cuadrito bajo el brazo a 'los lunes plásticos' […]. Si usted es un hombre feliz y no hace ninguna de esas cosas, la Tota irá a buscarlo […] y lo abonará a sus "martes de meditación y ocio" […]. Un amigo, luego de perder el apetito a causa de la denodada persecución de la Tota, perdió también todo rudimento de buena crianza e intentó suprimirla diciéndole: "Mire; antes de ir a oír macanas a su casa, me hago cura". La Tota movió la cabeza con su sonrisa

> de comprensión sutil y lo invitó para concurrir a sus "sábados místicos". (1994: 53-54)

"La Tota Pérez Smith" represents the very embodiment of the 'cultural parasite', as Jorge Téllez Vargas calls it, that Onetti criticised.[67] She is a woman; a white, urban, middle-aged, middle-class woman. In this sense, this character used by Onetti reaffirms what Amy K. Kaminsky noticed almost two decades ago: 'The assumption that women have always been the conservative force in society – counted on not to produce, but to reproduce, to maintain whatever is worth maintaining in the culture – serves masculinist agendas on the left as well as on the right' (1993: 16). In another substantial piece entitled "Katherine y ellas", written by Onetti in *Marcha* in 1939 and published under the pseudonym of Periquito el Aguador, offers a significant account on women's writing. The article emphasises the fact that a 'true' women's writing remains interrupted ('detenido'):

> Las publicaciones europeas muestran que también por allá la literatura femenina crece, expandiendo sus armoniosas líneas: Mme. Simone es bautizada "la nueva George Sand". Otras estrellas surgen con su luz sonriente. Pero algo que comenzó con Katherine Mansfield permanece detenido: una verdadera literatura de mujer. (1994: 19)

Then the author stresses the miraculous and exceptional character of Katherine Mansfield's writing: 'Aparte de su talento, K. Mansfield debe su triunfo a esto: por primera vez, y por última, hasta ahora – pese a la legión de bas-bleu anteriores y posteriores – una voz de mujer dijo de un alma de mujer' (19). According to him, she was neither tacky not erudite: 'Katherine Mansfield tuvo mucho de milagro: no fue cursi, no fue erudita' (19). Moreover, he finds her "originality" in the way she did not conform to an established tradition of religious and mystical writing: '[ella] no se complicó con ningún sobrehumano misticismo de misa de once' (19). Onetti reaches, then, a moment of revelation:

> Con esto de las doblemente bellas letras femeninas, está sucediendo algo curioso. Antes las mujeres se dedicaban casi exclusivamente a la poesía. Cantaban al amante, a Dios, a los árboles y a los recién nacidos. A unas les salía bien y a otras mal. Cada comarca tenía su poetisa oficial y todos muy contentos. Pero ahora las cosas se han complicado. En cierto sentido, podría decirse que las mujeres son las nuevas ricas de la cultura. Aunque no sólo ellas, está claro. Hay superabundan-

[67] See in "Onetti en Marcha, propuestas para una literatura moderna" [u.d] : <http://www.onetti.net/es/descripciones/tellez-vargas> [accessed on 10 October 2010].

> cia, plétora de mujeres intelectuales. Casi todas las muchachas que leen y escriben, se abruman con la obligación de hacer versitos y publicarlos.
> Las que no sólo leen de corrido, las mujeres de sólida cultura que hasta dan conferencias y todo, ésas no se conforman con la estructuración de sonetos de catorce versos, describiendo la fuerza de perturbación erótica que poseen los ojos verdes del amado. Escriben sobre Cristo, Marx, el Cosmos o la técnica del autor del Bisonte de Altamira. Y todo – que si se mira comprensivamente es ya bastante – empleando el estilo más tenebroso, espeso e imaginero que pueda concebirse. A razón de dos citas por párrafo y una pareja de adjetivos para cada nombre. (19-20)

This uprising of women writers, as well as their eclectic writings, confuses the male author. Women no longer move within the 'permitted areas' of poetry and religion (Clarke 2000: xi); in his words, they no longer sing to their lovers, God, trees and children. As he reluctantly affirms, they go beyond their assigned positions. The last lines are extremely suggestive. Onetti disapproves of the fact that the almost compulsory need of women writers to create and publish made the national literature *lose control* of literary production. He disappointedly admits that there is no longer a hierarchical order. Certainly, women destabilise that hierarchy:

> En esta excesiva riqueza, naufragaron las jerarquías. Ya no sabemos a ciencia cierta, como en los buenos tiempos pasados, cuál es nuestra primera poetisa, ni cuál la alta filósofa del Plata, ni qué blanca mano esgrime la vara máxima, severa y medidora de la Crítica. (20)

Almost ten years later, sarcastic and sometimes misogynistic comments continue plaguing the pages of *Marcha*. Women's writing very exceptionally was conceived of as serious, as Uruguayan intellectuals Flores Mora and Rama demonstrate in an article published in 1949 concerning Regina Esther Sassón's book:

> [El libro *Abuela Clara* de Regina Esther Sassón] nunca hubiera sido comentado en *Marcha*, a tal punto es ajeno a la literatura y a la poesía [que es] *uno de los tantos libros que escriben las jovencitas y luego se dedican a las labores de su casa*. (1949: 14; my emphasis) [68]

[68] Sassón mainly wrote children's literature. Humberto Zarrilli wrote the prologue of this book, published by *Ediciones Meridión* in 1948.

Nowadays critics seem to be extremely reticent to challenge or even mention the sexist and misogynist character of these articles.[69] The most likely argument for why they avoid this analysis is that it is anachronistic; however, these commentaries not only present a great example to study the multifaceted Uruguayan cultural situation in the mid-twentieth century, but also help to understand specifically women's cultural and social position at the time. Regarded as procreators instead of genuine creators, women were seen as the perpetuators of the social ennui that the country was experiencing. Only a few women writers were permitted to express themselves alongside male members of this generation, but their voices were also filtered by their male contemporaries.

The (Married) Poets

Coincidentally, many of the women writers who were actively involved in the Generation of 1945 were married to the central male figures of this group. That is the case of Amanda Berenguer, married to José Pedro Díaz, María Inés Silva Vila to Carlos Maggi, Gladys Castelvecchi to Mario Arregui, and Ida Vitale to Ángel Rama (until they got divorced in 1967 and subsequently Vitale married poet Enrique Fierro).[70] We could also include here Idea Vilariño and Manuel A. Claps, although they were not married.[71] Nevertheless, none of them are recognised nowadays by their husband's surnames. In this respect, Ana Inés Larre Borges points out that women writers such as Vilariño, Vitale and Berenguer, 'rompe[n] con la tradición de las que llevaron los nombres de sus maridos – Esther de Cáceres, Sarah de Ibáñez – y marca la apropiación simbólica de su independencia' (Larre Borges 2007: 142-144). Larre Borges also affirms that 'Idea adopta una actitud – vital y lírica – de equiparación con el hombre, la misma que definió a ese feminismo equiparativo' (142), perhaps alluding here to Carlos Vaz Ferreira's ideas on feminism. However, this affirmation suggests that women had to write like

[69] As a example of this, see Mirian Pino "El semanario *Marcha* de Uruguay: una genealogía de la crítica de la cultura en América Latina" (2002: 141-156).

[70] Furthermore, Silva Vila's sister, María Zulema, though she was not a writer, was also married to Manuel Flores Mora.

[71] It is also known that Vilariño had a relationship with the writer and "father" of the Generation of 1945, Juan Carlos Onetti.

men in order to be recognised as writers and opens up the enduring discussion of the concept of *l'écriture feminine* (Cixous 1976: 875).

In addition, in the very same article Larre Borges suggests the absence of a women's literary tradition in Uruguay when stating: 'El lugar que [Vilariño] debía conquistar para decir su poesía no existía, había que fabricarlo. No hubo una genealogía femenina dada; nada podía heredar Idea de una Juana de Ibarbourou, ni de su transparente inocencia ni de su oficial respetabilidad, aquella legada por el apellido del esposo o por el enlace con el Estado' (144). Only the poetry of Agustini is presented as an 'antithesis' of Vilariño's poetry, 'ese doble anhelo, esas dos obsesiones: el amor y la muerte' (144).

These women writers, engaged in the effervescent times of the cultural Generation of 1945, were united, or confronted each other, around the magazines *Marcha, Clinamen,* and *Número* – and the rather modest publishing house of José Pedro Díaz and Amanda Berenguer – *La Galatea*, based at their house in the middle-class neighbourhood of Punta Gorda in Montevideo. María Inés Silva Vila remembered that house, not only as a cultural cenacle but humorously as a 'fábrica de matrimonios' (1993: 38). 'Más tarde o más temprano', she said, 'todos terminábamos pasando por el Registro Civil' (38). Pablo Rocca describes how those couples were not only culturally, ideologically and/or aesthetically (dis)connected, but also some of them lived under the same roof:

> [E]n la conformación de algunos grupos intelectuales del medio siglo – salvo en *Asir* [magazine] – hubo una significativa trama de parejas heterosexuales estables y rivales, más numerosas y no menos hegemónicas que las del grupo Bloomsbury […] Además, muchos pasaron sus primeros años de convivencia en una misma casa (Maggi-Silva Vila; Flores-Silva Vila y Rama-Vitale), donde llegaron a alojar a algún maestro ya célebre (José Bergamín). (Rocca 2004: 9-10)

Departing from Rodríguez Monegal's observations, in this essay Rocca briefly mentions the cultural and social situation for women writers in the Uruguay of the 1940s. Without deeply analysing those circumstances and without being totally convinced about the *machista* condition of Uruguayan society, a word that he writes between inverted commas, Rocca brings up other cases of women writers whose popularity and professional recognition would have been facilitated by marriage, class and/or money. Although Rocca alludes to the Bloomsbury group and eludes the study of the cultural and social position of women in Uruguay, he takes no notice of Virginia Woolf's famous book *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which has been abundantly studied and quoted. In this book, Woolf famously affirms that, for a woman to write

successfully, she must have money and a room of her own. As explained by Michèle Barrett, Woolf's argument 'concerns the external constraints on women's creativity that were imposed by lack of material resources, [...] education [...] social experience and [...] access of publishing or other means of communication' (Woolf 2000: 9). In any case, Rocca's account of these questions offers an illustration of the larger picture of Uruguayan culture and society in the first half of the twentieth century:

> En los años veinte, Blanca Luz Brum o Giselda Zani apoyándose en sus parejas masculinas (los escritores Parra del Riego y Juan Welker), encontraron puntos de apoyo y legitimación para intervenir más allá de la publicación de poemas en revistas o en libros, consiguiendo multiplicar su presencia de conducción de páginas literarias, en el dictado de conferencias, en la participación en exposiciones públicas o en el quehacer activo en revistas y cenáculos. En los años cuarentas el ejemplo de Susana Soca y de su revista *Entregas de la Licorne*, había mostrado la primera posibilidad de una mujer que trabaja sin que le sea necesaria la protección de un marido, aunque Susana Blanco Acevedo contaba con el respaldo de una fortuna personal y de un prestigio social de clase que *naturalmente* le permitía sobresalir […]. (2004: 10-11; emphasis in original)

Thus, if some space were left for some women writers, they had to make sure that they were going to play within the patriarchal rules and use their influences to find their own space in the small Montevidean cultural circles mainly formed by the male literati. Vitale recognised her own cultural position with this straightforward statement: '[m]e beneficio, claro, gracias a Enrique [Fierro]' (Rocca 2004: 91). However, the opposite seems not to happen.

Effectively, the *machista* society, without inverted – dubious – commas, in which this cultural generation erupted, was not ready for a change or even a discussion in terms of gender. Even for those recognised, consecrated and actively immersed women writers, it was difficult to break the silence, to go out of their way to make their voices heard and their writings read. Vilariño described, with a sarcastic tone, that unequal situation: 'Los avisos [para la revista *Clinamen*] los conseguíamos Ida Vitale y yo. Las cobranzas las hacíamos Ida y yo. Éramos las esclavas y ellos eran los intelectuales' (Rocca 2004: 94). Whereas Vitale reaffirmed the *machista* character of her male colleagues, when describing her participation in that cultural scenario, specifically her participation during the 1960s in the newspaper *Época*, she affirms:

> Ocuparme de aquella página pronto dejó de ser tarea grata, aquel diario socialista, era en primer lugar, machista y en segundo lugar, clasista: para algunos, una página cultural era como una crónica de tenis o

> esgrima, lo toleraban para arreglar cuentas algún día. Que la hiciese una mujer era prueba de inanidad (de ambas). (Rocca 2004: 88)

Vitale also confirms: 'El hecho de ser jurado, etcétera, me demostró que entre los intelectuales revolucionarios también se cocían habas' (89). Then again, in another interview Vitale maintains that her literary work was usually received by her peers with benevolence and astonishment:

> *-¿Cómo recibió la crítica uruguaya sus primeros poemas? ¿Podría contarnos cómo fueron esos inicios?*
> I[da] V[itale]: Con benevolencia, creo. Por lo menos pasaron años y varios libros hasta que recibí el primer tirón de orejas, cuando desde el diario del Partido Comunista, una bibliográfica me advirtió que el libro *estaba demasiado bien escrito,* amonestándome por ello porque el país no estaba para esos lujos. Mi estupor del momento me permite recordar ese episodio. (Zapata 1989:1)

In this sense, it is not surprising to note thatVitale (even Vitale) has been also considered 'an isolated and exceptional figure among the poets of her generation in Uruguay' (Verani 2001: 569).

Another woman writer related to the group, María Inés Silva Vila, wittily depicted the character of the male members of this literary generation and its cultural life in her book *45 x 1*:

> Eran insoportables y fascinantes o así me parecieron en mi primera visita al Metro, en el verano del 45 […] En su mayoría eran […] aspirantes a escritores y necesitaban las apoyaturas exteriores que da la bohemia más o menos declarada – el pelo largo, el tonito impertinente y la despreocupación en el vestir […] También necesitaban sus armas en un permanente escarceo verbal bastante deslumbrante y no exento de petulancia. Todo un despliegue de machismo intelectual que, si mal no recuerdo, irritó un poco mi susceptibilidad femenina y feminista. (1993: 19)

Later, she introduces the reason for her presence in that cafe, and her position amongst this group of male intellectuals: 'Me acerqué porque iba en compañía de uno de ellos – [Carlos] Maggi – y me senté a la mesa, encarnando por primera vez mi papel de espectadora, que es el papel que siempre he tenido en la generación del 45' (19). A silent attitude that Silva Vila recognised that she adopted and assumed: 'A todos ellos les debo mi costumbre de escuchar,

más que de hablar' (23). Then she rescues, somehow humbly, her silent position by saying, 'Valía la pena [escucharlos]' (23). Later in the same book she explains:

> [Las mujeres] inocentemente creíamos que las batallas se ganan sólo con razones y las exponíamos desprotegidas de todo plan de defensa y ataque. Por eso, cuando Maneco [Manuel Flores Mora] y [Carlos] Maggi decían que la literatura fantástica era un arte menor y yo reaccionaba como si me hubieran atacado a mi madre, me pasaban encima como una aplanadora. (39)

If, for those women writers fully connected to and actively involved in the cultural life was difficult to deal with the prevailing discourses that limited their voices and conditioned the reception of their works, we can imagine how more challenging it must have been for those writers who, like Silva Bélinzon, were ignored or displaced because their lifestyles and writing did not fit with the political and/or aesthetic beliefs of the dominant groups. Silva Bélinzon was nowhere near as well-connected as the aforementioned women poets to the Uruguayan literary elite of that time, which also includes her sister Clara Silva. She had neither a husband to give her "validity" nor to provide her with the markers of acceptable social status or a personal fortune, able to (naturally?) introduce her into the literary business. In other words, she had no support to enable her to be part of the 'people-in-the-culture' (Even-Zohar 1990: 16). Living with two ageing aunts, single and extremely introverted, Silva Bélinzon would keep an ambiguous liaison with her contemporaries and the cultural sphere in which, shyly and uncomfortably, she rarely participated. Instead, she confessed that she only had her poetry, a hermetic inscription of a modest life.

Silva Bélinzon did not have the advantage of being *de* "someone" in such a society, where becoming a woman was still associated with the reproductive role.[72] In this respect, the image of Silva Bélinzon as a sad spinster is echoed in an article by Sofi Richero which significantly refers to Silva Bélinzon's poetry as a 'literatura despareja' (2005: 377). She uses this expression in order to define a non-coherent, non-homogeneous work. The chosen word, formed by

[72] A report prepared by GREMCU: *Grupo de Estudios sobre la Condición de la Mujer en el Uruguay* and published in 1983, shows that, at the time of political transition, women were still attached to their reproductive roles: 'Si bien las necesidades determinadas por la coyuntura que atraviesa el Uruguay, de hecho crean el espacio para que se produzcan cambios en la imagen femenina sigue atada exclusivamente a los roles reproductivos. Al esposo-padre le concierne la esfera productora económica y a la esposa-madre la reproductiva social, sin que pueda haber intersecciones que den lugar, en esta última a responsabilidades más compartidas' (Prates and Rodríguez Villamil 1983: 87).

the prefix *des* (without) and the word *pareja* (partner) would disclose a work, precisely, "without [a] partner". Beyond this interpretation, this categorisation also exposes the lack of models that women's writing faced in general: a poetry with no peer. In 1949, Ricardo Paseyro wrote in the magazine *Marcha* an article apropos Clara Silva's book *Memoria de la nada*. He used a similar term to describe her writing: '[…] Creo que su libro, *aún desigual*, le caracteriza altamente en nuestra poesía' (15; my emphasis). Compared to the mainstream texts, women's poetry was seen as incomplete and imperfect or, more literally, as these critics expose, as writings with no equals.

However, what these women's works expose from different textual strategies, in fact, is the absence of a tradition and a consistent critical corpus able to understand the circumstances behind that political, cultural and social dislocation. In a poem significantly entitled "Canon" (published in *Palabra dada* in 1953), and which I will quote later in this thesis to show its similarities with one of the poems written by Silva Bélinzon, Ida Vitale shows the struggle for creation and authority:

> Ya todo ha sido dicho
> y un resplandor de siglos
> lo defiende del eco.
> ¿Cómo cantar el confuso perfume de la noche,
> el otoño creciendo en mi costado,
> la amistad, los oficios,
> el día de hoy,
> hermoso y muerto para siempre,
> o los pájaros calmos de los atardeceres?
> ¿Cómo decir de amor,
> su indomable regreso cotidiano,
> si a tantos, tantas veces,
> han helado papeles, madrugadas?
> ¿Cómo encerrarlo en una cifra
> nueva, extrema y mía,
> bajo un nombre hasta ahora inadvertido,
> y único y necesario? (9)

The poem, read next to her own testimonies (quoted above) about her position within the Uruguayan cultural milieu, acquires an additional dimension. Vitale expresses, here, her "impossibility" of saying something original or different within a given tradition. The existing, overpowering literary canon inhibits and/or restrains the author's voice. Nevertheless, from the place of the inexpressible, Vitale's literary strategy subverts such impossibility from

within by asking several questions that end up expressing, in a unique way, what she seems to be incapable of articulating.

To conclude, this chapter has exposed and challenged the critical corpus that has reproduced traditional concepts of gender, genre and identity in the Uruguay of the first half of the twentieth century. I have also illustrated how women writers are usually isolated from literary history or fractured in order to be consistent with the master narratives; at other times, women poets have been considered unusual or eccentric, belated or as epigones. In so doing, as Joanna Russ states, their 'experience is defined as inferior to, less important than, or "narrower" than men's experience' (1983: 47-48). However, this chapter has provided a new interpretative background to understand women's works in this period, which will find in Silva Bélinzon's poetry a good paradigm to illustrate the complexity of women's writing. Ultimately, this chapter has shown that Silva Bélinzon is not an isolated case in Uruguayan literary history, but a clear example of women's historical and cultural marginalisation.

CHAPTER THREE
Reconceiving Concepción

> Este olor de magnolia, este olor sólo queda
> circulación celeste de antigua casa mía;
> más que plantas y que hombres, única biografía
> que salva las corrientes con sus pasos de seda.
> *EPDP*: 54.

'Marginalization', Debra Castillo says, 'is not a philosophical position but a hard fact of daily life' (1992: 216). Hence, the present chapter helps to comprehend the nature of Silva Bélinzon's cultural and social position by highlighting the circumstances that contributed to determining her work. In this sense, this chapter shows that her life, as well as her poetry, is one of exclusion from the mainstream narratives of the nation. In order to demonstrate this, the discussion that follows is articulated around three fundamental aspects of her life: childhood, sisterhood and love.

The Magnolia Tree: Spring of Poetry, Topos of Identity

María Concepción Silva Bélinzon, the eldest daughter of four children, was born in 1900 in Montevideo, Uruguay, when, as it was described, the modern state started to construct the bases of a new nation.[73] She was brought up according to the prevalent morals and customs

[73] Her date of birth has been an enigma in Silva Bélinzon's biography. Different years appear in various documents, disclosing dissimilar dates, such as 1901, 1903, 1904 or even 1915. The latter appears in the National Library Author Registry. I was told by the librarians at the Biblioteca Nacional in Montevideo that this was the date given by Silva Bélinzon herself. Largely unknown, 9 January 1900 is her actual date of birth, which I confirmed through the copy of her birth certificate obtained in the National Civil Registry in Uruguay. Based on this documentation, and at my request, the Biblioteca Nacional has changed her record. As Emir Rodríguez Monegal had forseen: 'Futuros investigadores esgrimirán partidas de nacimiento y otros abominables documentos y pondrán a las abuelas en su sitio' (Rodríguez Monegal 1966: 71). What remains unknown is if the dates given are a mere act of 'coquetería', as some male scholars would adduce or a way to be recognised within a specific literary generation. As another anecdotal detail, in one of the interviews with EPC, Silva Bélinzon assures that she is younger than her sister Clara, though this is clearly not the case.

proper for a well-off *señorita* of her time, and in those circumstances, her voice emerged. Silva Bélinzon tells that her family lived in 'la más alta extravagancia (sin dinero) y fantasía pues querían para mí principalmente lo mejor que había en la ciudad […]'.[74] She was educated as an 'angel' and as a 'Russian princess' in a big house in the neighbourhood of Villa de la Unión in the blooming city of Montevideo.[75] Within a strong Catholic faith and secluded education, Silva Bélinzon strictly followed and respected 'el modelo de la "muñeca de lujo" cuya función debía ser el adorno del hogar' (Sapriza 1983: 124-140), or as 'una perfecta **señorita,** una modelo **dueña de casa**' (Peluffo Beisso 1931: 102; emphasis in original). In line with those conceptions, Silva Bélinzon experienced her childhood home as a 'castillo', in which she felt like a prisoner 'encerrada por prejuicios de familia.'[76] Consequently:

> Nosotros éramos como ángeles, no estábamos en las cosas de la casa, y nos trataban así, como que no comprendíamos. Y así, yo era. Tampoco me dejaban salir, ni nada. Estaba la puerta cerrada. No nos dejaban hablar con nadie […]. No sabíamos nada del mundo. (Richero 2005: 388)

Locked up in the immense home – the ominous house – of her childhood, 'llena de misterios', with eleven rooms and two gardens, full of furniture and antiques, where the external world was obliterated to children, the Magnolia patio with its huge tree became for Silva Bélinzon the space in which to develop her 'spiritual and material world' ('a room of her own'?, in Virginia Woolf's terms):

> [...] Yo recuerdo que mi refugio era "el célebre patio de la magnolia". Era un patio de damero de mármol muy grande, y rodeaba una terraza de azulejos más bien alta, ovalada, donde se erguía bellísima, infinita, la Madre de mis sueños, de mis secretos, de mi espíritu. […] Allí estaba tranquila; mejor, que adentro de los cuartos llenos de muebles antiguos; y roperos y aparadores que nunca pude comprender ni tocar; es decir que la Magnolia era mi mundo espiritual y material, y que ninguno de mis familiares pudo comprenderme y seguí así hasta tener diez años cuando me fui y la abandoné; pero la llevo en mi corazón porque da fe amor esperanza. (Richero: 386)

[74] Handwritten letter dedicated to Claudio Ross, CSB's archive, BN.

[75] Ibid. Also in Richero (2005: 385).

[76] Ibid.

The house's patio (with the Magnolia tree) is also a strong symbol of childhood in her sister's poetry. Although less significant in her work, Clara Silva depicts this evocative place in the poem entitled "El patio de damero" dedicated to her siblings Concepción, Luis and Felicí:

> […]
> Allá en la casa de sueño
> y de nada
> donde una infancia pasa, estremecida
> entre las altas entornadas puertas
> y acecha en las cortinas silenciosas
> el dominó de raso negro
> del miedo.
> Afuera están los cielos,
> los colores,
> Y los coros de las risas descuidadas;
> ah!, tus piernas son los trompos detenidos
> en la sombra de los grandes;
> y te quedas
> en el patio solitario de damero
> como pieza abandonada
> de su juego.
>
> Sombra, volviendo a mí por el camino
> de un olor de magnolias olvidado,
> en sueños te doy trajes de alegría
> para tus fiestas sin memoria.
> Niña de soledad,
> niña de otoño,
> el corazón de ayer juega a su infancia. (1948: 31-32)

Clara Silva's memories of this past/place are mixed. The adult's gaze reconstructs the parental house as an imposing, almost ominous place: 'entre las altas entornadas puertas / y acecha en las cortinas silenciosas'. Whilst the patio represents a secluded dwelling from the outside, an external exciting world full of colours and sounds is somehow forbidden for the child: 'afuera están los cielos / los colores, / Y los coros de las risas descuidadas'. Inside, a solitary child feels trapped and abandoned 'como pieza […] de su juego'. In contrast, in the poem "El sillón de hamaca", dedicated to her mother Rosa, Clara Silva seems to find comfort and refuge in the memory of her youth, where her childhood is indeed perceived as the paradise lost, and the magnolias a synecdoche of the maternal home:

> Vuelve a la infancia
> vuelve
> al paraíso

[…]
Vuélvete niña
vuelve
a las magnolias pálidas
al ramo de tu pelo
de salvaje negrura
enternecido
abre las viejas puertas
de la ausencia […].[77] (1965: 27)

For Silva Bélinzon, that familiar, common space was transformed into a personal place which the adult writer would reify later in life as a symbol of poetry. Especially since at the age of ten, Silva Bélinzon was separated from her parents' house and sent to live with her two ageing single and Catholic aunts, Luisa and Josefina Bélinzon. The reason for that decision has not been uncovered. However, it is possible to track some social facts that could have determined such a resolution. As Adela Pellegrino points out, the existence of *tías solteras* in the conformation of twentieth-century Uruguayan families was a frequent presence whose purpose could have been 'el de evitar la subdivisión de los patrimonios y garantizar el cuidado de los padres en su ancianidad' (Barrán, Caetano & Porzekanski 1996-1998: 122). Pellegrino emphasises that the '[r]oles asignados desde la infancia a algunos miembros de la familia – fundamentalmente relacionados con el cuidado de los padres en la vejez – contribuían [entonces] a impedir la formación de una pareja' (118). Whilst it is not possible to affirm that this was effectively Silva Bélinzon's role within her family, it is nevertheless worth noting that she lived under the protection of her aunts and herself remained single and without children. The explanation she gave for such a situation is a very suggestive one, as she tells in an interview with EPC, around 1982:

> De casarme… ¡ni soñarlo! No pensaba. Quizás por eso habré escrito tanto. […] La alegría era inmensa porque escribía; estaba con mis tías. […] Ahora si yo me hubiera casado o tenido novio no hubiera pasado todo eso. Quizás yo estaba muy sola y por eso decidí escribir. […] Quizás en esa soledad – no tenía amigos – empecé a escribir. (PA)

Whether her *soltería* was a free choice or a disguised social and/or familiar imposition, (or possibly both), marriage was understood by Silva Bélinzon as a form of separation from her

[77] The Magnolia tree or flower is not unusual in the Uruguayan women poets' imagery; Marosa di Giorgio, Esther de Cáceres and Amanda Berenguer have also evoked this symbol in their works.

family and more importantly, from her writing.[78] In another interview with Eduardo "Pincho" Casanova, the writer expressed this idea with a certain tone of reprobation: '¡Cómo se separan las mujeres de la familia! […] Y se casan y se separan de la familia […]' (EPC, PA). In fact, she never separated from her aunts until they passed away – and remained entirely enthralled by her poetry (EPC, PA).

Confined within the walls of her maternal aunts' house, Silva Bélinzon lived rooted to the memory of the Magnolia patio, which became a metaphor for inspiration as well as for isolation throughout her life. In those protective and almost cloistered environments that her parents' and aunts' houses represented, Silva Bélinzon found in her poetry the only possible way to break away from a destiny that would only bring silence, solitude and alienation.[79] As a shy and reserved woman, conditioned by a strict, traditional and puritanical education, mutilated in her capacity of growth and enjoyment, Silva Bélinzon would replace silence and absence with her writing, practically the only link between her and the outer world. Dispossessed of a stimulating and challenging (outside) life, the 'miracle of poetry' – as she called it – was performed through the Magnolia patio/tree, as the place to unearth her writing (EPC, PA). Silva Bélinzon would refuse the private – traditional– sphere assigned to her (to women) by finding a location, in Homi K. Bhabha's terms, 'in-between spaces' (1994: 1-3). This term, borrowed from Bhabha's postcolonial theory, reveals a third, interstitial space of conflict, intervention and negotiation. According to Bhabha, the in-between space enables the process of symbolic interaction that destabilises binary concepts. Even when I am aware that Bhabha uses this concept to explain postcolonial cultures, that concept, applied to Silva Bélinzon's poetry, offers a better understanding of her writing.

The poem "Calle Monte Caseros, 54" evokes her childhood home, in which the Magnolia patio becomes the symbolic source for creation as well as memory:

> Este olor de magnolia, este olor sólo queda
> circulación celeste de antigua casa mía;
> más que plantas y que hombres, única biografía
> que salva las corrientes con sus pasos de seda.

[78] A declaration that echoes Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's famous decision to enter the convent: that is, her aversion to marriage and her need to read and write.

[79] Orfila Bardesio writes, in her memory of *El pasado cultural uruguayo*, that Silva Bélinzon was educated by her two old aunts 'con la condición de retenerla prisionera en una celda de prejuicios; las tías no imaginaban que aquel aislamiento en que la confinaban pudiera perjudicarla; todo lo contrario […] le daban una atención solícita protectora, que como muralla, la separaba del medio en que vivía' (2007: 123).

Altos, altos luceros de aquel sitio seguro;
mi verso inesperado desordena un momento,
las frutas extendidas del naranjo contento
que avisa su alabanza sobre el estrecho muro.

¿Cómo ensayar su pan, la voz de sus corales
el piso blanco y negro con racimos de cielos?
¿Cómo llamar sus pájaros, la zona de sus vuelos
los ojos de sus lámparas, sus limpias iniciales?

Estaciones de amor. Mi villa eternizada.
Sobre pieles de lirios lucían las batistas;
todo lo suyo viene cargado de amatistas
y entre fuertes dulzuras, luz y sombra mezclada.

Calle Monte Caseros, lengua azul de mi estancia
hay nieblas especiales que agitan mi vereda…
y este olor de magnolia, este olor sólo queda,
convocando belleza con su firme sustancia.

Una danza de máquinas dispersa mis raíces…
y me siento olvidada como copa de nube;
su silencio de trébol, aire puro que sube
tan cercano y sencillo con sus frescos matices. (*EPDP*: 54)

Here, the synaesthetic poem appeals to memory through smells, colours and tastes, although only the scent of the Magnolia has the power to persist. However, the attempt to remember the 'villa eternizada' implies, in fact, an almost unattainable task. The questions in the third stanza reveal the difficulty of recreating or rehearsing ('ensayar') the past. But, is it just the past? Or is it the impossibility of finding a voice within the literary tradition? The poem is remarkably similar to Vitale's "Canon" (quoted in chapter two), and both are reproduced below next to each other by date of publication:

¿Cómo ensayar su pan, la voz de sus corales
el piso blanco y negro con racimos de cielos?
¿Cómo llamar sus pájaros, la zona de sus vuelos
los ojos de sus lámparas, sus limpias iniciales? (Silva Bélinzon 1947: 54)

¿Cómo cantar el confuso perfume de la noche,
el otoño creciendo en mi costado,
la amistad, los oficios,
el día de hoy,
hermoso y muerto para siempre,

o los pájaros calmos de los atardeceres? (Vitale 1953: 9)

Although their differentiation in terms of form is evident, the resemblance between them is so clear that, by putting the poems next to each other, it is difficult to guess that they are written by two aesthetically different poets. Even though, at first glance, Silva Bélinzon seems to be concerned with recapturing her past and Vitale with her present, both authors are showing a preoccupation for creation. As we have seen, Vitale is concerned with finding her voice within a given canon, whereas Silva Bélinzon's struggle for creation and identity is represented through the liminality of the Magnolia patio.

As Silva Bélinzon's last stanza shows, the poet traces a parallel (transformation, transmutation or metamorphosis) between the tree and her own body, being the forcefulness of the 'machines' able to disperse her roots. Whether the 'máquina' can be a representation of modernisation and capitalism, in opposition to the natural and spiritual (re)production of the Magnolia tree, it is difficult to assert. Beyond the powerful image of being (becoming) uprooted, and then forgotten, it is the transformation or communion of her body into/with the Magnolia tree that offers the poet a place of refuge and creation. Silva Bélinzon thus generates a '*mystical bond*' with the tree (Eliade 1996: 267), with the 'Mother of her dreams' (PA), as she (re)called it. As "Calle de la Magnolia" exemplifies, usually, the tree and herself become indistinguishably one being:

Movía la cabeza;
del camino miraba la magnolia
sus gestos de pobreza.

De brujas no entendía.
Por no ser devorada en sus rincones…
se hurtaba y se escondía.

Muchos años sumisa…
por una calle larga y empinada;
defendiendo tu brisa.

Parecía valiente.
Más allá de las reinas… y los parques…
trepaba lentamente.

Tú sabías quién era.
La forma de los ángeles tomaban
sus copas en la tierra.

Y en las pobres ciudades

los hombres y las mujeres complicados…
negaban tus bondandes.

Ella estaba segura.
Por sus miembros, tus miembros levantaban
luminosas criaturas. (*ANA*: 39-40)

Reinforced by the ambiguous use of the personal pronouns, tree and poet are perfectly blended. More manifest in the last stanza, perhaps, the limbs (arms and branches) are a prolongation of a magical act of creation.

Place and displacement of the Self, the liminality of the Magnolia patio would signify, then, a *topos* of identity: a fertile soil wherein to develop her voice. In other words, she reconstructed the Magnolia patio as an interstitial place where the antagonistic, fixed dichotomies of home and world, private and public are articulated and contested. This 'in-between space' provided her with the 'terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood' (Bhabha 1994: 2). As Mary Beth Tierney-Tello similarly notices in the narrative written by women under the military regimes in the Southern Cone in the 1970s, in Silva Bélinzon's poetry, 'the borders between the multiple spaces such as "nation", "family", "body", "text", "house", "world" are porous' (1996: 239). In her writing, they are also distorted, blurred and redrawn. Thus, the public/private dyad – at the heart of the national discourses – which seems to be so clearly detached in Silva Bélinzon's life and time, is altered through the symbolisation of the Magnolia patio as an interstitial space that dislocates her identity. In this sense, her writing would bring out her private life into the public sphere, entering into history, inasmuch as her writing transcended the boundaries of her home and transformed silence into words, and words into bridges.

Despite the limits that her education imposed upon her, Silva Bélinzon was able to unfold her poetry and to speak 'betwixt and between times and places' (Bhabha 1994: 227). Witness of almost an entire century, Silva Bélinzon's life conflated with the emergence of the state at the beginning of the century and its political and economic deterioration from the late 1950s onwards. Within those personal and historical circumstances, the Magnolia patio signified a "going beyond" the personal and external boundaries in order to survive and transcend them. A writing that has been criticised for being hermetic, obscure, repetitive and redundant was produced in between spaces, epochs and literary generations, political, cultural and social circumstances that clashed with that intimate and public space that the body and writing represent.

The Family Tree: *Claras (Pre)Concepciones*

> "Indeed!" cried her mother. "I must send my own daughter there. Come here, Fanchon. Look what comes out of your sister's mouth whenever she speaks! Wouldn't you like to be able to do the same thing?"
>
> C. Perrault, *The Fairies* (1912)

If the Magnolia patio had the power to transform the place of isolation into creativity, it was not, however, a place for solidarity and fellow feeling. In that sphere where imagery and solitude merged, Silva Bélinzon found herself in deep exclusion. Writing meant both a way of contact with the external world and a way to keep away from it. Separated from her parents, and sometimes her siblings, solitary in her acts, there was not much room for bonding and sociability in her life. Except for her aunts, who were Silva Bélinzon's confidantes, mothers, probably sisters and friends, and some women writers, such as Orfila Bardesio and Marosa di Giorgio, there were not many women to identify with. But in the complex weaving of identity, there was another woman who Silva Bélinzon had to face for her own vocational, familiar and cultural location. That was her sister Clara Silva (1903-1976), who became a well-known and respected writer, and who also developed her work within the same cultural period. Miguel Carbajal describes Silva Bélinzon and her relationship with her sister with these words:

> Concepción Silva Bélinzon, la hermana opaca de Clara Silva, era un personaje entrañable. Llevaba lo mejor que podía la carga de tener una hermana famosa, literariamente más valiosa que ella, vinculada al establishment intelectual, y encima de todo, casada con Alberto Zum Felde, un figurón de las letras uruguayas que alcanzó niveles de influencia irrepetibles en la escena nacional.
>
> Con esa hermanita, ese cuñado y una familia entroncada con los militares que integraron la gesta patriótica, Concepción era una hoja en la tormenta. Escribía unos sonetos preciosos, menos procaces y frutales que los que después hicieron la fama de Marosa Di Giorgio pero igual de inquietantes. Era una solterona de modales versallescos que vivía rodeada de gatos y de falsas ilusiones. (2009: para. 1 and 2 of 4)

In the 1940s, both sisters started to circulate their works, at the dawn of the Generation of 1945. Silva Bélinzon published her first book of poetry, *El regreso de la samaritana* in

1945;[80] while Clara, also in her forties, also published her initial work *La cabellera oscura* in the same year with a laudatory prologue written by Guillermo de Torre (1900-1971).[81] Both poets also received national prizes, some of them given by the same institution in Uruguay. Silva Bélinzon received her first prize for *El regreso de la samaritana* given by the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública in 1943. Clara's books *La cabellera oscura* and *Memoria de la nada* were awarded the Poetry Prize by the same institution in 1945 and 1948 respectively. Thereafter, both writers received various literary prizes and acclamations. Nevertheless, while Silva Bélinzon would be kept outside the inner cultural circles of Montevideo, Clara would stand out within the small, savvy and close-knit cultural scene, obtaining a rather positive reception and being fully involved in the cultural life of her times.

An interweaving of familiar and familial, literary and critical discourses have helped to construct and define both sisters' identities, shaping but also undermining their writings. In other words, the familial and critical network in which Clara shone, while Silva Bélinzon was kept in the shadows, set a complex representation of power and talent that I would like to analyse in detail here. Dismissed in the light of her sister and other women writers, who were seen in her time as more lucid and innovative, Silva Bélinzon's work has been practically discarded, biasing our readings and our attitudes not only towards her work but also towards her women contemporaries' writings. As being discussed, feminist theories have largely uncovered that the social construction of sexual difference plays an essential role not only in the production, but also in the reception of literary works and, therefore, in the history of literature. In this sense, Silva Bélinzon's and her sister Clara's lives and *œuvres* unveil that the interlacement of gender, authorship and criticism has conceived women's writing as isolated, exceptional cases, instead of a part of a common process in the history of literature.

Competitive, complex and fluctuating, Stephen P. Bank indicates that, historically, '[s]isterhood is seen as a relationship where female difference is worked out within a framework of sameness' (Bank & Khan 1997: 69).[82] In the Silva's lives, that relationship has been

[80] There are some inconsistencies with the date of her first publication. Although *ERDS* won the National Prize of Poetry in 1943, the book was published in 1945.

[81] In Clara Silva's archive at the National Library in Montevideo, it is possible to observe that Clara Silva frequently exchanged correspondence with Guillermo de Torre for almost two decades. Some of them are particularly suggestive: 'Ya le he dicho otras veces el deslumbramiento que Ud. me causó, cómo en aquel momento yo me hubiera sentido dispuesto a "todo"', de Torre wrote in a letter dated in Buenos Aires, 27 September1945. Three years later, they met in Montevideo.

[82] See also *The Significance of Sibling Relationships in Literature*, edited by Stephens Mink and Doubler Ward

seen, constructed and emphasised in terms of sameness and otherness, glorification and exclusion, nearness and isolation. The sometimes strong-willed relationship between Silva Bélinzon and Clara has been nurtured by anecdotes, rumours and disagreements, which usually underline 'ciert[a] competencia' (1997b: 83), as Wilfredo Penco suggests.[83] Silva Bélinzon expressed this general perception in these words: '[l]a gente decía para no quedar mal que las dos [Clara y yo] éramos iguales pero diferentes' (EPC, PA). That game of prevailing oppositions has traced a story of love and antagonism, in which Clara is considered the successful and shrewd writer, while Silva Bélinzon is seen as the eccentric but also introverted one. In recent correspondence, Jorge Arbeleche offered me his own testimony of this relationship: 'Pienso que siempre hubo amor y celos entre las hermanas, porque mientras Clara era unánimemente reconocida, ella era más marginal'.[84]

Undoubtedly, the Silva sisters envisaged their lives in distinct dimensions. In the sisterhood's field of presumed equality, both sisters learnt how to be "different". They attempted to identify with each other and simultaneously set up and retain their own differences in order to find and define their own location within the same, small and patriarchal cultural and social sphere. The personal and external conditions, in which their identities were constructed and developed, shaped their works in unique ways and made them adopt dissimilar attitudes towards their own production and intellectual position. In this sense, Silva Bélinzon seems to base her work and life on a search for identity through a *disidentification* with her younger sister but also with her cultural circle, in order to find her own cultural location. As Sylvia Molloy maintains, texts written by women in Latin America, usually:

> [B]espeak a dislocation of being – more specifically, a *dislocation in order to be* – that could well be the main impulse behind their writing. One is (and one writes) elsewhere, in a *different* place, a place where the female subject chooses to relocate in order to represent itself anew. (Castro-Klarén, Molloy & Sarlo 1991:107)

In other words, her Self is defined in terms of its differentiation from her sister, from her peers and from her cultural world. In the following interview, Silva Bélinzon reveals some aspects

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(1993).

[83] In a personal electronic interview with poet Jorge Arbeleche, he also affirmed this view. By email, 16 October 2009.

[84] Ibid.

of the relationship with Clara, where difference and distinction appear as the key for her to find her own familiar and cultural place:

> Clara me escribió aquello que dice que atrás de los vidrios, que estaba sola… […] sí, estaba sola. Y hasta ahora estoy, ¿no ves? […] Por ejemplo, a veces [Humberto] Zarrilli llevaba algún libro de él con alguno mío…Y mi hermana supo y se enojó tanto…Dice que era tan feo, eso… Puede ser que no fuera distinguido, pero me parecía que era una cosa [que estaba] bien. […] Se enojaba mucho…Yo me fui alejando, y no por ella, por la poesía me fui alejando, también. Y la quiero mucho…pero nunca pude hablarle así como te hablo a ti [Casanova]. Porque era así, todo mal le parecía a mi hermana. Si iba con el cabello suelto, más largo, como ahora lacio, ella se enojaba, me decía que me hiciera un moño…Y éramos personalidades distintas. Completamente. Y ella no comprendía eso, que nacemos distintos. (EPC, PA)

In addition to this remark, in another dialogue with EPC, speaking about the cultural life in the 1940s, Silva Bélinzon describes Clara as a well-dressed and well-connected personality, emphasising her sister's physical appearance and personal fashion style. Here, Silva Bélinzon also confesses that she used to suffer from not being included in the Montevidean cultural circle of the second half of the twentieth century, pointing out her isolation and affirming that she found protection in her poetry, which remained invulnerable and possibly became stronger, as the following passage illustrates:

> Mi hermana se vestía con unos vestidos muy apretados. Yo la miraba porque no [se] podía sacar el vestido, tenían que deshacerlo las modistas. Iban de noche a fiestas, con Esther de Cáceres y todo…Y yo estaba lejos… Sufría, pero mi poesía no. No dejaba mi poesía. (EPC, PA)

Bitter words tinge this depiction of her sister Clara and clearly contrast with a description of herself, in which poetry continues to be a liberator as well as a protector. Here, she also highlights the fact that the entire cultural/intellectual circus was not for her:

> Vestidos, comidas y paseos me eran indiferentes. Cuando empecé secundaria y más adelante la poesía me liberé completamente. Le di a la palabra mi sangre y mi espíritu; homenajes, modas, estrellas artificiales de literatura, no veía, sólo lo mío, lo que yo creaba. (EPC, PA)

Clara is subsequently perceived and generally described by Silva Bélinzon for her haughtiness and sophistication, appearing as a censor who disapproves of Silva Bélinzon's attitudes. Ro-

lando Faget, a friend of Silva Bélinzon, has said that Clara and her husband used to 'discriminate' against Silva Bélinzon because of her personal and social behaviour.[85]

The word chosen by Faget is particularly relevant to the analysis of the relationship between these two sisters, and therefore to the connection between authorship, creation, gender, class, artistic perception and reception. In his book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu examines art and its relationship with the dominant elite in France. Bourdieu states that dominating classes determine aesthetic notions in order to preserve their own interests and privileges. Although his work is based on a survey carried out between 1963 and 1968 in France and, in spite of the fact that Bourdieu himself warns that his work is circumscribed to French society, some of the applied concepts shed light on the present study. Bourdieu affirms that the sense of distinction, the *discretio* (discrimination) demands that 'certain things be bought together and others kept apart' in order to construct and maintain the notion of taste (Bourdieu 1984: 474). Following Kant's ideas, Bourdieu defines taste, as 'an acquired disposition to "differentiate" and "appreciate"' (466); in other words, he states that taste 'establish[es] and mark[s] differences by a process of distinction' (466). Along these lines, Bourdieu argues that social subjects 'distinguish themselves by the distinction they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar […]' (6). Consequently, Silva Bélinzon and Clara Silva embody the complex social and cultural interweaving of class and gender that has helped to influence and determine the reader's reception of their works. In opposition to Clara Silva, Silva Bélinzon was seen as the woman/writer whose style of life did not follow the ideal of the woman writer conceived of and imposed in her time. In other words, Silva Bélinzon was the poet that betrayed those assumptions by ignoring them.

In addition, another sociocultural factor has been taken into account by critics, when talking about Silva Bélinzon and Clara Silva's lives and the repercussion that their works have had, is the fact that Clara was married to one of the most respected and active national intellectuals. In the inner circles of Uruguayan cultural life, predominantly dominated by a small and compact group of men, to be married to Alberto Zum Felde meant an unconditional support for Clara's career. In spite of Clara's talent, Emir Rodríguez Monegal recognised the fact that being the wife of Zum Felde would have facilitated Clara's access to the literary world in the 1940s:

[85] Radio interview *Sopa de Letras*, CX26 Radio Uruguay. Montevideo, 13 August 2007. Faget passed away in 2009.

> Si se compara la resonancia que han tenido Clara Silva y Sara de Ibáñez con la de otros poetas de su promoción, se advierte que ambas han sido lanzadas con todas las garantías: sus primeras obras son editadas por importantes casas argentinas [...] ambas son mujeres de críticos influyentes. (1996: 119)

In contrast, Silva Bélinzon was nowhere near as well-connected as her sister to the Uruguayan literary elite of those decades. She had no husband to give her validity or to provide her with the markers of acceptable social status, as mentioned before. Single and introverted, Silva Bélinzon would keep an ambiguous liaison with her contemporaries and cultural life, in which she participated rarely, shyly and uncomfortably:

> Yo iba muy vergonzosa [a las fiestas organizadas por Alfredo y Esther Cáceres en su casa], nomás que con la poesía, [yo] no tenía nada que ver. Pero yo que sé, ellos fueron los que me alentaron. Por ejemplo, Sara de Ibáñez y Roberto Ibáñez, que me conocían, me miraban como una mujer que hacía buenos versos o yo que sé, pero así nomás. Nunca me dijeron nada, ni me llamaron ni nada. Eran amigos de mi hermana y todo […]. En esa torre [Alfredo Cáceres] dijo la conferencia sobre este verso […]: Unidad de transparencia / en regiones de esmeraldas; / de la frente a la raíz, / la luna en el mar levantada. / Puerto oportuno de Cristo / en su sien encrucijada; / simetría de diamantes, / sin las preces renovadas. *Y María Magdalena*, / *lo miraba*…, *lo miraba* / *Tan indiferente de todos*… / *Y queriendo hablar, callaba* […]. (EPC, PA; my emphasis)

Making clear in these lines that those intellectuals were her sister's friends, Silva Bélinzon situates herself in the place of an observer (self-marginalisation?) in relation to her sister's and contemporaries' social and cultural position. Beyond the patent way in which Silva Bélinzon tells, here, of her bond with that cultural circle, the quoted poem is particularly remarkable since it discloses women's social and cultural silence. The biblical image of Mary Magdalene, a prostitute who was saved by Jesus from her sinful spirit (Luke: 8: 2), is depicted in this poem as an observer, indifferent to everyone, who has the will to express herself but, instead, keeps quiet. Indeed, in this poem, repression acts under the veil of willingness while silence dominates. In addition, in an interview for the magazine *Imágenes* in 1978, Silva Bélinzon is also asked about her relationship with her sister and brother-in-law:

> – ¿Qué le significó intelectualmente, la familiar cercanía de Clara Silva y Alberto Zum Felde, tus hermanos…?

− Nada, y punto [she curtly replies]. (F.J.P [sic]: 13)

Nevertheless, in the already quoted interview with EPC, Silva Bélinzon confessed that she used to write 'a escondidas'. In an unclear account, filtered by her frail memory, she states: 'dejé de ir a la casa de mi hermana porque me parecía que ella estaba celosa porque [ella] hacía tiempo que no escribía […]' (EPC, PA). The name of Zum Felde appears once again in her testimony along with mixed memories: '[…] la historia empezó que yo escribía a escondidas entonces iba a la casa de mi hermana y empecé a escribir […] y le mostré a Zum Felde […] [a quien] le gustaba[n] mucho […] mis romances' (EPC, PA).

Poems dedicated to Clara also show that particular relationship, where love and sisterhood are mixed with feelings of resentment and tenderness. "El nenúfar" (*LRDO*, 1953) and "Las hormigas" (*MEME*, 1963) illustrate those sour feelings, perceptions and comments affecting their relationship with themselves and their milieu:

Al Padre lo llamó tan angustioso
se venga de su parque y elegancia;
apenas lo percibe más juicioso
de consignas y trébol, la importancia.

Y todo lo contrario es delicioso
para no cometer su extravagancia;
sólo existe un Nenúfar vaporoso
de Indochina buscaron su fragancia.

Que escriba sus memorias me lo ruega.
Sobre el césped helado sus mejillas
de escaleras de cárcel, se despega.

Y de que tome frío tiene miedo.
Pocas veces se pone de rodillas
con este nuevo lujo de su ruedo. (*LRDO*: 21-22)

And:

[…]
Ni frívolos ni serios silenciosos:
no es culpa de nosotros tantas migas;
picadillos de carne ponzoñosos
nos cortaron el techo con intrigas.

Me levanto, me caigo, me levanto:
nunca tuve tarjetas de visita…
En fuentes inmortales el llanto.

> Habrá que perdonar y eso es más duro:
> dentro de nuestro amor está la cita
> con los rostros humanos, el futuro. (*MEME:* 51-52)

The quoted poems underline a caring sister ('y de que tome frío tiene miedo') who is also depicted as an important and elegant woman, albeit rather aloof and arrogant ('Pocas veces se pone de rodillas / con este nuevo lujo de su ruedo'). In the second poem, entitled "Las hormigas", Silva Bélinzon alludes to the vital process of creation that would also unite them through writing. Ants are known as hard, tenacious and very well organised insects. Suggestively, their organised colonies separate females into fertile and sterile ants. Furthermore, Silva Bélinzon highlights in this poem the fact that her relationship with her sister has been infiltrated by intrigues, whilst love and forgiveness appear as the key for a better understanding between them. The poem also introduces another social aspect that visibly illustrates my argument. It refers to the inexistence of 'tarjetas de visita'. In the 1920s and 1930s, 'las visitas' were a common social tradition practiced by the 'clases acomodadas' (Barrán 2001: 227-228). The poem thus reveals not only the poet's isolation but also her lack of access to that social lifestyle.

From the other perspective of this sisterhood, Clara also had her say. From Clara's gaze, Silva Bélinzon is revealed as a 'desorbitada criatura' whose hermetic poetry is a consequence of an alienated voice.[86] In a poem that functions as a prologue in Silva Bélinzon's book *AODH* (1970), and which I will mention again in chapter six, Clara emphasises Silva Bélinzon's absence of clarity, describing her writing as a strange language:

> Hablaba un lenguaje extraño. / Decía, por ejemplo, / que la ceniza limpia la boca / y Dios vivía / en la obediencia de la tierra, /o cosas parecidas, / con el silencio en las manos. / Nadie sabía el porqué de sus palabras / ni la locura de sus pasos. / La dejaban sola detrás de los vidrios / como un asilo de inocencia / y desafío. / Pero venían los sueños / cada día / a beber el agua de sus párpados. (7-8)

By highlighting the strangeness and incongruity of her language, Clara Silva's poem focuses on the peculiarity of the nature of Silva Bélinzon's poetry, unveiling a narrative of madness and isolation, in which dreaming brings the possibility of liberation from that condition, even if Silva Bélinzon is ultimately left 'behind the glasses'.

[86] In an undated letter written by Clara Silva to her husband Alberto Zum Felde. Clara Silva's archive, BN.

Educated under the same principles as her sister, Clara Silva was also immersed in that world where women are defined by their family and domestic roles. By depicting and revealing through her writing the social and familiar situation of women, Clara Silva made her female characters express that existential condition that unveils stories of frustration and isolation. In her novels *La sobreviviente* (1951), *El alma y los perros* (1962) and *La habitación testigo* (1967), the three strongly religious female protagonists – two single women, Laura Medina and Carmen Quartara, and the frustrated married woman Elvira Olmos – are depicted struggling with a patriarchal, hypocritical and moralising society. These female characters uncover an intricate social, but also familiar, tradition in which the protagonists are defeated by solitude and alienation. As Fernando Aínsa says, 'Clara Silva hunde seriamente a sus mujeres en una divagación metafísica de la que siempre saldrán derrotadas como cuarentonas y, abandonadas y solitarias' (1997: 127). Coincidentally, two of the mature ('cuarentonas'), alone and discouraged female protagonists' names coincide with the author's female family names: Medina was her paternal grandmother's surname, whilst Quartara was Silva's maternal family name. Hence, self-conscious of a social situation from which she was not estranged, Clara Silva discloses that complex family and social configuration from which women are excluded.

Outside of the dominion of sisterhood and poetry where both sisters located and identified themselves, criticism has considerably helped to structure their differences, shaping and reproducing stereotypes according to the language of cultural hegemony. Criticism has created an almost folk-tale of similarities and peculiarities, where Silva Bélinzon has been located as the eccentric, single, poor and simple – often unattractive – sister with a childish desire for becoming a poet. As a result, Silva Bélinzon's agency and creation is dismissed and the analysis of her work is, therefore, greatly diminished. On the contrary, Clara Silva is usually described as an elegant, mundane, intellectually active and a keen reader, who successfully cultivated various literary genres, such as poetry, novel, short stories and literary analysis. In the following interview, published in the Uruguayan newspaper *El País*, Jorge Arbeleche talks about the possible formation of the Uruguayan literary canon and the Generation of 1945, and offers an illustration of those (pre)conceptions surrounding Silva Bélinzon and her sister. With a patronising tone, the interviewer Miguel Carbajal and writer and critic Arbeleche undermine Clara Silva's writing and erase any vestiges of Silva Bélinzon's talent. Beauty and recognition are words used to describe Clara Silva. Meanwhile 'su hermanita' is located in the place of madness and seclusion whose work is interpreted as inconsistent, therefore lacking the coherence that a literary work 'must have':

> − Se habla poco de Sara [de Ibáñez], ahora. Y también poco de Clara Silva, que no debe caer en el olvido.
> Arbeleche: −Y que también tenía problemas de desenfoque y de inocencia. No era fácil ser la mujer de Zum Felde, pero resultaba malsano rehuir los reflectores. Tenía un aire como de sacerdotisa y era una mujer hermosa.
> − Muy hermosa. Fallaba un poco de piernas.
> A: (Risas) Eso no es una mirada, es una radiografía.
> − A Clara se la leía y se la veía. ¿Y qué pasaba con su hermanita, solitaria y rodeada de gatos? Y su obsesión pueril por ganar un Nóbel.
> A: No hacía pie en la realidad. Logra destellos en su poesía, escribe algunos versos rutilantes, pero no alcanza la coherencia final que un texto de arte debe tener. (Carbajal 2004: para. 55 of 100)

And then the possible connections between women writers are, again, diminished:

> − Le daba [a Silva Bélinzon] por el jardín como a Marosa (di Giorgio) por el huerto.
> A: Pero Marosa es una de las grandes. Construyó un mundo, organizó conceptualmente su fantasía, trascendió.
> – Es obvio. No quiero minimizar a di Giorgio, sólo marcar la compartida predilección por la exuberancia vegetal. Pero continuemos con las omisiones, por favor.[87] (para. 61)

The rather informal tone of the interview echoes the misogynistic statement of Spanish writer Leopoldo Alas ("Clarín"): 'La poetisa fea, cuando no llega a poeta, no suele ser más que una fea que se hace el amor en verso a sí misma' (1971: 86). Ugliness and beauty are dangerous sexist categorisations that frequently interfere in the reception of women's writing. In a small tribute that was given to Silva Bélinzon shortly after her death, one of the male speakers stresses Silva Bélinzon's physical and personal qualities, strangeness and unattractiveness being the most notorious ones: 'Ella era tan grande… tan extraña. Para mí el hecho de que ella era una extraña mujer… tenía una fealdad hermosa. Por detrás de su fealdad que casi nos contenía, Concepción era una mujer tan tierna, tan patética […]' (EPC, PA).[88] Marosa di Giorgio, the only female presenter at that homage, speaks afterwards in a clearly upset tone, and firmly denies this view by saying: 'Concepción era una mujer hermosa' (EPC, PA).

[87] The significant title of this interview, "El Maracaná de la literatura nacional. Jorge Arbeleche acepta el rol de DT y reubica parámetros", refers to one of the most glorious national moments in Uruguayan history: when the national football team beat Brazil in the 1950 World Cup. In so doing, the title stresses a masculinist view of the national (literary) history.

[88] The male speaker has not been identified.

The already quoted article by Sofi Richero, "Alas de magnolia" (2005), offers one of the most complete studies written, so far, on Silva Bélinzon's life and *œuvre* and illustrates this interweaving of criticism, reception, sisterhood, identity and creation in which the two sisters are portrayed. Richero's article reproduces stereotypical concepts on gender, creation and identity, the result of which is a patronising and condescending account that ultimately ridicules Silva Bélinzon's work and life. Richero sketches both sister writers' personalities by reproducing archetypal – and simplistic – oppositions in a rather Cartesian play of dichotomies (spirit/mind; feeling/thinking; sensitivity/lucidity). Richero briefly describes Silva Bélinzon's personal characteristics in the light of her sister's presence and lucidity, situating Silva Bélinzon in another place. In that "other" place where Silva Bélinzon is located, her erudition is described as the slave of a grotesque, bizarre and excessive sensitivity. Nevertheless, nothing else is said or explained about the other way in which Silva Bélinzon expressed her lucidity:

> Dibujamos en una a la cortesana y a la cenicienta en la otra, en una a la popular y en la otra a la marginal, a la lúcida y a la sensible, a la mundana y a la extraterrestre. Ciertamente en sus talentos, e incluso en la lucidez, fueron, si no opuestas, asincrónicas: Clara fue una mujer culta, una lectora entrenada. De una lucidez a la que propiamente se le llama lucidez, y que tiene que ver con el talento y la erudición, pero también con la versatilidad, cierto discernimiento analítico y cierta discriminación intelectual. Silva Bélinzon fue lúcida de otro modo, y su erudición fue siempre esclava de una sensibilidad grotesca, bizarra, desmesurada. (2005: 403-404)

Richero establishes here a description where, on the one hand, Clara Silva is not only the 'courtesan' and the 'popular' but also the 'lucid' (*clara*?) sister, while, on the other hand, Silva Bélinzon is the 'marginal', the 'alien' and also the 'sensitive' one. In fact, Silva Bélinzon's merits are mentioned hazily; they are described and situated as what feminist theorists such as Hèléne Cixous have been fighting against, the place of 'sensitivity', intuitive and dreamy as the traditional location reserved for women, in contraposition to 'sensibility' as the masculine domain (Cixous 1981: 245-64). Besides, that lucidity, which both sisters show, is expressed in an ambiguous and vague way both in Clara Silva and Silva Bélinzon; much less clear in Silva Bélinzon's account, in which her lucidity is only described in opposition to her

sister's attributes.[89] One way or another, Richero undermines their lucidity, exposing what Rosario Castellanos has questioned as a 'quality' or 'disgrace' when applied to women writers (Castillo 1992: 25). Following Castellanos' words, Debra Castillo states that '[w]omen may or may not be lucid; whether lucidity is bane or boon is left undecided' (25). Richero's illustration of these two women writers clearly misses the point behind an inconsistent schema of ambivalences which infrequently contributes to our understanding of women's writing and, to this particular case, Silva Bélinzon's work.

As with other hierarchical binary oppositions used to define the world, Silva Bélinzon and Clara Silva are polarised and caricatured by being positioned one against the other. By emphasising their differences, the opposites were established and the value of one over the other was promulgated and sustained. Consequently, Silva Bélinzon appears as the sister-woman-writer that did not fit with the idea of woman-poet conceived in her times and, therefore, she has been set aside. Thus, marginality is shown as a tool, as Castillo says, that marks and masks 'very real differences' (1992: 61) but also creates 'false differences out of cultural, economic, philosophical, and ideological exigencies of an antagonistic politics' (61). Without any room for interstitial writings, 'cruelmente diferenciada / diferenciada cruelmente' (*ANA*: 18), Silva Bélinzon's poetry was seen as the work of a poor – unattractive – old lady with pretences of becoming a poet. Thus, her body and writing has been trapped by collective preconceptions, which are based on hegemonic discourses within an institutionalised culture. Nonetheless, Silva Bélinzon's writing became that territory where it is possible to speak, to dissent and, more importantly, to be individualised.

[89] In other passages in the same article, Richero refers again to Silva Bélinzon's lucidity, visibly doubting it: 'Fue consciente de esa situación, fue *probablemente* lúcida' (2005: 391; my emphasis) and, 'Sucede que hay una lucidez resplandeciente, inequívoca pero también irracional en sus conjuros' (376).

No Visible Order to Love

No hay un orden visible para amarse;
del color sin color sus infinitos
pero no es peligroso aproximarse.

Silva Bélinzon (*SA*: 26).

Has construido mi ser lo que nadie comenzó,
has emplumado mis pájaros, has golpeado al viento, ahora soy transparente.

Handwritten letter to Claudio Ross,
CSB's archive, BN.[90]

Love was that other realm that was slowly discovered and loudly expressed by Silva Bélinzon. Writing, rooted in the idealised Magnolia tree, would be replaced afterwards in her life when love arrived to substitute its meaning. Within a new, drastically altered political and personal situation as from the 1960s, love would connect her with a new state of feelings, in a new search for identity. At the age of seventy-six, Silva Bélinzon fell in love with the Uruguayan poet and actor Claudio Ross, nearly forty years younger than her and openly homosexual. It is not certain if that was the first time that she had fallen in love, but it was the first time that her feelings became dramatically public. As Silva Bélinzon herself wrote, that love story began, in fact, 'sobre los muertos' (*SA*: 11). In 1976, she met Claudio Ross at the funerals of her two closest relatives in Montevideo; three years after the *coup d'état* imposed the longest and cruellest dictatorship in the country, Silva Bélinzon found love. The first time had been at the *velatorio of* Alberto Zum Felde, her brother-in-law. The second time Claudio Ross and Silva Bélinzon saw each other was at her sister Clara's funeral. As she recorded in her poetry, Silva Bélinzon was 'exchanging' death for life, a dead man for one alive: 'Cambiar a un hombre sano por un muerto' (*SA*: 32). From that point, they started a friendship of unpredictable significance. Displaced by her sister's popularity and ignored by a society that hardly recognised her writing, Ross appeared to offer some credit to her talent and companionship. A septuagenarian Silva Bélinzon fell in love with a young man who was unable to return her

[90] The letter is clearly quoting (rewriting, plagiarising?) Alejandra Pizarnik's verses: 'construido tu casa / has emplumado tus pájaros / has golpeado al viento / con tus propios huesos / has terminado sola / lo que nadie comenzó' (*Árbol de Diana*, 1962). Both authors had exchanged some correspondence at that time and therefore Silva Bélinzon might have been familiar with Pizarnik's work. Pizarnik also knew Clara Silva and dedicated the poem "A la espera de la oscuridad" to her.

love, turning their friendship and mutual admiration into an unexpected turmoil. When, in 1980, Ross went to live in Buenos Aires and started a relationship with an Argentinean writer, Silva Bélinzon was despaired. A voice that had spoken only shyly was for the very first time heard, even when its echo brought stories and gossip of madness and awkwardness. Ross praised Silva Bélinzon's talent while the Uruguayan literary circle mourned the death of one of its most important woman writers, her sister Clara Silva. At that time, under military rule, having financial and health problems and abandoned by her peers, Ross arrived in Silva Bélinzon's life to bring some hope.

In contrast to her colleagues who judged her as a mad and pitiful woman, falling in love in her seventies was Silva Bélinzon's subversive response to so many years of containment and silence: '[…] vivió el amor sin un secreto / la verdad por sí misma son terrores' (*SA*: 14). Solitude was then revealed, contested and abandoned for the love of a man, which would bring goodness and understanding: 'El amor es el gran beneficio que nos da a muy pocos Dios. A mí me cambia por completo; me conocí a mí misma y por ti soy muchísimo mejor que antes porque comprendo y perdono las faltas de los otros', as written in a letter to Ross in 1981.[91] Love would be experienced by Silva Bélinzon as a powerful sentiment able to transform her, bring self-knowledge and self-confidence, but, even more, it would give her womanhood:

> Cuando tú llegaste a mi casa, con tu comprensión y estilo fascinante de tratarme a mí, y tu verdadera admiración por mi poesía, me Desencantaron de la magnolia, como una Varita mágica, y me transformé [en] una mujer como todas [*sic*]. (Richero 2005: 384)

Despite that encounter with a new state of feelings, her life and last correspondence show her unrequited love bringing more desolation and seclusion. Lonely and ageing, with many difficulties to face, her physical and, especially, her emotional health mainly affected by the hard economic situation, was made worse by the fact that, in 1980, Ross stopped visiting her and left for Buenos Aires.[92]

Alone, faced with an adverse economic, physical and emotional reality, Silva Bélinzon found her last chance in search for recognition. It is in that unfavourable period that her last flamboyant, treacherously flattering and despairing correspondence, especially addressed to Claudio Ross, presents a fundamental source for understanding her poetry and identity. Her

[91] CSB's archive, BN. At the time, Ross and di Giorgio were preparing Silva Bélinzon's anthology (1981).

[92] Some people who met her, such as Jorge Arbeleche affirm that Ross fled in order to avoid Silva Bélinzon's constant emotional demands. By email 16 October 2009.

letters help to illustrate how her writing is crossed by a conspicuous conflict between hegemonic and religious discourses and her own self-identification. Writing is performed in a clashing arena of production and reproduction where the poet conceals and reveals traditional notions of femininity and womanhood. Strongly conditioned by her conservative education and religious observance, in these letters, as well as in her poetry, Silva Bélinzon uses recurring Christian, fictional and popular images in order to reconstruct herself. As Lucía Guerra suggests discussing women writing in Latin America:

> [I]f one considers that writing is, in essence, an act of the imagination which results in a meaningful process of self-identification, one must say that women writers faced the paradoxical situation of adopting the already fictionalized images of women in order to fictionalize themselves. (1990: 6)

Bringing up popular, religious and traditional figures of women, Silva Bélinzon performs in her correspondence as a martyr, sacrificed woman, as a Cinderella, or as a little girl. In one of those letters written to Claudio Ross she signs 'Santa Concepción'.[93] In another one, the farewell is very suggestive: 'Un beso de la Cenicienta' (Richero 2005: 384-385). At this point, Silva Bélinzon brings the name of Cinderella into play, referring to the popular fairy-tale whose plot involves a girl from a rich family being forced to live a servile domestic life, and who is, therefore, deprived of her rightful location in the family. In this way, the poet disguises and reveals her own dislodgement, marginality and identity within her own familiar situation.

In line with the social model of woman imposed in her time as 'mujer niña-muñeca' (Sapriza 1983: 129), Silva Bélinzon also characterises herself as a child and an enchanted statue: 'La poesía me dejó como una niña, una estatua encantada de un parque desconocido' (Richero 2005: 426). By blaming poetry for her immature actions, Silva Bélinzon distinguishes her voice as an infantile one ('una niña'), or as a muted, mythical, motionless figure and enchanted statue ('una estatua encantada'). Focusing on her powerlessness, the phrase also suggests poetry as an almost embryonic and static state in detriment of her capacity, as a woman, to exist and create. Unable to abandon fixed positions of identity, Silva Bélinzon depicts her poetry as an undeveloped voice unable to let her grow as a writer. Using these images, she performs a role that has been socially, traditionally and familiarly assigned to

[93] Handwritten letter CSB's archive, BN.

women. Nevertheless, in spite of her limited world of experiences, Silva Bélinzon was able to love and write rejecting the ostracism, stillness and silence of an inherited identity.

Her capacity to write never declined, although her financial, emotional and physical condition became highly precarious. Those economic and social differences became more drastic and more desperate in the late years of her life and writing poetry was her only form of emotional and social outlet. The last attempts to publish a long-awaited book of poetry never bore fruit. However, Ross and di Giorgio published an anthology of her poetry in 1981, which would be Silva Bélinzon's last published book. A year before she passed away, the Senate, under the newly democratic government of Julio María Sanguinetti (1985-1990), voted a special pension to Silva Bélinzon in appreciation for her literary career, a late acknowledgment that, for bureaucratic reasons, was difficult to confer on her. Silva Bélinzon died 'sola y perdida, en la mayor miseria' on the 2nd of November 1987.[94]

To conclude, Silva Bélinzon has been trapped by collective preconceptions and prevailing stereotypes that have diminished her work. Yet, for her, poetry signified going beyond the cultural and social restrictions imposed upon her, and an attempt to subvert and challenge them. Probably the most striking concept in Silva Bélinzon's work is the metaphor of the Magnolia patio as spring of poetry and identity. The dyad public/private at the heart of the nation's conservative discourses, which seems to be so clearly detached in Silva Bélinzon's life and time, is altered through the symbolisation of the Magnolia patio as an interstitial space that relocates her own social position. Despite the fact that Silva Bélinzon existed on the fringes of the close-knit cultural circles of mid-twentieth-century Uruguay, as will be analysed in depth in the next chapter, she remained loyal to her writing: it became her very subversive (and sometimes frantic) act to defy marginality.

[94] Handwritten letter, CSB's archive, BN. Also quoted in Richero (2005: 409).

CHAPTER FOUR

That Lumpen Poetry of Steeds and Gazelles

> En esos momentos la poesía que se escribía tanto en Uruguay como en Argentina era muy hermética, misteriosa, poesía de evasión donde aparecían gacelas, corzas, madréporas, etc., toda una retórica que parecía que espantaba a los lectores y consecuentemente no se vendía nada, lo cual era bastante dramático para los poetas. Ninguna editorial quería publicar libros de poesía […]; era bastante decepcionante.
>
> Mario Benedetti with Carmen Alemany Bay (1997).

This chapter analyses how Silva Bélinzon's poetry enters into dialogue with the cultural discourses of her milieu. From the personal, historical, social and political situation to the more concrete examples of her work's reception, this chapter focuses on the different critical approaches that her poetry has received. In so doing, this section examines the strategies and discourses that have prevented Silva Bélinzon's work from carving a place in Uruguayan literary history.

Introduction

The word "lumpen" in Marxist discourse means 'uninterested in revolutionary advancement, boorish and stupid', but also 'marginalised: living or regarded as *living on the margins* of society', as well as 'not educated or enlightened, stupidly content with a life regarded as intellectually empty and socially inferior'.[95] Her poetry, together with that of other writers, produced at the threshold of the politically-engaged Generation of 1945, was then associated with the uninterested and tasteless character of what this cultural group believed to be outdated and futile. Her hermetic sonnets were subsequently considered superseded, her themes were judged as indifferent and obsolete, and her activity as a poet was regarded as trivial, marginal

[95] *Oxford English Dictionary* (my emphasis).

and apathetic. The aesthetic postulates of her *œuvre* were considered anachronistic by the intellectuals of the Generation of 1945 when, as mentioned previously, a colloquial and *comprometida* poetry, as well as a radical criticism started to be practised in Montevideo towards the second half of the twentieth century. Mario Benedetti's epigraph points out the cultural stagnation that his generation believed the country had lived for many years, and the need they felt to engage in the redefinition of the poet's political, social and cultural role.

Concepción Silva Bélinzon's poetry was considered by the Generation of 1945, and subsequent critics, as excessive and inconsistent, obscure and picturesque. As Wilfredo Penco maintains, '[l]a crítica del "45" […] apenas la consideró como extravagante y pintoresca' (1997b: 82), by affirming later that 'esta poeta elaboró *una obra difícil de enmarcar* en los centros e intereses ideológicos y estéticos del Uruguay de su tiempo' (83; my emphasis). The hermetic character of her work has reinforced this view, and its apparently unclear and incoherent poetic style has precisely overshadowed its significance, without taking into account that, as Paz has also affirmed, 'Toda creación engendra equívocos' (1956: 41). Her poetry was quickly overlooked, merely mentioned and rapidly discarded as a typical example of an outdated, mediocre or purposeless poetry. Isolated and marginalised, in an interview with EPC, she sadly admits that condescending attitude towards her writing and its reception: 'El doctor que canta en los salones no entiende [mi poesía]'. Then Casanova asks her: '¿A ti no te han cantado mucho en los salones?'; the answer is a laconic 'no' (EPC, PA).

Vaguely and inconsistently allocated to two literary generations and two different conceptions of creation and identity, Silva Bélinzon's poetry was left in the limbo of Uruguayan literary history, unable to represent, transform or occupy a clear and relevant position. Despite the fact that, as has been indicated, several national literary prizes followed the publication of Silva Bélinzon's first book in 1943, and her work was praised by many renowned writers from all around the world, it did not secure her a place in the Uruguayan literary canon. On the contrary, that desire for recognition was generally seen as desperate – even pathetic – attempts to be acknowledged. Her work did not achieve the appreciation that it deserved when she was alive, and such appreciation never truly arrived posthumously either. As Luis Bravo pointed out in an article written on the occasion of her death in 1985: '[s]u obra, reconocida por escritores de aguda percepción crítica en el plano internacional, nunca fue seriamente recepcionada por la literatura uruguaya, una omisión más de las tantas que registra nuestra (¿distraída o mezquina?) Historia literaria' (1987: 31). The astounding incongruity that seems to occur between the international recognition and the national awards that Silva Bélinzon held and the little national interest and subsequent forgetfulness corresponds to a similar pat-

tern of suppression and marginalisation. Accordingly, this chapter exposes how Silva Bélinzon's poetry has been entrapped in the delusional, eccentric, isolated and estranged realm of women's creation by a critical corpus that has consistently treated her work in a patronising and condescending way; a critical corpus that has even denied her the alternative canonical position of "raros". Departing from Rubén Darío's *Los raros* (1896), Ángel Rama gathered, in his anthology, *Aquí: Cien años de raros* (1966), a group of Uruguayan novelists that seemed to be unconcerned with political and social issues, such as Felisberto Hernández. This label has been used since then by Uruguayan criticism to categorise an original but marginal and/or unclassifiable writer.[96] Yet as Amir Hamed shrewdly states, '[l]a rareza es apenas resultado de la falta de explicación' (1991: 12).

Neither Here Nor There? Relocating Concepción Silva Bélinzon

As the following examples will illustrate, since Silva Bélinzon's work was published, critics have failed to define, place and even consider or understand her poetry within the Uruguayan literary history, thus providing a partial view of her poetic universe. Questions such as taste and value play, as mentioned, a fundamental role in this account where two clearly different conceptions of poetry were taking place in Uruguay and Latin America. Above all, her poetry has been reduced to conventional and traditional tropes historically attached to women. In the light of a larger male literary tradition, it was precisely the difficult and problematic task of classifying and locating Silva Bélinzon's poetry that reduced her poetry to sameness, silence, disconcert or even delusion. The little and belittling critical corpus that followed her work is clear proof of her marginal cultural position. The inability to comprehend her poetry can be traced in the few early reviews of her work. Her personal correspondence, as well as some other testimonies, exposes the strong preconceptions and prejudices that Silva Bélinzon's poetry faced at the time.

In 1944, Silva Bélinzon figured in *Marcha*, in a section called "La mujer y Marcha", as a recent winner of a poetry prize granted by the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública.[97] The review

[96] See for instance, Valentina Litvan and Javier Uriarte's *Raros uruguayos. Nuevas miradas* (2010).

[97] In an editorial column called "Figuras de la semana". Other women writers that appeared in this section were the feminist Luisa Luisi and the writer Paulina Medeiros. The section also included poems by Juana de Ibarbourou and Sara de Ibáñez. The two pages dedicated to this subject soon became one, and the section "La mujer

is written in a somewhat patronising tone, in reverberating, elusive, over-elaborate prose, composed in the same style that the great majority of the members of the Generation of 1945 would consider unacceptable for an adequate and accurate literary critique. The article highlights Silva Bélinzon's 'originalísima' personality, her 'candidez' and 'fina transparencia, frente a la vida, a los seres, a los acontecimientos, y la profundidad inmensa de su sentimiento'. It continues, stating, '[m]ezcla inconfundible, su timidez despierta ternura en quienes la conocen, y su potencia espiritual, admiración intensa'. Finally, after describing her (delicate, shy) personality, a few more sentences briefly depict her work: '"El regreso de la samaritana" presenta tal unidad, que nos hace pensar en un dominio de la forma, y encuentro tal de su yo, propios, no de la primera obra de un artista, sino de una obra plena de madurez'. According to the unnamed author of this commentary, the mystic character of her poetry 'le confiere una extraordinaria delicadeza.'[98] The result of this article is a succinct and weak evaluation, plagued with oversimplified and banal comments that ironically illustrate the underestimated and misunderstood status of Silva Bélinzon's poetry.

The Spanish writer Max Aub (1903-1972) also mentioned 'delicacy' as one of Silva Bélinzon's best virtues: 'He añadido un nuevo nombre al de las dos grandes poetisas uruguayas que adoro: el de usted. Su [libro 'El] plantador de pinos' es un delicado libro de horas (…)'.[99] It is that delicacy, but also naivety, that Jules Supervielle would also eulogise as merits of Silva Bélinzon's writing in a letter addressed to her. These are the qualities that later critics would use and overuse to judge Silva Bélinzon's *œuvre*: '[…] vos poèmes si touchants, et plein d'une fraîcheur si delicate' […] 'votre art sous son exquise naïveté est extrêment savant' (reproduced in *LMDA*). An echo of Supervielle's appreciation is clearly evident in the prologue to Silva Bélinzon's *Amor no amado* (1950), an unknown Ángel Núñez (an agronomist by profession, we are told) writes in gushingly complimentary prose: 'Es un libro *sencillamente bello*, escrito para los que sienten la vida y ahondan en sus espíritus el culto por lo Bello. *Sus poemas son naturales*, como la vida misma' (8; the emphasis is mine). One of the book's poems, entitled "San Marcos", is dedicated to him (*ANA*, 51). Moreover, the 'pretty book' whose poems are as natural as life itself is made for 'simple people' and written with 'sweet grace' as Núñez stresses: 'Es un libro bello para gente sencilla, escrito con la dulce gracia de

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y Marcha" quickly disappeared from *Marcha*'s pages. The section merged into other editorial columns, already mentioned in chapter II, called "Femenina" and "De mujer a mujer", dedicated to domestic and "female" issues and advice.

[98] *Marcha*, November 1944, No 260, p.11. Anonymous.

[99] In a letter dated in Mexico on 26 January 1951 at CSB's archive, BN.

las cosas Eternas' (8). That simplicity resonates in the words of Uruguayan critic Arturo Sergio Visca; Visca begins by affirming that Silva Bélinzon 'revela una de las voces poéticas de entonación más singular de la literatura uruguaya' (*AP*: 7). He then states that Silva Bélinzon's poetry has no reflection, rationality or logic: 'la poesía de Concepción Silva Bélinzon se muestr[a] naturalmente despojada de todo artificio retórico. No hay nada en ella ficticiamente premeditado' (8). This idea is reinforced throughout the prologue: '[…] sus poemas […] son nítida traducción en palabras, de estados de conciencia profundamente vividos por la poetisa. […] Pero esa traducción no se verifica a través de una operación lógica que organice racionalmente el fluir de la conciencia sino mediante la aprehensión directa del ritmo vivencial' (7). Intuition, pure perception, spontaneity and mystery are, according to Visca, the most remarkable characteristics of Silva Bélinzon's writing: 'porque su poesía es expresión del misterio que es aún su propia vida y su intuición del mundo. Y el misterio puede ser vivido y señalado pero no revelado. Incluso el intento de explicarlo sería falsearlo' (8). Poetry is, then, not seen as a work of art worthy of being analysed and interpreted, but as a mere (almost involuntary) translation of feelings and emotions coming from the poetess' (broken and shaken) heart; certainly, a very Romantic trope:

> Esos estremecimientos [Visca is referring here to Oliverio Girondo's words on Silva Bélinzon's work] que pasan intactos a la acerada estructura del soneto o de cualquier otra forma poética son los que comunica a la mano el humano corazón de la poetisa. Un corazón dolido por la áspera realidad y por la presencia del mal en el mundo pero que se sabe también de su posible pureza y hermosura. (9)

In that letter mentioned by Visca, Girondo (1891-1967) writes:

> Gracias, muchas gracias, por su bello y emocionante envío. […] Hubiera deseado *balbucearle el deleite con el que he saboreado sus poemas* y decirle algo de lo que pienso sobre la *maestría con la que usted maneja una forma tan acerada como el soneto*; manopla a la que ha sabido infundir la mórbida ductibilidad [*sic*] de un guante de cabritilla que, no sólo permite percibir las rutas y la estructura topográfica de la mano que recubre, sino todos y cada uno de sus estremecimientos. […] [sus versos] *me abruma*[n] porque poseen esa libertad de asociación de ideas (poéticas) que en ocasiones suele llegar hasta la arbitrariedad y que constituye uno de los mayores encantos de su poesía.
>
> Muchas cosas podría decirle sobre sus *bellos poemas* que me dedica, pero *una especie de pudor* me aconseja postergar todo comentario hasta que encuentre la ocasión de hacerlo de viva voz.

> Permítame, que estas líneas sean, tan sólo, el testimonio de mi emocionada admiración y gratitud y expresión del íntimo deseo de conocerla personalmente.[100] (*SC*; my emphasis)

Beyond its hyperbolic tone, the letter includes suggestive passages. By using a metaphor to refer to the sonnet, which is described as a 'manopla', and 'guante de cabritilla' as Silva Bélinzon's writing technique, Girondo mentions that the poet's hand has managed to infuse a feminine touch to the sonnet. In fact, the English translation for *guante de cabritilla* appears to be even more suggestive: 'kid glove'. Literally translated into English the phrase acquires a more critical meaning, that is, Silva Bélinzon managed to fit the sonnet like a (kid) glove. More importantly, Girondo states that some of Silva Bélinzon's 'bellos poemas' overwhelm him ('me abruma[n])'.[101]

In *Los Reyes del oro* (1953), the politician José Gervasio Antuña introduces Silva Bélinzon's poetry stressing similar patterns.[102] Referring to the influence of poet Humberto Zarrilli (1898-1964), and quoting one of his poems, Antuña describes Silva Bélinzon's poetry as indecisive, humble, delicate and almost silent (9-10). Antuña suggests a delicate, subtle and, once again, an immature poetry unable to be expressed in a robust, mature and clear way: '[e]lla nos lleva de su mano hacia las cosas, en puntas de pie *apenas las toca* [...]' (9-10; emphasis in the original). However, in this collection, Silva Bélinzon shows a much more defying and challenging writing than Antuña intends to describe. In the very first verse of the book, Silva Bélinzon challenges the reader: 'Si usted puede leer esta escritura / y la boca curar de tres leones, / tendrá la sexta parte de amargura / deshaciendo la duda en las lesiones' (11). This strong and confident author is able to state: 'Uno mismo es el dueño de uno mismo / con sus revelaciones y sus aves; […] │Uno mismo es el dueño de uno mismo / aunque lleguen los

[100] Original letter in CSB's archive, BN.

[101] Also quoting this letter, Uruguayan poet Silvia Guerra has indicated that Silva Bélinzon has been criticised for being a close follower of Girondo's poetry, and even accused of plagiarising him: 'Se le ha recriminado ser seguidora persistente de Girondo, más aún, se la ha acusado de plagiarlo'. In Silva Bélinzon's defence, Guerra cites Girondo's letter in order to demonstrate precisely the opposite: his profound admiration. However, there is no clear influence of Girondo's work in Silva Bélinzon's poetry. Cited by Silvia Guerra ("Concepción Silva Bélinzon: sin tarjeta de visita").

[102] Antuña had also praised Delmira Agustini's poetry (García Pinto 2000: 216). Furthermore, according to Carlos Demasi, Antuña was one of the politicians involved in the creation of the Centenario's celebration as the date of the country's independence (2004: 85-86). Demasi mentions that Antuña also represented in the 1920s and 1930s the most conservative sector of Uruguayan society (87). José G. Antuña was elected a member of the Academia Nacional de Letras in 1959 and died in 1972.

condes y jarabes' (13). Although she also writes: 'De mi cuello formó un collar de oro / Y como era, tan niña y delicada / a mi boca guardó como un tesoro' (16), the poem continues: 'Vencedora salí con poca gente. / Y escondido en la noche desvelada, / me hacía compañía simplemente' (16).[103]

In the poorly regarded book *Literatura Uruguaya 1807-1975*, published precisely in 1976 (under the dictatorship), Sarah Bollo highlights Silva Bélinzon's 'poesía barroca, hermética, a la manera de Basso Maglio y Maeso Tognochi' as well as her personal language and rich imagery, which, nevertheless, also lacks coherence and logic: 'En sus últimos libros se advierte cierto alogismo, cierta incoherencia, un tanto envuelto en las bellas palabras de entraña simbólica. Su verso es ya clásico, ya romántico, cambiante, con palpitación humana' (1976: 248). Although Bollo's comparison of Silva Bélinzon's poetry to two Uruguayan male writers demonstrates an intention to locate her poetry within a tradition, movement or tendency, she ends up stressing the intuitive and revelatory, as well as the irrational and incoherent character of Silva Bélinzon's poetry.

In one of the fascicles of *Capítulo Oriental: Historia de la literatura uruguaya*, Enrique Fierro reiterates the words of Supervielle as a way to legitimise and praise Silva Bélinzon's *œuvre*. However, he states that her writing lacks any elaborated technique or poetic skills: '[sus poemas] acus[a]n frecuentes debilidades (falta de elaboración de la materia poética, excesiva supeditación a la rima, confusiones varias aparentemente no predeterminadas)' (1968: 507). Fierro finally admits that, despite the fact that the poet managed to constitute 'un mundo que no dudamos en calificar de fascinante', he later underlines Silva Bélinzon's poetry as 'una alucinada imaginación que transforma los objetos reales en incitantes presencias mágicas' (507). Even though Fierro recognises Silva Bélinzon's work as 'fascinating', all these critiques remind us of what Lucía Guerra Cunningham has affirmed about women's art: '[i]n spite of the fact that the new realm of introspection, dreams and alienation provided women writers with a fertile soil to express their existential condition, they were still entrapped in artistic subordination' (1990: 7). Certainly, Silva Bélinzon is entrapped in the delusional, eccentric, estranged or incomprehensible realm of women's creation, as the aforementioned Max Aub said about Silva Bélinzon's poetry: 'Hace mucho que lo incomprensible me merece

[103] This is the poem Argentinean poet Alejandra Pizarnik praised in a letter addressed to Silva Bélinzon: 'Estoy enamorada de su poema "Vencedora salí con poca gente"' [u.d], CSB's archive, BN. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, it is also clear that Silva Bélinzon was aware of Pizarnik's work as well.

el mayor respeto. Es usted una gran poetisa anárquica, encerrada en su cárcel, de catorce barrotes, alguno de ellos del más puro metal'.[104]

A few more reviews reveal a similar pattern: a not-clearly-located poetry, somehow appealing but difficult to describe, too alien, too 'incomprehensible' to interpret or too uneven to pigeonhole. Apart from a few anthologies (Bollo, 1977; Ginés de Alvareda and F. Garfias, 1968; Patiño, 2004; Pedemonte, 1958; Pereira, 2005; Ruffinelli, 1971), her writing is either obliterated or vaguely explained.[105] Moreover, the critics who do remember to include her in their studies do not always remember to write about her *œuvre*. It is interesting to note that Jorge Arbeleche, in the book co-written with Graciela Mántaras Loedel, *Panorama de la literatura uruguaya entre 1915-1945*, includes Silva Bélinzon as a poet member of the Generation of 1930. Yet, she is the only poet on the list whose work is not analysed (1995: 78). Although her name is almost unavoidable within the context given, her work is, however, invisible. This omission could be explained by stating that Silva Bélinzon was not as relevant a poet as the other women poets studied in the book (such as Cáceres, Soca and Ibáñez). Some could also argue, that since she did not have an active participation within the cultural circles of mid-twentieth century, the study of her work is considered not to have a significant impact and, therefore, it is not worth analysing. But, if this is the case, why do the authors mention Silva Bélinzon's work alongside that of the other writers? The most likely reason for this dismissive treatment is the resistant character of her work as well as her "minor" cultural participation that disturbs a coherent reading of cultural history; hence, this location is somehow conflictive and arguable. In order to understand this oversight, I asked Jorge Arbeleche what he thought about Silva Bélinzon's poetry and her female contemporaries. Interestingly, in his reply, he not only includes Silva Bélinzon within a 'mystical air' that 'blew' in the 1930s and 1940s in Uruguay, as it was already cited, but, more importantly, he believes that she did not achieve a coherent and consistent work:

> Personalmente encuentro en sus poemas algunos versos de alta poesía que no condicen con el ritmo siguiente, creo también que se somete exageradamente a la rima y que más que poemas, escribió, de forma aislada, versos soberbios.[106]

[104] Letter dated 22 April 1958, CSB's archive, BN.

[105] Although the list is more extensive, it lacks of consistency and reliability.

[106] By email, 15 October 2009.

In his view, Silva Bélinzon somehow belongs to the group of women writers in the 1930s-1950s, but her writing does not quite fit with the other women poets of her time. Sofi Richero's analysis of Silva Bélinzon's poetry is consistent with Arbeleche's observation. Although Richero is much more straightforward in her approach to Silva Bélinzon's poetry, she is also unconvinced about its value, especially in comparison to the works produced by her contemporaries:

> No es simple conjeturar acerca de las particularidades de la belleza de su poesía, entre las otras poesías y bellezas; no es simple y es inútil. […] hay algo seguramente hermoso pero también patético en su escritura, una rara clase de belleza patética. A veces esos términos se descombinan; quiero decir, la belleza y el patetismo, y quedan unos versos que parecen demasiado bellos junto a otros demasiado pueriles, incluso bizarros. (2005: 376)

Whereas Arbeleche describes Silva Bélinzon's poetry as incomplete and imperfect, Richero doubts its relevance and "beauty", describing it as pathetic and bizarre. By judging Silva Bélinzon's poetry only based on artistic value, the critiques miss the fundamental point of revising her writing in the light of an alternative frame. In other words, in rushing to decide whether Silva Bélinzon's poetry is good or not, none of them question why such writing was produced at that time and in such a way.

There is even more evidence to prove the dismissal of Silva Bélinzon's poetry. The surprising contradiction that seems to occur between the international recognition and national awards, on the one hand, and the little national interest and subsequent oblivion, on the other hand, also has a plausible explanation that corresponds with a similar pattern of suppression and marginalisation. The fact that Silva Bélinzon's poetry received many national prizes granted by the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública in the 1940s and 1950s was not considered by the active members of the Generation of 1945 as relevant. Quite the opposite, they constantly criticised the character and importance of this prize, arguing that the competition had become a mere reproduction of the official literature, which was, in the words of Rodríguez Monegal, a bad and an old joke.[107] As Wilfredo Penco explains, the aesthetic confrontation between the Generations of 1930 and 1945 may be found in the magazines *Marcha* and *Asir* from 1949 onwards, when some of the members of the Generation of 1945 started to express

[107] Rodríguez Monegal's response to a letter written by the A.U.D.E in relation to a one of his articles published in Marcha and entitled "Una literatura de minoristas" (1953: 15).

disagreement with the literary prizes granted by the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública (1997: 63-64)

A clear example of this discussion is offered in an article published in *Marcha* in 1949, in which Manuel Flores Mora and Ángel Rama firmly disagree with the prizes granted by "Concurso de remuneraciones literarias a la labor literaria" organised, precisely, by this Ministry in 1948.[108] Flores Mora and Rama describe the award as unreliable, claiming that the prize is a "'sotto voce' del que participan amigos y allegados":

> El estado no tiene derecho a engañarse permitiendo que un jurado inepto distribuya con absurdos criterios algunos premios menguados entre gente que los merece y gente que no los merece. El Estado no tiene derecho a contribuir con distinciones absurdas, a la desorientación y confusión del público, recomendándole su sanción, como libros de calidad, drogas de la peor especie. (1949: 14-15)

The following year, in the column "Desde la mesa del café", in the magazine *Clinamen*, Rodrigo Ruiz ponders an almost rhetorical question in relation to that debate: '¿[e]s entonces benéfico que el Ministerio [de Instrucción Pública] otorgue premios y la Biblioteca [Nacional] compre libros si con ellos se multiplican sobre todo, las obras inmaturas o manifiestamente malas?'(1950: 9). A few months later, in the same publication Dionisio Trillo Pays also supported this opinion by pointing out that the prize had fallen into disrepute: '[l]o cierto es […] que el descrédito ha ido envolviendo, lenta, persistente e inexorablemente, con el correr del tiempo, a los fallos de este concurso' (1950: 19). A few years later, the reconsideration of this official literary prize and the formation of its panel still received attention and provoked an outcry in the cultural circle of mid-twentieth-century Uruguay. In an article published in *Marcha* in 1953, a young Omar Prego Gadea claimed: '[n]o pretendemos –y antes por el contrario no somos partidarios de tal posición– que el estado se convierta en mecenas; bajo su protección, la literatura no puede vivir como tal' (14). Also, '[c]omo distinción literaria en sí, tampoco aporta mucho. Es fácil comprobar que la calidad que posee la mayoría de las obras pre-

[108] The prizes were granted to Sarah Bollo, Clara Silva, Mario Benedetti, Regina Esther Sassón, Paulina Medeiros and René Bonne. Apart from Mario Benedetti, active member of the Generation of 1945 and Clara Silva (as *reservista*), the rest were part of the previous cultural group. In accordance with the position adopted by the members of the group of 1945, Benedetti, who won the *concurso* in 1958 and 1961, renounced the prize on both occasions too. Curiously, Rodríguez Monegal was one of the judges on both occasions. No doubt the article is written by his intellectual opponent, the "entrañavivista" Ángel Rama. In the next issue, Rodríguez Monegal sent a letter in reply to this article initiating an unprecedented open debate.

miadas, no difiere mucho de aquellas que no merecieron distinción' (14). This issue kept being discussed in the next few years in the magazine. In 1955, Carlos Real de Azúa added fuel to the controversy by attacking the institution's literary prize and its procedures, the recently created Uruguayan Writers Association (A.U.D.E.), and the 'feminine supplement' of the newspaper *La Mañana*, for being 'el inepto vaciadero de nuestra "lumpen-literatura"' (1955: 13).[109]

After *El regreso de la samaritana*, Silva Bélinzon was granted the prize on two more occasions, and precisely at a time when the debate around this issue had reached a climax: in 1953 for *Los Reyes del oro* and in 1956 for *El cordero terrible*. Between these dates, in June 1955, a group of fifty writers signed a document where they expressed their commitment not to participate in the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública's competition until the general conditions of the award were changed and the panel board was justly, impartially and pluralistically formed. Echoing that statement, and similar to Mario Benedetti's attitude towards the award, in 1963 Idea Vilariño felt 'obliged' to renounce the prize granted to her by the Ministerio, as she expressed in a letter addressed to the Minister Juan Pivel Devoto (Larre Borges 2007: 55). Both writers were showing how deeply disappointed they were with the traditional literary apparatus, its models and procedures.

A further factor must be taken into account in order to understand Silva Bélinzon's cultural location: namely her friendship with the poet Humberto Zarrilli. Paradoxically, Silva Bélinzon's only viable connection with the literary world and the awards that she held isolated and ostracised her further from the existing cultural activity. In an interview with Casanova, Silva Bélinzon says that she met Zarrilli when she started to work as a civil servant at the Instituto de Educación Primaria where Zarrilli was working as Director. He soon became her mentor: 'Zarrilli era como un santo para mí. […] Yo no hacía caso a nadie más. Solo a Zarrilli' (EPC, PA). According to her testimony, it was the first time in her life that she was able to go out, get a job and therefore have a relatively independent life. In the poem "Los caballos blancos", dedicated to Zarrilli too, Silva Bélinzon expresses the extent and strength of that relationship:[110]

[109] He adds: '(De esa infraliteratura que alguna vez habrá que estudiar en sus órganos, nombres y métodos)' (1955:13). In the same article, Real de Azúa argues that such cultural situation has ignored de works of E. de Cáceres, S. de Ibáñez. I. Vilariño, O. Bardesio, I. Vitale 'y algunas otras que ahora olvido' (13).

[110] Zarrilli also dedicated his book *Paradoja de la imagen* (1958) to Silva Bélinzon.

> Por donde nadie vino, tú viniste / […] − ¿Y sabes tú quién soy? − Yo lo sabía. / De ridículo tiempo no supiste / todo lo nuevo y bueno yo tenía; / mi pasado y futuro desvestiste / el poema lo dice todavía. / Los amigos de casa…en desacuerdo. / La nieve de mi espalada sacudía / mi corazón atado a tu recuerdo / El bocado del plato me sacaban; bajo su movimiento y fantasía… / levantadas noticias me llegaban! (*ANA*: 53-54)

This close connection made Ángel Rama claim that Silva Bélinzon was Zarrilli's artistic successor, both heirs of the tradition of Spanish Ultraism and French Surrealism: '[…] dentro de esta cauda Humberto Zarrilli descubre el "cadáver exquisito" componiendo un poema en sus versos y reduciendo éstos a la metáfora en libertad con *Libro de imágenes* (1928); su experiencia invariable habría de continuarla Concepción Silva Bélinzon' (Rama 1968: XXXVII). Despite this attempt to connect Silva Bélinzon to a literary group, tendency, or perhaps just a single poet, Silva Bélinzon's poetry does not seem stylistically close to Zarrilli's work. Although artistic patronage probably influenced and shaped Silva Bélinzon's *œuvre*, their works differ substantially. In fact, one of the characteristics of Silva Bélinzon's writing that separates her from Zarrilli's poetry is the use of language. Her writing is, I would argue, more linguistically audacious, less ostentatious and much more obscure.[111] In her poetry, there is uncertainty, elusiveness, and even technical and linguistic irregularities, yet, this should not be seen as negative, but as a different literary tactic that reveals her social and cultural dislocation. Rama was probably confusing artistic patronage with influence.

However, Zarrilli's presence in Silva Bélinzon's life played a role in the reticent reception of her work. Zarrilli was not only the Director of that official institution, he was also a frequent panel member of the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública Literary Prize, an active member of the Generation of 1930. Furthermore, he was a founder of the literary group *Meridión*,

[111] In *Nuevo diccionario de Literatura Uruguaya*, Hugo Achugar describes Zarrilli's work: [A]hora que su obra está concluida, es posible comprobar que en su totalidad no logra aportar más que lo alcanzado en aquel primer momento. Sus libros de poesía muestran un gusto más que subrayado por la imagen, recurso éste que no alcanza a sostener a su obra poética. En *Cántico de la imagen*, por ejemplo, pueden encontrarse versos muy hermosos, pero que destilan más una voluntad lingüística que una vivencia por trasmitir. El trabajo del verso es infatigable, no decae en ninguno de sus libros, pero la mayor parte de su obra muestra sobre todo al esforzado artífice; o, como dice Domingo L. Bordoli, un "honestísimo esfuerzo desgarrador que da cruelmente el efecto final de un permanente escamoteo"'. In the same description, Achugar adds: 'De 1928 es su primera obra, *Libro de imágenes*, en la cual, según Alberto Zum Felde, Zarrilli no ha logrado salir del estado anárquico en que la revolución "ultraísta" colocó a la poesía. […] Su obra se complementa con piezas de teatro pedagógico, y una ópera, *Paraná Guazú* (1930), con música de Vicente Ascone' (Oreggioni 2001: 322).

whose publishing house, *Ediciones de la revista Meridión*, printed Silva Bélinzon's first book. Her relationship with Zarrilli provoked constant disagreements with her sister Clara and her husband, Alberto Zum Felde. According to Silva Bélinzon's latest testimony, they had some reservations about Zarrilli. This uncomfortable situation also prevented her from having a flexible and active social life, as Silva Bélinzon said: '[y]o no fui más a la casa de mi hermana y [ella y Zum Felde] se ofendieron. Si yo no iba a la casa de mi hermana, no salía' (EPC, PA). Excluded from the public world, Silva Bélinzon's social and cultural status was therefore greatly reduced. She was then considered unable to embody, perform or adapt to the new exigencies of the Uruguayan intellectual construct, and her work was depreciated in the light of the new aesthetic – and political – values.

In contrast to those views, in the prologue of *Antología poética* of Silva Bélinzon (1981), Marosa di Giorgio and Claudio Ross question the character, significance and relevance of Uruguayan contemporary cultural groups by stating that Silva Bélinzon stayed away from 'oficialismos perturbadores y de grupos literarios de dudosa valía' (1981: 11). More recently, Silvia Guerra also refers to her persistent writing despite and against her cultural seclusion: '[e]ntre la admiración de algunos, unos pocos, y la indiferencia mayoritaria de sus contemporáneos, entre la irritación que provocaba en algunos y la fervorosa estima de otros, Concepción escribió sin tregua, ardiendo y siempre fuera del posible rebaño'.[112] Outside the possible flock, as Guerra argues, Silva Bélinzon constantly expresses her cultural seclusion and dislocation, which sometimes becomes a source of pride, disillusionment or disdain: '¡Y de repente salto de la fila! / para golpear las moscas con mi canto: / las almas duras forman una pila / los jueces de la tierra un desencanto' (*EMJL*: 19); 'Las voces de los jueces / no traspasa / Concepción y su verso abandonada' (*LYD*: 8). At other times, she challenges her marginal location by finding and assuming a more domineering position: 'Abandonando, pues, las ceremonias: / ¡así sea, así sea mi desaire! / fuera de aquella tribu mis colonias' (*LRDO*: 50). Her social and cultural dislocation made her create a singular and tenacious poetry. Nonetheless, Silva Bélinzon soon became aware of her cultural seclusion, lack of social connections and the need for public recognition and publications: 'necesito más premios y más ruidos', she wrote in the poem "Yo quiero ser curada" (*EMJL*: 5). In her own words, those prizes would provide her with sufficient money to buy more books: 'si quería más dinero era para comprarme libros' (EPC, PA), but also to have more visibility and recognition. As Itamar Even-Zohar explains in his theory of the literary canon, 'it is [also] obvious that on a superficial

[112] Guerra, op.cit.

level text producers (writers) struggle for their texts to be recognised and accepted as such' (1990: 20). If the producer is a woman (who was "ugly", singleton and middle-aged, confined to her house, working as a civil servant, living with her two ageing aunts, surrounded by cats, and – apparently – uninterested in political advancement), such a struggle may take slightly more effort. Aware of the need for her texts to be recognised and accepted, Silva Bélinzon applied a persistent strategy: she unremittingly sent letters and her books with pompous dedications and/or attached manuscripts to prominent writers, intellectuals, and even politicians all around the world.[113] This rather systematic writing of dedications and letters served as an attempt to authorise and legitimise her work in the poetic tradition of her time, a form of construction of literary authorship, a persistent effort to be accepted and respected by her peers in Uruguay and beyond. In other words, an attempt to break away from her literary and social ostracism, as a possible vehicle for public recognition, to get 'access to the means of cultural production' (Guillory 1994: 18), or simply to belong to a literary tradition.

One of those letters, written by Argentinean poet Luisa Pasamanik, offers a good example to illustrate the character of her correspondence and her struggle to get access to those means. In it, Pasamanik replies to an enquiry from Silva Bélinzon in 1969, asking her about the possibility of publishing one of her books in the established publishing house *Losada*. Here, Pasamanik clearly discloses the intertwined process of cultural production in which Silva Bélinzon tried to be included:

> Respecto a lo que me dices que quisieras publicar un libro en Losada, bien quisiera ayudarte, y lo haría sin titubeos, creo que lo sabes, de tener posibilidad de hacerlo. Sucede, Concepción, que aquí es necesario tener conexiones y 'acomodos' para editar allí o en otras editoriales argentinas.[114]

[113] Although the great majority of letters that she received were just polite answers to her dedicated books and generic letters, many writers exchanged a sincere and frequent correspondence with her, such as: Vicente Aleixandre (Spain), Jean Aristiguieta (Venezuela), Juan Jacobo Bajarlía (Argentina), Albert Camus (France), Oliverio Girondo (Argentina), Ramón Gómez de la Serna (Spain), José Emilio Pacheco (México), Manuel Pacheco (Spain), Alejandra Pizarnik (Argentina), Antonio de Undurraga (Chile). In Uruguay: Marta de Arévalo, Nancy Bacelo, Orfila Bardesio, Esther de Cáceres, Enrique Fierro and Ida Vitale, Marosa di Giorgio, Rolando Faget, Líber Falco, Gastón Figueira, Clotilde Luisi, Paulina Medeiros and Ricardo Prieto. She also received invitations and letters from institutions, such as *Comité de Solidaridad con los escritores franceses* (1946), from the *Pen Club* to reorganise a branch in Uruguay (1977), and from the *Université de Paris, Sorbonne Nouvelle* to give a paper or read her poems (1987).

[114] Handwritten letter signed by Laura Pasamanik, dated in Buenos Aires, 1 December 1969, CSB's archive,

Furthermore, a revealing letter addressed to the infamous, far right-wing Uruguayan politician Jorge Pacheco Areco (President from 1967 to 1972) shows Silva Bélinzon's economic and social differences and difficulties becoming extreme in the later years of her life. In it, Silva Bélinzon describes herself as getting old, being forgotten and tremendously poor. The letter is a distraught one:

> Perdone que lo moleste, pero le pido por Jesús que me ayude en lo que vea conveniente. [Se lo pido] por mi país el Uruguay, el corazón de América por su suprema democracia y singular cultura. [Then she summarises the books she has published and writes:] Actualmente recibí un telegrama de la Academia Nobel de Suecia que me dice que mi libro 'Sagrada Cantidad' está incluido en el Comité del premio Nobel de literatura. Aquí no tengo amigos verdaderos […] *Yo vivo lejos del mundo literario, no tengo apariencia, porque no tengo dinero* […] Estoy en la mayor miseria. Mi jubilación del Ministerio de Ganadería es de 127.000 pesos viejos […]. (PA; my emphasis)

The letter is not dated and it is unknown whether it was finally sent. The information provided in the manuscript is rather confusing and it does not help to guess the approximate date. She mentions here her nomination to the Nobel Prize (in 1974). Nevertheless, Silva Bélinzon finishes the letter stating 'Me dirijo a usted por mi gran admiración y lo espero pronto como presidente del Uruguay'. If the letter was written in or after 1974, Uruguay was under dictatorship. In fact, Jorge Pacheco Areco was responsible for allowing the military to take control over the policing of the Tupamaro guerrilla.

In contrast to what one might think, the letter should not be taken as proof of her political affinities, but rather as an anxious move to get some recognition and, above all, some monetary support. She was, indeed, in financial despair at the time. Richero quotes in her article a similar draft of a letter that exposes Silva Bélinzon's precarious economic situation, regardless of the identity of the possible influential addressee: 'Mi querido y recordado amigo Embajador XX [sic]: […] Estoy pasando un momento muy difícil, pues tengo desalojo de la casa donde viví 61 años. Estoy sola y perdida, en la mayor miseria' (2005: 409).

Other dedications, personal correspondence as well as some manuscripts reveal similarly distressed requests to be accepted and acknowledged as an author, and to be supported financially. As a result, panegyric letters reinforced a pitiful and patronising attitude towards her writing and encouraged a partial portrayal of Silva Bélinzon, especially from the Leftist male

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intellectuals, as a provincial or confessional writer. In line with this view, some critics affirmed that her nomination to the Nobel Prize was one of her many frantic and extravagant attempts to be recognised as a writer.[115] Jorge Arbeleche, for instance, says that Silva Bélinzon nominated herself to the literary prize in 1974, although, according to the Nobel Prize's criteria, this is not possible.[116] Others even declare that this was one of her own peculiar ways of being acknowledged, as Miguel Carbajal asserts:

> En uno de sus tours promocionales [Silva Bélinzon] había conocido a una sueca que se enamoró de un uruguayo y se instaló con él en Santa Lucía. Con su insistencia y su encanto (que también lo tenía) había logrado que su amiga le tradujera al sueco esos libros tan delgados como folletos en donde atesoraba sonetos de corte surrealista facetados como piedras preciosas. Esa misma amiga le traducía la dedicatoria y le escribía los sobres de papel manila con la dirección de una de las oficinas de Estocolmo donde se recibía material literario de todo el mundo. Y de los que sólo se leían, de seguro, los recomendados.
> ¿Alguna vez algún sueco habrá leído los libros anuales de Concepción? Ella apostaba a lo positivo y cuando hacía llegar su currículum agregaba con letras de imprenta bien grandes: postulante al Premio Nobel. La leyeran o no, su nombre y su dirección figuraba en los archivos y todos los años le enviaban el acuse de recibo de sus libros. Los sobres con el sello de la Academia Sueca se exhibían en una vitrina de la casona hedionda de almizcle y turbia de remolinos de pelos de gato que harían pasar vergüenza a las vilipendiadas pelusas de los plátanos cuando llega la primavera. Si se cultiva la fantasía no se necesita la realidad de un Nobel.[117]

Critiques such as these seem to engage in the mere anecdote and to avoid contesting certain ideas and (pre)conceptions around those facts. The linear and simplistic views that see Silva Bélinzon's poetry (and her own personality) as eccentric, incidental and uneven, base their observations on prevailing discourses that prevent them from going beyond the anecdotic circumstances and challenging those positions.

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[115] In *Sitios Abandonados* (1979), after the long list of published books and received literary prizes, it is stated: 'Concepción Silva Bélinzon. Recibió un telegrama de la Academia del Premio Nobel de Literatura de Suecia, Estocolmo, 1974, donde la informan que su libro está incluido en su Comité.'

[116] See the *Nobel Prize* webpage: <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/nomination/> [accessed 10 February 2011]

[117] "El Nobel de Concepción Silva" in *El País Portal Digital*, 17.11.2009, Montevideo, Uruguay: <http://ns.elpais.com.uy/091117/pespec-454700/espectaculos/el-nobel-de-concepcion-silva/> [accessed 10 February 2011].

Nonetheless, borrowing Bhabha's words, 'it is that desire for recognition [...] for somewhere else and something else' (1994: 12) that took Silva Bélinzon beyond her own assigned, unclear, flimsy location and made her cross frontiers and transcend her own time. It was Silva Bélinzon's relentless wish to be accepted as an author that sometimes made her write desperate, somewhat embarrassing letters and overgenerous dedications. In fact, such endeavour is nothing more than her own 're-creation of the self' (Bhabha 1994: 12). Writing meant for Silva Bélinzon the very possibility of reconstructing identity and relocating herself in the social and cultural scenario that tried to shut her up.

Agency and Creation

In opposition to the Chilean avant-garde poet, Vicente Huidobro, who claimed that "El Poeta es un pequeño Dios" (1916), Silva Bélinzon asserted that she was a messenger of God: '[s]i el poeta es verdadero, es como un ministro de Cristo' (EPC, PA). She believed poetry was a gift as well as a dictation from God and, therefore, it meant something beyond this terrestrial world. Apart from Zarrilli, she did not dare to retouch or allow anyone to correct her poems. Nevertheless, some of her manuscripts and declarations contradict this conception. In her handwritten poems, words or even verses frequently appear deleted, rewritten or rephrased. Furthermore, in an interview for the Uruguayan magazine *Imágenes* published in 1978 (a significant interview which I will quote again in chapter six), Silva Bélinzon denies the existence of a deity and claims a more human idea of God: '[a] Dios no quiero nombrarlo, le busco otros nombres. Pero él vive y muere con todos nosotros. No es más que el hombre mismo' (F.J.P. 1978: 12). A few years later, in a recorded talk with Casanova, Silva Bélinzon offers a new insight to her writing process by stating: 'corto las palabras con toda libertad' (EPC, PA). Although that liberty is denied by the fact that her chosen words are selected by their sounds and rhythms, the poem freed her words. However, her statement (the poet is like a minister of God) may reveal two different attitudes towards the writing process and agency: on the one hand, if it is God who dictates the poems, then the poet is not able to create, produce or even subvert. Thus, the writer becomes the instrument, the reproducer, the mere translator of God's words. This is, in fact, Richero's interpretation of Silva Bélinzon's writing process: '[p]ara Concepción, era Dios quien dictaba, y ella el cuerpo del sacrificio, la taquigrafía oficial, así que no iba a permitirse la vanidad de la desobediencia. Como eran dictados se escribían, gus-

taran o no' (2005: 380). Notwithstanding the idea of the poet as a superior or chosen being as shaped during *Modernismo*, by describing herself as a minister of Christ, or as a messenger of God, Silva Bélinzon is denying her own capacity of creation. She is in fact, acknowledging her social and cultural marginalisation. However, this idea also touches upon other concepts such as "escritura automática" or "poesía pura", and even Henri Bergson's theory of time and memory, as well as the Proustian idea of *mémoire involontaire*, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Significantly, her idea on writing and agency denotes the historical, political and social problems around women's subjectivity and authority that have been observed in other contemporary women writers in Latin America and elsewhere. More specifically, the idea of writing as a spiritual translation from God's will reminds us of the *monjas místicas* mentioned by Jean Franco in "'Si me permiten hablar': La lucha por el poder interpretativo" (1992). Franco states: 'Obligadas a escribir o personalmente o por medio de un amanuensis, las monjas mantienen una lucha sorda contra la palabra escrita, insistiendo que no son autoras' (114). As she explains, the other literary genres 'desde la parodia, el pastiche, la retórica, la ficción y el juego' were seen as pertaining to the devil (114), '[p]or eso las monjas quieren prescindir de la palabra y beber el conocimiento directamente del cuerpo de Cristo (114)'. This idea is reshaped and readapted in the patriarchal Uruguayan lay state of the beginning of the twentieth century. Unable to possess their own voices, women writers are pushed to find a plausible, spiritual, "supernatural" explanation to their geniuses, especially if they were not educated and well-read. Again, Luisa Luisi's critical comments on Ibarbourou's and Agustini's poetry point out this conception of women's writing and agency:

> Lo que sorprende ante todo en ambas, es ese fenómeno de mediumnidad de que habla [Maurice] Maeterlinck como explicación del trance de inspiración poética. Para el filósofo belga el poeta no expresa sus propios estados de conciencia, sino aquellos, que le dicta, a pesar de sí mismo, un genio, un demon, una musa como la llama el lenguaje popular. Y afirma como argumento, por lo menos desconcertante, esa especie de mandato, de fuerza superior que lo obliga a escribir, y que el poeta obedece como a la voz de un imperioso deber: tal como el médium a las sugestiones de su hipnotizador. (1925: 253)

Asking herself how these two women 'sin cultura literaria o científica; ni lectura casi' (254) were able to produce such astonishing writings, Luisi concludes: 'Es preciso aceptar la explicación de Maeterlinck; o bien considerar al poeta como una fuerza más que brota de la naturaleza con la misma misteriosa vitalidad de otras fuerzas' (254). Luisi's and Silva Bélinzon's

observations reveal women's writing not only as lacking in referents, models and a literary tradition but also as being unable to produce art by themselves, as Franco notes:

> Es el hombre el que tiene el poder de predicar, negado a la mujer por su condición de mujer, porque según San Pablo, *mulieres in ecclesia taceant* (las mujeres tienen que observar el silencio en la iglesia). La debilidad natural de la mujer servía como eje simbólico para afirmar el poder ideológico del clero, para separar lo racional de lo irracional, la teología de otras formas menores del conocimiento. (1992: 113)

'Habiendo restado de la mujer la posibilidad del raciocinio', Franco continues, 'el clero se veía obligado a otorgarle el espacio del sentimiento y por lo tanto permitir prácticas religiosas que podían conducir al conocimiento místico' (114). Although her analysis is placed in colonial times, Franco emphasises that the dichotomies reason/masculine and feeling/female are 'una situación que no cambia con la Independencia aunque se distribuyen las diferencias de una manera ligeramente distinta' (114). Hence, as Franco notes, these questions suggest a problem around the constitution of women's subjectivity and around woman as an authoring subject: 'La capacidad de la palabra de independizarse de la voluntad del sujeto constituye por lo tanto un peligro que se salva renunciando toda pretensión de ser autora. La palabra nunca pertenece a ellas' (115). This is observable in Silva Bélinzon's conception of creation:

> El poema es en sí una revelación. La poesía es inconclusa y no puede ser explicada, igual que el hombre. Si el poema está inconcluso es porque yo estoy inconclusa. Si no es comprensible es porque no lo escribo yo sola. El hombre debe esforzarse por penetrar ese misterio que es el poema para hacerlo junto a mí. Ambos, poema y lector, marchamos desde lo desconocido hacia lo que hay que conocer. Ningún concepto puede ayudar en esa marcha. La razón no significa nada. (Richero 2005: 380)

On the one hand, Silva Bélinzon's view of the creative process does not seem to be different from other notions of creation that were prevalent in her times. Octavio Paz stated in his book *El arco y la lira* (1956) a similar interpretation of the poetic experience: '[e]l poeta no escoge sus palabras. […] Cuando un poeta encuentra su palabra la reconoce: ya estaba en él' (45). 'En el momento de la creación', Paz maintains, 'aflora a la conciencia la parte más secreta de nosotros mismos [el] [p]oema como "revelación"' (45-47). On the other hand, Silva Bélinzon's notion of creation is a denial of her own ability to create:

> Siento que me los dictan, que [los poemas] no son míos. Por eso yo puedo librarme de mis versos, puedo hasta tener vanidad y todo y muchas cosas, porque me parece que es una persona que me los dicta, que no soy yo. […] Yo creo que sean las almas de los poetas unidos que quieren no morir… […] Alguno dice esta es mi frase, esto es lo que yo puse… Entonces ellos se alegran, y cuando empiezo a escribir se reúnen cerca de mí. (Richero 2005: 383)

Richero defines Silva Bélinzon's concept of writing as a 'curiosa definición de intertextualidad' (383). Nonetheless, Silva Bélinzon is revealing here the historical and cultural restrictions imposed on women as author(itie)s, and her continuous effort to be included within a literary tradition. In other words, her 'curious definition of intertextuality' is her artistic endeavour to place her own writing within literary history, which is, in effect, a much more common pattern of women's poetry in mid-twentieth-century Uruguay.

In a prologue to Silva Bélinzon's book *La ciudad invisible*, Chilean writer Antonio de Undurraga echoes the idea of the poet's mission as closely related to the *modernista* concept of artists as chosen beings, and therefore places Silva Bélinzon on that pedestal:

> […] Concepción es la elegida, siempre en viaje a Delfos, dispuesta a lanzar en el pecho de los dioses, como una vestal suprema, la llama justa e imprevista, unas veces oscilante y otras, relumbrantemente precisa, la llama del logos y sus misterios, de la palabra como una vara de virtud. (1959: 7)

Undurraga proceedes to make a comparison between Silva Bélinzon and Emily Dickinson as two women able to produce astonishing poetic works: 'Concepción es también una vecina de tantas, difícil de distinguir de las otras, en una calle de Montevideo, pero que en su mansedumbre e indiferencia aparentes, lleva el don de comunicar al verbo un alto voltaje, un enigma personalísimo' (8). Although Gastón Figueira interpreted this comparison not as 'influencia [but as] un paralelo lírico', and the contrast appears to be a good attempt to explain Silva Bélinzon's work, the association is, however, not established on their possible artistic connections but more on their personalities (Guerra "Sin tarjeta de visita" para. 17 of 25).[118] The result is an unpromising account that stresses the fact that an ordinary woman is able to write in an impressive way despite her awkward personality. In his brief description of Silva Bélin-

[118] Other writers and critics also pointed out this parallel. For instance, in a letter addressed to Gastón Figueira, Marosa di Giorgio writes: 'Concepción es la Emily [Dickinson] de América del Sur', undated letter, CSB's archive, BN.

zon's poetry Undurraga suggests that like Dickinson, Silva Bélinzon is a common person ('una vecina como tantas, difícil de distinguir de las otras'), who despite her meekness and indifference, has the gift to communicate in a singular way. Emily Dickinson was, for too long, attached to sexist stereotypes such as the Madcap, the Sad and the Spinster (Russ 1983: 57), and the connection of these two writers, distanced in time and place, seems to be based more on those stereotypes than on their own works. Juan Jacobo Bajarlía, in turn, alluding to Supervielle's words, traces the artistic connection between Silva Bélinzon and Dickinson in a personal letter addressed to the poet:

> […] Su fervor al mismo tiempo que me exalta, me ha dejado nostálgico. Y creo en la 'mano invisible' a que aludía Supervielle al referirse a su poesía, o en el antecedente de Emily Dickinson, recordado por Undurraga. Por Usted es eso. Tiene la mano invisible que ahora crece en La ciudad invisible, y tiene la profundidad de Emily, lacerante y sencilla como una llama que se objetiva en un verbo permanente. […] Hay una simbología ardida […]. La ciudad invisible es poesía y profecía. Invención y anuncio […].[119] (Underlined in the original)

More recently, Sofi Richero harshly diminishes the possible connections between these two poets, and ultimately ridicules Silva Bélinzon's poetry: 'Habían querido compararla con Emily Dickinson, la poeta de New England; tal vez fue apenas esto, la pantomima vital de las cartas, toda la vida apretada de la caligrafía, lo que alentó aquel paralelismo excéntrico' (2005: 405). Richero's account illustrates what Van Gerven explains as the systematic critical practice that isolates women's writing from literary history. Coincidentally enough, she uses Dickinson as an example to demonstrate this position:

> When Dickinson, or any woman poet for that matter, is isolated from all writing in her own and succeeding generations, she appears bizarre, extraneous […]. Since women writers are thus isolated, they often do not fit into the literary historian's "coherent view of the total literary culture". […] As each succeeding generation of women […] is excluded from the literary record, the connections between women…writers become more and more obscure, which in turn simply justifies the exclusion of more and more women on the grounds that they are anomalous – they just don't fit in. (Russ 1983: 80)

Silva Bélinzon's poetry refuses to be pigeonholed within the fixed, dominant categories and pushes the reader to (re)think beyond existing classifications. In fact, the absence of ho-

[119] Buenos Aires, 21 November, 1959, CSB's archive, BN.

mogeneity in her work, which seems to concern critics so much (Richero 2005: 377), is revelatory of a writing that not only incorporates and mixes different artistic tendencies, but, in so doing, exposes a more complex and multilayered writing. Constrained within strict classical forms, Silva Bélinzon's poetry integrates the techniques of the Spanish cultural Generations of 1898 and 1927, the aesthetics of Romanticism, the avant-gardes (especially those with traces of Surrealism and Ultraism), some remaining symbols from Symbolism, *Modernismo* and *Posmodernismo*, and even hints of (Neo-) baroque, as will be analysed in the next chapter, and as these verses demonstrate: 'Dejaré que se caigan las paredes. / Sin licor de cerezas los armarios / La transparente noche me concedes. │Que no estabas allí, ellos decían / Pero tú lo explicaste sin denarios / puros muslos de lágrimas servían' (*ECT*: 70). Her poetry mixes diverse aesthetics and styles, revealing a third, interstitial space that produces an alternative way of creation that it is neither pure poetry nor surrealist or colloquial, but interrelates all of them in an original and sometimes concealed way.[120] It is its imprecision and obscurity, and that apparently anachronistic and "irregular" poetic style, that makes her syncretic and disturbing writing, distinctive as well as indefinable.

In this sense, Silva Bélinzon's poetry challenges strict classifications and categorisations and exposes the eclectic, heterogeneous Uruguay of the twentieth-century that literary and political history has been trying to hide. It shows the contradiction of a poetics in constant transformation, despite its apparent rigidity and difficulty, which tries to reflect, reinvent and adapt to the modern world. It is perhaps Alejandra Pizarnik who provided one of the most suggestive definitions of Silva Bélinzon's poetry: 'Su poesía pone el mundo entre paréntesis y lo sacude y lo hace temblar tanto que todo se une y se transforma y se confunde' (Richero 2005: 378). In other words, Silva Bélinzon's poetry manages to negotiate, deconstruct and reconstruct her secluded, private life and the inherited patriarchal traditions and values. Writing became for Silva Bélinzon an empowering resource that signified both audacity and a fight against the word and the world, even if that enterprise only meant being badly judged and criticised. Her poetry gave her strength, and the very possibility of transition and transcendence; it allowed her to find a place and a meaning, a way of relocating herself in a historical discourse of ignorance and abandonment.

[120] The concept of the "third space" in Homi K. Bhabha has been recently revisited in Latin America, especially in decolonial studies. See, for instance, *Negotiating Difference in the Hispanic World: From Conquest to Globalisation* (Kefala 2011).

To conclude, this chapter has dealt with several critical accounts in order to examine how Silva Bélinzon's writing has been (mis)interpreted, (mis)understood and (mis)treated. In this way, I have shown that critics have persistently reproduced the image of a dominant critical corpus, denying the productive and distinctive role of her poetry. As shown in these first chapters, Silva Bélinzon is not the only woman writer treated in this way, but she offers a paradigmatic case to prove marginalisation of women's writing from the national and literary history. By confronting different statements at different historical times, this chapter has exposed the fascinating, as well as contradictory explanations, that reveal why and how Silva Bélinzon's work has been estranged from her context, marginalised and pigeonholed as an extravagant and eccentric poetry by the very same critical corpus that speaks of her poetry as well as secludes her. Those interpretations forget, nonetheless, that it is in those characteristics where the key to understanding her poetry rests.

CHAPTER FIVE

Symbols Going Wild
or
'La noche se deshace en llamaradas'

> **Silva:** (Del lat. *silva*, selva). 1.Colección de varias materias o temas, escritos sin método ni orden.
>
> Dictionary of *Real Academia Española*

> But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.
>
> Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* (1989: I, 50-51)

Drawing on Henri Bergson's work on time and memory and Marcel Proust's well-known idea of *mémoire involontaire*, this chapter focuses on creation and writing, time, memory and identity. It will argue that Silva Bélinzon's poetry can be read as an elliptical poetry that weaves together fragments of imagery and memory in a way that subverts, or dramatically contrasts with, the austere structure of the sonnet. This creates a puzzling, surreal, almost photographic poetry that constructs identity through an exploration of time.

In this way, this chapter will prove that Silva Bélinzon's poetry is a discontinuous montage of images that destabilises the great discourses of modernity such as homogeneity, continuity, totality, linearity and progression.[121] Here, I will maintain that Silva Bélinzon's writing can be interpreted as a virtual journey through layers of the past that deterritorialises the national hegemonic discourses of the first half of the twentieth century in Uruguay. This will help to

[121] Although I acknowledge that this is not necessarily something new in Latin America, a great part of modernist poetry and avant-garde poetry does this, my emphasis on Silva Bélinzon's poetry is precisely to offer a new and unexplored example in Uruguay.

understand why her poetry is often not understood in canonical evaluations, and yet ironically demonstrates that she is writing "about" the nation all along, and the very process of constructing identity through a relationship with the past.

Introduction

In a commentary on Uruguayan poets from 1925 to 1940, at the very end of a long paragraph, Enrique Anderson-Imbert states 'CONCEPCIÓN Silva Bélinzon (1901), whose symbols go wild' (1969: 609). She is the last Uruguayan poet mentioned in his account and the only one whose description – significantly and disconcertingly – occupies only a line. In line with Anderson-Imbert, Gastón Figueira emphasises this aspect of her writing in the prologue of *El más justo llamó* (1965): 'la simbología de esta autora es a manera de un hermanamiento de imágenes muchas veces inesperadas, bizarras quizá, en las que el subconciente [*sic*] da sus relaciones, su mundo inexplorado, su mina riquísima' (8).

As has been shown in the previous chapter, one of the singularities of Silva Bélinzon's poetry has been revealed by the incapacity of critics to relate it to a particular literary trend. By emphasising the "wildness" or eccentricity of her writing, critics have left unexplored its possible strategies and style. However, it is in that very impossibility where the significance of Silva Bélinzon's writing lies.

Her poetry is, indeed, overwhelmed by multiple and discontinuous symbols, images and ellipsis, which leave the reader amazed and perplexed. Undoubtedly, her writing needs a constant cooperation on the reader's behalf. Hence, her poetry might be seen, as Anderson-Imbert describes it, as symbolically "wild". In this sense, the chosen word seems to be extremely significant. On the one hand if, as Daniel Balderston concisely points out, 'Surrealist writing was known for the *wild sequence of images*, for automatic and collective writing [...]' (Balderston & Gonzalez 2004: 556; my emphasis), Silva Bélinzon's poetry could be interpreted in line with this artistic movement. Although this is evident in her poetry to a certain extent, one of the ways in which Silva Bélinzon alters this tendency is by using traditional poetic forms. On the other hand, this leads us to what Elaine Showalter has defined as 'the wild zone' (1981: 200). Showalter explains that 'the "wild" is always imaginary; from the male point of view, it may simply be the projection of the unconscious' (200). She suggested, at the time of writing, some 'French feminist critics would like to make the wild zone the theoretical base of

women's difference' (201). However, she refused this interpretation by arguing that: '[t]he concept of a woman's text in the wild zone is a playful abstraction: in the reality to which we must address ourselves as critics, women's writing is a "double-voiced discourse"' (201).

Silva Bélinzon's poetry is not unusual in this sense. She uses a double-voiced literary strategy that replicates, as well as subverts, the master discourses. Certainly, one of the most interesting characteristics of her poetry is the use of strict and traditional poetic forms as a vehicle for the depiction of a complex, eclectic and rich, popular, quotidian, Christian, fantastical and surreal imagery, and the way these different aspects work together. In other words, one of the most intriguing aspects of Silva Bélinzon's poetry is precisely the way it performs, negotiates, integrates and disrupts these components into an almost unchanging stylistic form. That is, the discontinuity of the poem's content (that symbolic "wildness" that Anderson-Imbert refers to in the quote above) is coupled by the continuity of the conventional form. These literary strategies create a disturbing and unpredictable poetry that offers a significant new insight into the question of women's writing, particularly in this period.

Her writing proposes a complex literary strategy that does not always follow rigorous literary patterns, although sometimes it is presented as predictable and unchanging. On the one hand, using the traditional poetic form in such a mechanical way, Silva Bélinzon's poetry is reflecting and reproducing the dominant models, the 'pedagogical' or 'powerful master-discourse', in Bhabha's words (1994: 223). On the other hand, a stylistic juxtaposition of rich and eclectic images challenges linearity and "logical" symbolic associations, revealing her poetry as an assault on literary tradition; that is, the perfomative, as an intervention of the pedagogical that 'introduces a temporality of the "in-between"' (Bhabha 1994: 212) that disturbs the historical narrative.

Ultimately, this literary strategy is an attempt to find her own voice, and one which – in fact – has reinforced her cultural marginalisation. Critics cannot see how Silva Bélinzon fits in the national literary canon, which is ironic, because she is writing from the position of someone excluded from the canon – that is, her "eccentric" style – which both reaffirms and rethinks normative styles. Whereas her writing is expressed within conventional poetic forms, repeating certain hegemonic artistic codes, its content nevertheless subverts and disturbs the authoritarian literary structure, as Luis Bravo observes:

> [S]us versos, fundidos en moldes tradicionales, rompen desde dentro, a fuerza de imaginación y rebeldía, las formas establecidas; dominan con ferocidad el instrumento del lenguaje hasta arrancarle a esa estruc-

> tura del soneto versos que por sí solos se constituyen en hallazgo. (1987: 31)

Silva Bélinzon's use of rigid and conventional poetic structures provides a consistent, traditional and recognisable form, while random and bizarre images expose a non-linear, incoherent syntactic language that contradicts and interrupts the strictness of the poem. As a result, her fragmented poetry reveals her own sense of loss, fragmentation, marginalisation and seclusion. In this sense, she is re-engaging the scraps and fragments of her own history on which coherent narratives of cultural identity are otherwise based. In other words, her literary methodology unfolds the fundamental premises for understanding her poetic world and read identity: firstly, the classical style, and the methodical and fixed rhythmical construction permit her poetry to be recognised within a literary (male) tradition. Secondly, its persistent subordination to rhyme and metre conventions exposes a tactic that oscillates between freedom and censorship. An authoritarian poetic form, like the sonnet, pushes the poet to express her feelings by carefully measuring and imprinting them within traditional lyrical forms, allowing her poetry to be integrated and accepted within a tradition. However, content and form appear to clash in the poetic space. If the symbols run wild, the form, metre and rhyme restrain them. This creates a writing that seems contradictory and paradoxical but which is, in fact, distinctive and defiant, as the poem "Las violetas" in *El plantador de pinos* (1947) demonstrates:

> Miedo de mi palabra...grito de la colina,
> mi rebelde familia con los panes medidos;
> y entre las altas hierbas escorpiones asidos
> con leyes de las gentes…y olor de gasolina.
>
> Eran aquellos meses...con alambre y neblina
> por la gran plaza roja procesión de gemidos:
> y en medio de mi cuerpo, sin trenza ni vestidos
> era un collar sin cuello capital que declina.
>
> Como un jaguar inmenso rugía en mis desvelos,
> pequeño agonizante que turbaba los cielos.
> Y desde muy abajo poderosas y mudas
>
> subían las violetas por mil oscuridades,
> partiendo los abismos de viejas libertades;
> entre las grandes bestias…deshaciendo mis dudas. (23-24)

Bleakness and scarcity, loneliness and fear, this poem intertwines personal and collective memories. Written during the context of the Second World War and the beginning of the

Cold War (1947-1956), the poem refers to these two historical moments in the first two verses of the second stanza: 'Eran aquellos meses...con alambre y neblina / por la gran plaza roja procesión de gemidos'. The verse might evoke the misty and sombre, black and white images of the concentration camps in Nazi Europe that emerged just after the end of the war, whereas the more clear allusion to 'plaza roja' (Red square in Moscow?) might support this historical association. Furthermore, the ambiguous word "capital" in the following verse: 'y en medio de mi cuerpo, sin trenza ni vestidos / era un collar sin cuello capital que declina', seems to engage not only with her personal scarceness but also with the new economic system that materialised after that period. Yet, the allusion of these events contrasts with a magical imagery that takes the poet and the poem beyond such referential terrain. Everyday objects and commodities, such as petrol (gasolina) and bread (panes) contrast with dreamlike images: 'Como un jaguar inmenso rugía en mis desvelos'. Either as symbols of faith or imagination, dream or inspiration, violets represents in the poem the source of confidence and freedom. Yet, such an original poem is enfolded in a traditional metre, rhyme and stanza. The following sonnet, "Tu música" also encapsulates the way in which Silva Bélinzon retreats into an almost non-verbal poetry that 'breaks', in Bravo's words, as well as distorts the very traditional poetic forms from within:

> Tus vastas manos de metal y pluma,
> asen las cabelleras de latidos;
> arpegios de cristal sobre la bruma…
> espejos de tus voces, suspendidos.
>
> Con palomas del mar, suave perfuma,
> tu música, de puertos encendidos;
> ritmo de filo azul, raíz y espuma
> entre tus pulsos, astros sumergidos.
>
> Más acá de tu música, desiertos.
> Ecos del corazón, ramos cedidos
> sobre puentes nocturnos, tus conciertos.
>
> Y racimos de luz son tus sonidos
> que en los hombros del aire, descubiertos,
> deshojan la corriente de gemidos. (*ERDLS*: 45-46)

The poem reveals Silva Bélinzon's act of creation as a musical composition.[122] Sight and sound merge in the poem before the reduced use of personal forms of the verbs. The supposed

[122] This is, of course, not a particularly original theme. As Andrew Thacker affirms in *The Imagist Poets* 'The

rapid succession of the music (arpeggio) is, however, suspended by the use of past participles. These verbal structures become almost the sole form of actions and descriptions of inert or submerged things (suspendidos; sumergidos). In terms of the tension between form and content, if there is a strict order in the configuration of the poem, the role of imagination is to destroy, and hence, to *trans*form such structure. That is evident in the last two stanzas of the quoted sonnets, where verbs such as 'deshacer', 'partir' and 'deshojar' reveal the act of creation as a powerful tool capable of challenging fear and solitude.

This twofold strategy unveils fundamental questions about women's writing. In particular, the strict nature of the sonnet and the determined subordination to the rhyme, coupled with the persistent repetition and the discontinuity of the poem's content open up engaging aspects to analyse and interpret in her writing, such as memory, time and identity, the literary canon and the nation. Her use of a rich imagery and the contrast with fixed poetic forms expose a way of reading women's writing in mid-twentieth-century Uruguay, as I will explore here.

Silva Bélinzon's Writing Matters

Although Silva Bélinzon used other poetic forms, her tactic of conforming to a coherent literary structure, corseted in the exacting form of the sonnet, the ballad (*romance*), or sometimes even the ode, indicates a way of writing identity. Her decision to contain the word within a rather mechanical and methodical writing noticeably contrasts with her use of unpredictable and random images that can be interpreted in line with Henri Bergson's idea of time and memory.[123]

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link between music and language, explicitly poetic language, was [...] one that many writers explored in [the first decades of the twentieth century], perhaps promptly by Walter Pater's famous fin-de-siècle claim that "all art aspires to the condition of music"' (2011: 51).

[123] I am aware of the risk of using a European male philosopher within a postcolonial, feminist approach. Nevertheless, the selection of this author is based on two main reasons: firstly, he was a contemporary of Silva Bélinzon, and his ideas were known in the Uruguayan intellectual circle of the beginning of the twentieth century. Although this does not imply that Silva Bélinzon was informed of his philosophy, it is important to stress that Henri Bergson's ideas were circulating in the country at the time. Secondly, Bergson's ideas were an attempt to question the traditional Western concepts of time.

A fundamental aspect of Bergson's notions of time and memory, which is extremely useful for this analysis, is his attempt to escape from the traditional Western idea of time as linear, as Anthony Giddens explains:

> Bergson's attempt to formulate a philosophy of time, like the more powerful notions of Heidegger, can be seen as an endeavour to escape from the 'linear' or 'unitary' view of time expressed in the world view of modern Western culture. Bergson wants to apprehend durée as fusing the continuous to the discontinuous, the order of differences that actually constitutes 'reality'. (1986: 202)

In his book *Matière et mémoire/ Matter and Memory* (1896), Bergson studies the relations between the body and the mind (later in the book considered as memory). In the first chapter, Bergson writes: '[h]ere I am in the presence of images, in the vaguest sense of the word, images perceived when my senses are opened to them, unperceived when they are closed' (1988: 17). Yet, Bergson continues, 'there is one of them which is distinct from all the others, in that I do not know it only from without by perceptions, but from within by affections: it is my body' (17). Body and memory will be, then, closely bound in his theory. As Suzanne Guerlac explains, memory in Bergson is 'defined as the survival of past images' (2006: 118). That survival occurs, basically, in two different ways. Bergson identifies two processes: one that he terms 'habit' [*habitude*] which is 'fixed in the organism' (1988: 151) and it is a repeating, automatic and mechanical action that lets us function in the world.[124] This memory is not representation, and it is connected to the present; it is matter. The second, called the 'true memory' (the memory of the imagination) is virtual, and registers past in the form of 'memory-image' (81); as he explains in more plain terms, 'one [memory] *imagines* and the other *repeats*'(82). But this is not a distinction or reproduction of a binary opposition such as body/mind; in fact, Bergson affirms that these two memories work 'side by side and lend each other mutual support' (86).[125] In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson develops his model of memory and time and explains the fundamental interaction and articulation of present, past, perception, recognition, and the two memories.

In line with Bergson's discussion, it is possible to say that these two memories are present, concatenated, intertwined and condensed in Silva Bélinzon's writing. The systematic subordi-

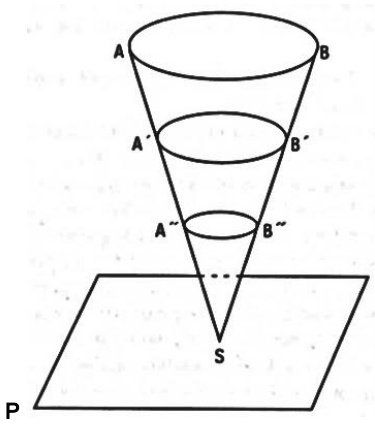
[124] Bergson offers the example of how we learn a lesson by heart in order to illustrate the mechanism of this memory (1988: 79).

[125] Bergson's ideas are much more complex than what is described here but, for the purpose of my analysis, I prefer to keep this explanation as clear as possible.

nation to rhyme can be seen as 'habit', a repeating action that is expressed in a restricted graphical space: the poem's framework. This memory is, in Bergson's words, 'lived and acted, rather than represented' (1988: 81). Alternatively, Bergson explains that 'true memory', 'regardless of utility or of practical application, stores up the past by the mere necessity of its own nature' (81); 'in it', he writes, 'we take refuge every time that, in the search of a particular image, we remount the slope of our past' (81). And the past:

> appears indeed to be stored up [...] under two extreme forms: on the one hand, motor mechanisms which make use of it; on the other hand, personal memory-images which picture all past events with their outline, their color and their place in time. (88)

This is where time comes into the picture. Bergson's famous image of an inverted cone was used to describe how memory works. The representation of an inverted memory cone (SAB) is placed on a plane (P), as the diagram shows:



At the base of the cone (AB) Bergson situates the past, which 'remains motionless, while the summit (S), which indicates at all times my present, moves forward unceasingly, and unceasingly also touches the moving plane (P) of my actual representation of the universe' (1988: 152). In this virtual cone, Bergson explains that 'between the sensorimotor mechanisms figured by the point S and the totality of the memories disposed in AB there is room [...] for thousand repetitions of our physical life, figured by as many sections A' B', A'', B'', etc., of the same cone' (162). Bergson then explains that:

> [W]e tend to concentrate ourselves in S in the measure that we attach ourselves more firmly to the present reality, responding by motor reaction to sensory stimulation. In point of fact, the normal self never

> stays in either of these extreme positions; it moves between them, adopts in turn the positions corresponding to the intermediate sections, or, in other words, gives to its representations just enough image and just enough idea for them to be able to lend useful aid to the present action. (163)

What Bergson referred to as 'pure memory', Marcel Proust famously defined as 'involuntary memory', which is an attempt to reappropriate the past through memory. In the famous passage of the *petites madeleines* in *À la Recherche du temps perdu* (1987-89), the protagonist's memories of his past are unlocked after the taste of the little tea cakes (1989: 50). Nevertheless, as David Ellison explains, 'the narrator laments the fact that his past remembrances appear in isolation as starkly illumined fragments of a largely unexamined life' (2010: 37). It is then when the involuntary memory 'can open up the gateway to those areas of human experience that otherwise would be lost to oblivion' (37). Indeed, the experiences of involuntary memory make it possible to explore the past, while writing makes it possible to perpetuate it.

Let us begin the analysis of these two memories in Silva Bélinzon's poetry; firstly, looking at memory as habit to show how form and repetition provide the poet with a sense of belonging, and, secondly, bearing in mind Bergson's concepts of 'pure memory' in order to demonstrate that her writing reveals time and memory as discontinuous, tangled and fragmented. This strategy defies the patrilineal idea of time. I am not suggesting here that, in contrast to the "patrilineal" time, there is a "matrilineal time" or a women's time, as Julia Kristeva has argued (Moi 1995: 190). Instead, my intention is to show how time is used to construct linear narratives of identity and how Silva Bélinzon undoes this process.

The De/Form: Writing and Identity

The sonnet was unquestionably Silva Bélinzon's favoured poetic form, but not the only one, and was not even stylistically accurate. Nevertheless, no matter how many times writers and friends suggested that she experiment with other poetic structures, she kept writing in a rather systematic way. For example, in several letters, Juan Jacobo Bajarlía almost begged Silva Bélinzon to abandon the sonnet: 'No le contesté a la carta anterior por falta de tiempo, me

gustó el poema. Pero protesto en iguales términos. Termine con el soneto. Su poesía está por encima de estructuras ya caducas.'[126] Also:

> Un día le pedí un poema en verso libre. ¿Qué fue de tanta esperanza? […] Aún espero su poema. Quisiera que me lo haga aunque más no fuera para mí… aunque no se publique y no vuelva 'contemporánea' a la lucha periódica. Espero esta prueba de su fuerza poética. Recuerde que soy un fanático del vanguardismo […].[127]

Due to her fidelity to the sonnet, some contemporary writers and critics have assessed Silva Bélinzon's poetry as repetitive and conservative. Nonetheless, Silva Bélinzon's use of the conventional poetic forms, seen as clichéd, has not been studied so far in any detail.

In her latest interviews, Silva Bélinzon admits her own lack and disdain of technique. While, in one of them, she stated that 'Soy libre. La técnica es aburrida' (F.J.P 1978: 12); a few years later, she would admit: 'hay otros acentos que no conozco',[128] saying later that her writing method was purely invention: '[…] un maestro de música de acá de Montevideo, me decía que si yo escribía con todas las reglas que tiene el soneto iba a escribir mejor […]. Pero yo sabía que no era mejor porque era un invento mío'.[129] In this sense, her apparent lack of stylistic knowledge can be seen as a distinctive strategic discourse to convey identity. Some linguistic and stylistic variations reveal a singular, personal writing that does not obey, ironically, any literary norms. No matter how aware of this she was, it is in her "imperfection" and contradiction, as well as in her "disobedience" of established stylistic techniques, where her literary achievements lie. This personal aesthetic exploration is one of the instances of intervention and change in her poetry. Hence, Silva Bélinzon's poetry reflects a much more complex textual strategy that critics have so far failed to notice. In the absence of a female tradition, a work written from the margins of her time, and excluded from the production of meaning, Silva Bélinzon discloses writing as an uncomfortable, uncanny, and difficult experience. In other words, Silva Bélinzon expresses not the fullness, unity and fulfilment of the writing process but the difficult task that articulating words implied for her. The almost unchanging rhythmical structure of Silva Bélinzon's poetry seems to reaffirm this view, working as a textual corset that is reinforced by the use of words that sometimes reflect and connote rigidity,

[126] Buenos Aires, 3 January 1957. CSB's archive, BN.

[127] Buenos Aires, 29 September 1958. CSB's archive, BN.

[128] Interview with EPC, PA.

[129] Ibid.

stillness and harshness, observable in many verses such as: 'El *duro* lecho cuaja mi rocío […]' (*ERDLS*: 19); 'Porque la rosa salva mi *dureza*, / y nunca fue segura compañía' (*ANA*: 29); 'Pero todo está *fijo* en mi quebranto' (*LRDO*:14); 'mi dolor es más *firme* / y belleza mi duelo […] / ciertos tallos más *quietos* / conversan sin figuras' (*LRDO*: 55); 'La desgracia divina la renuevo / con verbos *inflexibles* y distintos' (*ECT*: 13; all emphases are mine). Inflexibility, harshness, stillness, firmness and fixation are terms used to describe not only her personality but also her creative process.

The constant subordination to the sonnet, the almost invariable repetition in rhyme and metre, at times "inconsistent", not only suggests self-containment, and perhaps repression, but also memory and identity. The concept of memory as 'habit' is, here, crucial to understand Silva Bélinzon's writing. Her constant recollection of images from the past is condensed into poetic conventional forms, structured and encompassed by the usual rhyme scheme of ABABCDCEDE. As Jorge Luis Borges stated at a certain point in his life when he was getting older and going blind: '[y]ou can remember a sonnet. I can remember many sonnets […] But I can't remember free verse to memorize' (Burguin 1998: 208).[130] Accordingly, Terry Eagleton maintains that rhyme 'is one of the most familiar of all technical devices […]' (2007: 131). 'Perhaps', he affirms, rhyme 'reflects the fact that we take a childlike delight in doublings, mirror images and affinities, which have something magical (but also something disquieting and uncanny) about them […]' (131). 'In its predictability', Eagleton continues, 'repetition may yield us a sense of security' (131).

If her writing is developed from an imaginary that recreates the past through the experience of the present, her poetry becomes a secure place to develop imagination and memory, which is always elliptical and selective. In this sense, memory is structured and reconstructed within the limits of the poetic form. Whereas places concentrate memories, memories condense time within a physical, strong and enclosed space: the sonnet. It is therefore in that spatial and concise frame where the poet can fix and, paradoxically, free her own memories. The succinct, graphical, almost square space of the sonnet also reminds us of the constant allusion to the Magnolia Patio.[131] As mentioned in chapter three, if the Magnolia patio was the symbolic re-

[130] Eduardo "Pincho" Casanova recalls Silva Bélinzon as speaking in verses. In one of his latest interviews with her, Silva Bélinzon utters that she memorised all her poems and she could remember and recite many of them by heart. Nevertheless, in her eighties, her memory was very fragile and some verses slipped her mind. In recorded interview with EPC, PA.

[131] This interpretation also takes us back to one of Rosario Castellanos' poems: 'Yo soy un ancho patio, una gran casa abierta; yo soy una memoria' (2004: 210), in her book, significantly entitled, *Materia memorable*, origi-

fuge of creation, Silva Bélinzon situates her poetry in the shelter of the past. In this way, memories – as a fragmented and discontinuous experience – are framed, well-contained and imprinted in the poem. In this sense, rhyme fortifies memory. In other words, Silva Bélinzon's poetry becomes the physical place where her memories are materialised.

In a significant poem entitled "Me despierto y repito tu escritura", dream and repetition are articulated within the strict but 'easy structure' of the poetic form:

> En silencio. Lo negro deslumbrado.
> *Me despierto y repito tu escritura*;
> siempre vuelves a mí cuando he pensado…
> […]
> — El tiempo, el perro, el bosque acompañado
> con tu hábil tentativa de ternura;
> en mi pecho distinto, retratado
> de lo difícil, *fácil estructura*'. (*EPDP*: 57; my emphasis)

Once again, the constant repetition and subordination to the rhyme and metre, along with other textual strategies, express a way of reading gender identity. Silva Bélinzon was neither consciously nor openly engaged in the exploration of gender in her poetry. Nevertheless, it is possible to trace in her writing a concern for the female subject, as well as a distinctive textual strategy that I would like to explore further here.

Silva Bélinzon's writing can be understood in line with Judith Butler's notion of gender. Butler defines gender as *performative,* that is, as a historical, cultural and social construct that imitates and repeats sexual practices conceived as "original":

> [G]ender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations, and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or which parody the mechanism of that construction. (1990: 338)

In this sense, Butler explains:

> [H]eterosexuality must be understood as a compulsive and compulsory repetition that can only produce the *effect* of its own originality; in other words, compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of 'man' and 'woman', are theatrically

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nally published in 1969.

> produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real. (1991: 21)

According to Judith Butler, gender is produced as a ritualised repetition of conventions, and that ritual is 'socially compelled in part by the force of a compulsory heterosexuality' (1995: 31). Hence, if we conceive writing as the virtual terrain wherein Silva Bélinzon performs her gender, we might see Silva Bélinzon's compulsive and compulsory repetition of the sonnet and the same rhyme scheme as a textual practice to reproduce gender identity. Nevertheless, there is a possibility of change and difference or, in Butler's words, of 'de-institution' in that recurring act:

> If there is, as it were, always a compulsion to repeat, repetition never fully accomplishes identity. That there is a need for repetition at all is a sign that identity is not self-identical. It requires to be instituted again and again, which is to say that it runs the risk of being *de*-instituted at every interval. (1991: 21)

Whilst the fixed structure of the sonnet provides a coherent, conventional and systematic form in a withdrawn context, or in a context without a strong female tradition, then, the practice of symbols running wild, to insist with Anderson-Imbert's image, exposes *difference*; in other words, the very possibility of subverting the conventional poetic form. Even more, this strategy reveals what Homi K. Bhabha defines as the split between the pedagogical and the perfomative (1994: 212), understanding performative, as a discourse that 'performs the problematic totalization of the nation will' (2003: 311).

In fact, other textual strategies also show this technique of intervention and variation. In contrast to the strictness of the poetic form and its rhythmic repetition, limits are constantly addressed and altered in Silva Bélinzon's poems. Significantly, the opening poem of her first book speaks of a poem unable to be finished. It is a poem that disestablishes the patriarchal order ('the men's order'): 'el orden de los hombres, desordena' (*ERDLS*: 5). In a book coincidentally called *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory*, Carole Pateman explains that the '"disorder of women" means that they pose a threat to political order and so must be excluded from the public world' (1989: 4).[132]

Silva Bélinzon's poetry moves between the men's order and the possibility or impossibility of interfering with it. The dialectic between inside and outside, so profoundly ingrained in her

[132] Pateman recognises that women have not always been excluded from the public world, however they 'have been incorporated into public life in a different manner from men' (1989: 4).

life and in the formation of the nation-state, are generally mentioned, contested, and sometimes blurred in her poetry, as one of her verses clearly suggests: 'límites que diluyo' (*LMDA*: 46). In this poem, entitled "Al lucero", distortion, discordance and dissonance create tension between freedom and oppression. Here, borders appear again misshapen: 'Equipos discordantes / atan con suma ciencia tus cordeles; / lúcidos vigilantes / pastor de trazos fieles; / los bordes desaristan tus cinceles' (47). In the same book, in the poem "Mis santos sin abrigos", one of its verses speaks of confinement and dislocation: 'Mis santos sin abrigos, / en una blanda bruma se convocan; / cerrados los postigos / amargamente chocan; / los alistados himnos se discolocan' (49). As seen in chapter three, in the poem already quoted, "Calle Monte Caseros", after alluding to the Magnolia patio, she insists on the image of writing as a force able to distort order in a safe but enclosed place: 'Altos, altos luceros de aquel sitio seguro; / mi verso inesperado desordena un momento […]' (*EPDP*: 54). If poetry is the space of condensed memories, it is also the place where any kind of boundaries can be diluted, dilated and reshaped. Within a national history conceived as an uninterrupted, homogeneous and coherent succession of events, her strategy to confront those limits should not be seen as mere coincidence.

Writing is the political arena where identity not only disturbs limits, restrictions and principles, but also alters and questions her own Self: 'Este dudar de mi vida, / yo tan seria y resistente. […] / ¿Soy la que mi nombre dice?' […] '¿No soy más Concepción Silva / yo tan fija y tan prudente? / ¿Cambio mi mano y mi semblante / por favores más lucientes?' (*ANA*: 15); 'Lobos se erguían demasiado grandes / damas y caballeros distinguidos; / plebeyo grito de ¿quién soy? Perdona / sabiduría' (*EMJL*: 57); 'Y mi fracaso de vino era pequeño. / ¿Usted es Concepción? entonces rece / y no por su victoria tanto empeño' (*ECT*: 64). Writing also becomes the very possibility of freedom, change and evasion: 'Habla su lengua fina: / de las pequeñas casas que evadí' (*EPDP*: 63). It is also an ambiguous force able to subvert, transform, communicate and illuminate, as well as segregate: 'Alargando los brazos / levanté con dulzura el corazón; entre piedras y lazos / pude abrir un balcón'. By subverting the natural event, the poem is the silence that breaks the storm; it is a 'gran navío / el silencio quebrando la tormenta; la sombra en torno mío / deshaces como menta; / ya tu muda linterna me alimenta' (*EPDP*: 65). Moreover, writing is also described as an evil force that disturbs tranquillity, certainty and order: 'Qué demonio dejó la puerta abierta / para que entre la duda como cierta / entre la ropa limpia y los disfraces' (*LRDO*: 74). Above all, poetry is a strong sign of identity: '¿Por qué no has de ser tú, sin escritura, / de automáticas lágrimas lavada, / con las ciervas en llamas soldadura?' (*LMDA*: 14). Her writing is, indeed, her very own space to per-

form identity, to overcome solitude, to fill the empty spaces, as she claimed: '− [¿] Y qué son las palabras? (an interviewer asked her in 1978) – Cuentas de colores. Con ellas formo cosas, cubro espacios vacíos […]' (1978: 12).[133]

If writing provides Silva Bélinzon with a sense of identity, misunderstanding and incomprehension of her poetry seem to seclude the author even further from her milieu, as she writes: 'Miles no comprendían mi trabajo / de la pequeña marcha…dividida; / no pudieron quitarme aquel legajo / tu misteriosa letra conocida' (*ANA*: 48); and 'ciertos libros no entiende todavía' (*ECT*: 18). In the poem "Yo sola entre mujeres", the poet seems to assume the "old-fashioned" character of her writing: 'Me separan de usted los huracanes / cabello al aire suave del infierno / yo sola entre mujeres y ademanes / y un escrito de amor nada moderno' (*ECT*: 43). Indeed, if modernity is understood as a coherent, continuous and homogeneous process, her poetry is anything but that.

The apparently paradoxical concept of writing lies in its unquestionable power. The poetic act is expressed as an arduous practice that dignifies, acknowledges and resituates the writer in a more distinguished place: 'Sólo puedo decir: Allí yo estuve. / Una, diez, muchas veces invitada, / solo puedo decir: Allí yo estuve / y fui dignificada y aceptada' (*ANA*: 14). But, in the next stanza, the 'unbearable fight of words' that is writing becomes a commodity for people as well as judges: 'Ahora bajo el mar todas mis cabras / mi colección de objetos y de peces / la lucha insoportable de palabras / mercadería de almas y de jueces' (*ANA*: 14). Assuming a baroque attitude, here Silva Bélinzon exposes the poet's ambiguous cultural position as an artisan who is able to produce a cultural artifact (Beverley 1988: 34). Memorable verses such as 'sorda y recta fabrico mi teclado' (*LMDA*: 9) expose her creative process as an isolated as well as a persistent and inevitable labour: '¿quién puede detener tantas palabras?' (*LMDA*: 37). In "El secreto", writing is also described as a restless force able to reveal secrets and disentangle mysteries, but also to disturb conscious control: '¿Por qué no me escondiste la palabra / que deshizo el secreto de mi giro?'(*ANA*: 9). From *Amor no amado* (1950) onwards writing is more clearly defined and depicted as a handcraft, sometimes perceived as a struggle or as a powerful tool able to reveal, defeat and transform solitude and marginalisation.

[133] The interviewer is identified as "F.J.P".

Defying Linearity/Deifying Memory

On the one hand, if the systematic use of a similar poetic structure is a strategy practised by Silva Bélinzon as a form of memory [habit], it is also a need and an attempt to be inserted and recognised within a literary tradition. On the other hand, the uncommon images of her poems, as well as the assault on the grammatical and syntactical order, clearly noticeable throughout her creative production, not only challenge the linguistic regime but also the idea of time as linear and chronological. This is where Bergson's concepts of time and 'pure memory' shed some light on Silva Bélinzon's poetic "wildness". Her poetry might be difficult to read because the poet traces a journey through a labyrinthine time where the present and different pasts coexist, interact, and sometimes overlap. In line with Bergson and Proust's work, this exposes 'pure memory' or 'involuntary memory'; that is, time and memory are unpredictable, inapprehensible, incomplete and, indeed, discontinuous. Silva Bélinzon's defiance of literary linearity or coherence denotes the incapacity to grab time, to remember the past in a chronological and logical way. If past and present coexist, skip, jump and fade in Silva Bélinzon's writing, as in the way images are described from one verse to another, it is because her poetry can be seen, borrowing Bergson's words, as a 'series of snapshots' (1988: 331). In other words, if symbols run wild, it is because the poet is jumping "incoherently" around time. Hence, time appears in her poetry to be non-relational, non-logical, non-coherent, non-homogeneous, and non-rational, able to disrupt the hegemonic conception of order, as she significantly writes: 'el orden de mi Vida los aterra' (*EMJL*: 39). Similar examples have been drawn by feminist interpretations. In *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, Hélène Cixous explains Lispector's *Água Viva* as a narrative that challenges the classical or "normal" textual order. Although Cixous is referring here to a different literary genre, her analysis is relevant to my argument. She states that Lispector's book 'escaped the first rule of text. It is not linear, not formally constructed […]. As there is no story, one can start anywhere, in the middle, at the end' (1990: 15). Cixous continues explaining that '[t]he text follows movements of the body and enunciation […]. Rather than a narrative order, there is an organic order' (15).

Doubly marginalised (as a woman and a writer, if this division is at all possible), Silva Bélinzon's poetic strategy challenges the homogeneous discourse of the nation, the linear time of the modern nation, or the linear history of the nation's time that left women misrepresented, as has been analysed throughout this thesis.[134] This reinforces the interpretation of a poet(ics)

[134] In *Women's Writing in Latin America*, Sara Castro-Klarén refers to the 'double marginality' of Latin Ameri-

displaced in time. Recurrent and unpredictable questions in her poems not only show a confused poet, but, more importantly, a poet lost in time. Many of her verses illustrate this idea of time as erratic, incoherent and seemingly illogical, but the following one greatly exemplifies the intricacy of her symbolic associations:

> Me cura muchas veces cien mil nueve
> del príncipe del norte y del tirano;
> no sirve del hechicero… pero mueve
> las piedras y vestidos de verano.
>
> Después del abandono de la nieve
> no lloraba la carne de mi mano;
> sino mi corazón que ya se atreve
> a luchar con la industria de mi hermano.
>
> Y me dijo: Te doy lo que tú quieras;
> no habrá conspiración entre mis zares
> ni pomitos de olor en las riberas.
>
> El tilo tomaré aunque frío.
> Qué nubes más curiosas ¿son bazares?
> la dalia sin papel es tu navío. (*LRDO*: 33-34)

Along with the use of past, present and future tenses, time's coordinates are given in words such as "verano", while winter is implicit in "nieve" and "frío", and even in the now old-fashioned expression "pomitos de olor" (cosmetics) that takes us back to a nineteenth-century Uruguayan jargon.[135] Moreover, to express this effect of time, the poet not only mixes discontinuous images, but also situates actions in fairy-tale, fantastic, surreal or remote places. There is indeed a dislocation, not only in time but also in space, in 'del príncipe del norte y del tirano', supported by the image of 'snow' as a sign of winter more typical of Northern countries. Clearly, the line also suggests domination and power.

Nevertheless, time jumps from one line to another, tracing a virtual journey of past memories and dream images. The surprising line 'qué nubes más curiosas ¿son bazares?' has the power to break with the flow of the poem. This unpredictable question destabilises the *normal* flux of the reading. The line stands alone. Neither the previous nor the subsequent sentences

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can women writers in relation to the Anglo-American and French feminism that has ignored their productions (Castro-Klarén, Molloy & Sarlo 1991: xiii).

[135] "Pomitos de olor" is mentioned in the Spanish translation of the *Bible* in Isaiah 3: 16-23 as part of women's personal objects (such as apparel, jewellery and cosmetics).

seem to support, precede or follow such an image logically. The question in this stanza pushes the reader to reconstruct Silva Bélinzon's virtual/mental process, and exhorts us to ponder the question, where are we now? The interruption of the poem's flow could be interpreted as an attempt to expose its artificiality, but, perhaps, it also reflects the idea that time and memory are neither predictable nor linear.

In this sense, by disregarding coherence and linearity, Silva Bélinzon's poetry dismantles the complex structure of patriarchal domination. More obscure than the rest of the poem, the first stanza seems to support this idea. Whilst, in the first and second verse, an undetermined subject (the poem itself?) protects the poet from men's power (evident in the nouns "príncipe" and "tirano"), in the second stanza, abandonment more clearly prefigures the poet's sadness. Again, the last verses seem to restate the patriarchal surroundings and the need to break away. In the last two lines of the same stanza, the poet's heart dares to fight against her brother's 'industry'. Without wishing to simplify Silva Bélinzon's poetry, 'industria' stands for many symbolic associations, including power, production and, indeed, modernisation.

However, while this poem exposes an unconventional content that destabilises a "coherent" sequence of events, other poetic strategies are used elsewhere to fracture the traditional and rigid poetic form. In the poem significantly entitled "La dama del soneto", Silva Bélinzon reveals the dialectical connection between the body and the poem: 'Mi fuerza ha decrecido en este barco / (crecido y decrecido) / de metro y consonantes / de arriba libres eran. […] Atada y desatada / medida y desmedida. […]' (*EMJL*: 49-50). Oceans, rivers and streams are recurring images in literature that traditionally have been interpreted as symbols of life and time, with Jorge Manrique's *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* being one of the great examples in Hispanic poetry. In Silva Bélinzon's poem, the rigorousness of the lyrical structure is broken by the image of the boat, which alongside the play of oppositions, suggests a wandering, fluctuating, flowing body/text that oscillates from one state to another. In his dictionary of symbols, Juan Eduardo Cirlot says that there is a 'connection between the boat and the human body' (2002: 30). From an essentialist and almost holistic conception, French feminists, such as Luce Irigaray, have also associated earth, water and fire with the origin of our bodies. In this sense, Silva Bélinzon's poetry reminds us the words of Irigaray's: '[h]ow can I give you once more that rigidity you seek? My body is fluid and ever mobile' (1992: 25). In Silva Bélinzon's poetry, these images and symbols are not uncommon, (and again trying not to run the risk of explaining her symbolic realm in a simplistic way and from plain archetypes or essentialist models), rivers, boats and ports suggest the idea of time through transit and movement. In fact, such movement is not necessarily progressive or linear, but it swings.

The poem "El canto de los relojes vivos" reaffirms time as motion, significantly unfolding the idea of a journey where the poet travels through time and space. Here, the idea of virtual travel allows memories to be liberated:

> Conozco que el reloj me descolora,
> yo vi al reloj llorando por los muertos
> su aguja señalaba única aurora,
> cuando el latido quedó sin puertos.
>
> −Yo sé por qué florecen los desiertos
> y el vaso de las lámparas devora;
> sus números borrados ya son ciertos
> su viaje ilimitado me enamora.
>
> −Arrodillada voy en hondos vuelos;
> mis zapatos gastados ya me estrujan
> como rodar de muebles por los suelos.
>
> Sobre piel de culebra comprobados;
> sus horas preparadas me dibujan
> tremendos nomeolvides libertados. (*EPDP*: 42)

The natural life cycle represented in the clock, and manifested in the body ('el reloj que me descolora […]'), suggests an inevitable duration (*durée* in Bergson's terms) which contrasts with the poet's virtual and unlimited journey. If her body is bound to the present, her mind is able to escape, to travel in time. Nevertheless, the long virtual journey ends rapidly, and the poet is violently pushed down to the quotidian reality ('mis zapatos gastados ya me estrujan / como rodar de muebles por los suelos'). Borrowing some of Bergson's ideas, as developed in *Creative Evolution* (1911), the textual effect contrasts the 'immobile' form of the sonnet with the constant fluidity of reality. '[O]ur perception', Bergson argues, 'manages to solidify into discontinuous images the fluid continuity of the real' (328). While images seem to be fixed in the poetic realm, their content reveals a flowing narrative that suggests a mental, virtual journey, perhaps a dream, which would correspond with the upper layer of Bergson's cone of time.

It is in-between pre-existing borders where the poet manages to move freely. This succinct space allows the poet to wander in time: 'Y entre cercos confusos plácida voy y vengo; / palabras y razones dicen gallardamente, / que escarbando el abismo tus raíces sostengo […] (*LMDA*: 16). In a poem simply entitled "A Jules Supervielle", the poet traces a journey through time using words that connote movement:

Volando
a través de otro día o del verano
en cualquier otra parte
sobre la gaviota posada
y todas las cosas
me guardó su reloj, y estaba roto.

Pisoteando la sangre
(en cien años mejor no usar sombreros)
menos triste que antes
menos triste que todo.

Llevándome a sí mismo
fuera del mediodía
sobre abejas doradas
y aquel suelo estrellado de capullos
la fecha y el lugar de nacimiento:
un olor de alcanfor y de glicina.

Y detrás de las sombras
mansísimo y modesto
un mundo diminuto
en constante y medio tironeo. (*EMJL*: 40-41)

This poem also illustrates the idea of time.[136] Disconnected images make the reader follow a similar imaginary, virtual journey in time: 'Volando / a través del otro día o del verano / sobre la gaviota posada'. The idea of no time or any time is reflected in the conjunction 'or' that links two possible alternative times (the other day or the summer). More explicitly, the idea of being "out of time" is reinforced by the broken watch which does not even belong to her, and which is also kept away from the poet: 'me guardó su reloj, y estaba roto'. In the following stanza, memory goes back to childbirth and childhood. The body remembers through different senses (smell, taste and sight) and recalls past memories, while the line 'fuera del mediodía' underpins the idea of being, once more, out of a linear time. It is also noteworthy that grammar rules are particularly disruptive in this poem, where subjects and objects seem to alternate in a rather ambiguous and confusing manner ('me guardó su reloj' and "Llevándome a sí mismo'), which destabilises the linguistic coherence and the "normal" flux of reading, under-

[136] The structure of this poem seems to contradict my argument on her systematic use of traditional poetic forms, since here she is using free verse. However, this example is taken from her book *El más justo llamó* published in 1965, in which, as will be analysed in the next chapter, Silva Bélinzon started to use more lax poetic forms under a critical political and social period in Uruguay.

lining the notion of being excluded from the Symbolic Order. The last verse is probably the most revealing one, suggesting a parallel (and diminutive) world in constant change and negotiation ('en constante y medio tironeo'). Marginalised, outside the nation, left in the limbo of the national projects and the literary history, Silva Bélinzon is a poet lost in time.[137]

A Poetry of Chiaroscuro

There is another way in which her poetry can be seen to exist "outside" of the recognised traditions that also reinforces the model of time functioning in her aesthetic. Silva Bélinzon's literary strategy is usually focused on the bare event of the experience, appealing to memory and feelings through images, colours, sensations and light. In this sense, the use of light in her poetry not only recalls a visual effect but also reaffirms Bergson's ideas of time and memory: 'Essentially virtual, the past cannot be grasped as past unless we follow and adopt the movement by which it opens into a present image, emerging from the shadows into the light of the day' (1988: 135). Using this metaphoric wording, lighting works in Silva Bélinzon's poetry as a literary strategy that highlights Bergson's ideas of time/memory. Certainly, light evokes and reinforces past personal memories and even dreams; the past returns in the form of fragmented images, and the poem thus becomes a montage.[138] The use of chromatic images tinges her verses, creating, what I would like to call, a poetry of the chiaroscuro which recalls not only baroque paintings but also (neo-) baroque aesthetics, as I will now explore.

Discussing Sara de Ibáñez's work, Marci Sternheim observes that there is a 'literary syncretism – an intermingling of various literary styles from several different periods – that is the hallmark of the neobaroque is a definitive feature' (Maier & Valis 1990: 55). Sternheim explains that, unable to find a broader female literary canon, Ibáñez had to 'depend heavily on male models' (54). As 'a student of the rich Hispanic avant-garde tradition that flourished in the 1920s', Sternheim continues:

[137] As this thesis tries to demonstrate, Silva Bélinzon is no exception. Amir Hamed has also referred to contemporary woman poet, Susana Soca as being 'relegada a un limbo de la historia literaria uruguaya' (1991: 10).

[138] Bettina Bergmann mentions that, in Roman times, 'Cicero compared the making of memory images to painting a picture' (1994: 226).

> Ibáñez was directly influenced by the poets of this movement and their works. Like other poets of her generation – most notably José Lezama Lima – Ibáñez is thus […] most properly categorized as a poet whose work reflects one of the most important literary traditions since the avant-garde: the neobaroque. (55)

Amir Hamed also notices something similar in Uruguayan poets Juan Cunha and Susana Soca:

> Como es sabido, la tradición nocturna en poesía tiene precedentes más que prestigiosos. Entre otros, pueden ser hallados, con las diferencias del caso en el primer romanticismo alemán, con el hímnico Novalis y en Hispanoamérica, ya en el barroco y deslumbrante "Primero sueño" de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Una oscuridad como la privilegiada por Sor Juana fue retomada, por ejemplo, por Lezama Lima, quien consideraba que la oscuridad, cayendo como *un cono de sombra* sobre el objeto tratado, se volvía un proceso de redescubrimiento. Esa tradición, de la divagación nocturna y reflexiva de Sor Juana, podría ser retenida para pensar la poesía de Susana Soca. (1991: 48-49; my emphasis)

Along similar lines, some writers and critics, such as Gastón Figueira, have suggested that Silva Bélinzon's poetry is 'barroca y existencial', although this has not been actually explained.[139] The intention here is not to pigeonhole Silva Bélinzon's writing either as baroque, neobaroque or even as surrealist − a strategy that would go against my main reasoning – but to keep exploring the various literary models present in her poetry. These different approaches allow some understanding of the complex character of her writing.

The terms baroque and neobaroque are in essence complex and challenging concepts that have been applied in art from the early modern period to late and postmodern times in Europe and Latin America (Martín-Estudillo & Spadaccini 2005: ix). Much has been discussed about the influence and presence of baroque and neobaroque in Latin America as an artistic expression and as a movement but, apart from recent studies on Marosa di Giorgio, not much has been said about its expression in Uruguay.[140] At first glance, it is not only the hermetic and almost syncretic character of Silva Bélinzon's writing, but also the very common baroque concepts such as *difficoltá* and "malformation" that come to mind (Beverley 1988: 30). In this sense, I am directly referring here to its etymology and using it to mean 'irregularly shaped;

[139] In *Canal Social Enciclopedia*, Madrid <http://www.canalsocial.net/ger/ficha_GER.asp?id=9526&cat=literatura> [n.d.] [accessed 24 May 2010].

[140] Marosa di Giorgio (1932-2004), Roberto Echavarren (1944) and Eduardo Espina (1954) are considered as neobaroque authors in Uruguay.

whimsical, grotesque, [and] odd', characteristics that have been somehow assigned to Silva Bélinzon's poetry.[141] Needless to say that I am aware of the fact that neobaroque is a much more comprehensive concept that eludes any simplistic definition. Yet, it is perhaps Severo Sarduy's greatest contribution to the discussion of this artistic style in Latin America that may help to understand Silva Bélinzon's symbolic "wildness", as Anderson-Imbert would have it. Sarduy introduced the concept of *retombée* as: 'un neobarroco es un estallido en el que los signos giran y se escapan hacia los límites del soporte sin que ninguna fórmula permita trazar sus líneas o seguir los mecanismos de su producción' (1999: 1375).

Departing from this important notion, Mabel Moraña's article "Baroque/Neo-Baroque/Ultra-Baroque: Disruptive Readings of Modernity" helps to expand the analysis of this artistic expression in Latin America: 'The neobaroque is not […] a *creative art*, but an *art of citation*. Recycling, pastiche, fragmentation and simulacrum intervene in the territory of cultural and historical memory, and reactivate it in combinations that are, at the same time, evocative and parodic' (Martín-Estudillo & Spadaccini 2005: 253). In this sense, to suggest that Silva Bélinzon's poetry might be seen as neobaroque may seem ineffective. However, it is the idea of palimpsest, recycling, anachronism, fragmentation, symbolic excess, grotesque and even oddness that makes me align her poetry with this expression. It is precisely that elusiveness, as well as the "imperfect", hybrid character of her writing that stands out. Although it can be argued that there is not much parody or satire involved in her work, my point here is that Silva Bélinzon's poetry resists literary categorisation even though, it seems to be an attempt to identify with some of those tendencies. What seems contradictory, pointless or incongruent is, in fact, evidence that her poetry eludes and problematises strict definitions.

As has been noted in relation to the Mexican baroque writer Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's poetry, Silva Bélinzon's poetry also uses a 'pictorial technique of contrast between dark and light applied to the nocturnal landscape' (Faraudo 2009: 65). Silva Bélinzon's writing depicts places full of deep variations in light and shade that contrast with bold colours such as red and blue. This effect intensifies depth and artifice. Reinforcing the idea of the poet travelling *incoherently* in time, in her first book, *El regreso de la Samaritana*, it is possible to find these images and tonalities portraying silence and sometimes sacrifice, discretion and ignorance, fear and bitterness, mystery and concealment, loneliness and isolation. The poem "La linterna" illustrates this process:

[141] *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Nutrida de lunadas ocres
por agrias sendas anduve
con mi pálida linterna
sin tus pasos.

Cabellera escrutadora nacarada
¿qué nocturnos refugios malbaratas?

Los senderos más desiertos
enhebran legua tras legua,
rondando, siempre rondando.

Iba su luz extinguiendo
cosecha ajena espigando.
Para alimentar sus luces
exprimo mi propia lumbre. (17-18)

Lighting works here as a textual strategy that reinforces the idea of time/memory and identity. In contrast to the remote and deserted backdrop, the poem also strongly represents a circular, continual movement by the use of the verb "rondar" in the gerund, emphasized by its repetition and the use of the adverb "siempre" ('rondando siempre rondando'). Even under the most bleak and desolate conditions, the poem conveys a sense of change and transition. Nevertheless, the line also suggests a sense of self-sacrifice and defeat.

In this particular book, the light is always low, ephemeral, evanescent or fading away. There is brume and penumbra but never clarity. The misty, obscure, and sometimes ochre landscape that Silva Bélinzon depicts in her first book reflects her own sense of identity, and once again, reinforces memory and dream, as the following poem "Mujer" demonstrates:

Soledad en las manos y en los ojos,
trémula dalia que la niebla esfuma;
de la tierra los zumos y abrojos;
de los astros, los círculos de espuma.

Huyen las horas por sus flecos rojos,
talón de cobre y corazón de pluma;
cambia la sombra el jade de sus ojos
por guirnaldas de estrellas en la bruma.

Desde perdido puerto sin caminos…
ciudad de tulipanes infecundos,
la ciñe, con banales torbellinos;

y los pálidos luceros errabundos,
reflejos de mensajes cristalinos,

se encienden en su túnica, profundos. (*ERDLS*: 35-36)

'Turn-of-the-century representation of woman, in Latin America and elsewhere', Sylvia Molloy explains, 'is haunted by dismemberment' (Castro-Klarén, Molloy & Sarlo 1991: 116). 'In a frenzy of synecdoche, (male) poets', she continues, 'will exalt woman's hair, her eyes, her feet, one foot, a glove, a stocking as loci of desire' (116). Silva Bélinzon seems to reproduce this conventional depiction of women by using similar tropes to represent her in this poem. If the title were not "Mujer", it would be difficult to know that, in fact, it alludes precisely to the description of a woman. Nonetheless, the poem's symbolic elusiveness can be seen as the impossibility of defining and identifying a *woman*. The poet thus describes her in the mist, almost by her absence. Constrained by an infertile city, she (woman or poet, or both) is caught in banal whirlwinds. In this swift, erratic, fantastic and sombre world, imagination is the only source able to lighten and root the poet ('y los pálidos luceros errabundos, / reflejos de mensajes cristalinos, / se encienden en su túnica, profundos').

In the same book, this poem immediately enters into dialogue with the next one, "El retrato rojo", which reaffirms the artistic character of a poetry of the chiaroscuro.[142] It is, once more, the portrayal of a woman defined by synecdoche:

En el salón de pintores
fina gasa misteriosa;
en madrugada de dalias
sombra y lumbre, lumbre y sombra.

Largas pestañas de viento,
cintas y pulseras rojas;
gusto salobre en el arte…
por encima de las cosas.

Zumo de luna y arena
es rocío de las horas.

Cofre lejos de los mares,
abre sus flecos sin hojas;

[142] The poem might be alluding to a portrait created by Uruguayan artist José Cúneo, as Orfila Bardesio recalls: 'En un apartamento de la calle Rivera y Juan Paullier vivía el crítico [Zum Felde] […] junto a la poeta y novelista Clara Silva. […] Allí su esposa regalaba un generoso apoyo afectivo a los amigos en la elegante recepción donde reinaba su retrato de mujer en rojo, del pintor Cúneo' (2006: 117). If so, the pictorial character of Silva Bélinzon's poetry becomes even more evident. In that sense, she is "rewriting", re-presenting the portrait through words.

capa de profundo raso…
un alma trémula y sola.

En el lienzo está mirando:
por encima de las cosas;
un canto que llega lento…
entre volados de aurora.

En madrugada de dalias,
sombra y lumbre, lumbre y sombra.

Entre los barrotes finos,
vestida de capa roja;
un canto, calma temblando…
por encima de las cosas. (37-38)

The dark and sombre space contrasts with intense and bold colours, such as red and blue. The poem's obscurity is significantly accompanied by its ambiguous images and concealed meaning. Lighting not only intensifies dream and memory, as well as solitude and seclusion, but it also suggests the pictorial and/or even cinematographic effect of her poetry. Again, this is a very baroque idea. As Maravall states: '[i]t has been said that the works of the baroque are dynamic compositions, manifestations of an art of movement that was cinematographic, engaged in capturing the instant in its instability, in its transitoriness […]' (1986: 188).[143]

Nevertheless, it might be argued that these characteristics can be interpreted in line with avant-garde aesthetics. Obscurity and hermeticism were much more typical characteristics of the historical avant-gardes, as Alberto Julián Pérez notices: 'El poeta [vanguardista] se resiste a ajustarse a un canon y solo acepta como norma poética la libre asociación de imágenes' (1992: 51). If so, Silva Bélinzon's work can be seen as a poetry closer to the historical avant-gardes, as Beverley defines them: '[las] vanguardias […] buscaban la expresión metafórica "oscura" y chocante, la fragmentación del referente, [y] el "collage" de imágenes' (51) as a form of contestation. In addition, writing on Argentinean writer Oliverio Girondo's poetics, Francine Masiello notices the connection between painting and literature:

> De hecho, la relación entre poesía y pintura también lleva a cabo otro proyecto común compartido por los devotos de la vanguardia: promover un espectáculo de la modernidad. Desde el marco visual se nos incita al descubrimiento de una cultura de objetos. Un espectáculo de cosas, tanto manufacturadas como naturales, inaugura una reordena-

[143] In an aforementioned interview given in 1978, Silva Bélinzon significantly said: 'Por eso me gusta el cine. Imagen y palabra en versión única. La acción es irrepetible. Es esa única.'(F.J.P. 1978: 12).

> ción de estructuras formales, una atención detenida en el espacio, y las relaciones contiguas entre los objetos. Aún más, a medida que estas 'cosas' van siendo reformuladas, el lenguaje poético también encuentra un nuevo alcance y nuevas dimensiones imprevistas. (1998: 88)

As Masiello points out, painting and poetry played an essential role in the definition of the spectacle of modernity. As she also confirms, like any other avant-garde writer, Girondo's aim was to expose the artificiality of the poetic form.

Moreover, my use of the Bergsonian theory to analyse Silva Bélinzon's poetry may also suggest some similarities of her writing to English critic and poet T. E. Hulme, who was very much interested in Bergson's work.[144] It might even share some aesthetic aspects with Imagist poetry, a North-American movement that, as the name suggests, gave a special importance to the visual meaning of poetry.[145] However, in my view, Silva Bélinzon's textual collage or montage of images is an expression of a poetics that conveys a sense of identity through a complex exploration of time. In the ambivalent relationship with her literary milieu and with a literary tradition unable to provide consistent models of identification, Silva Bélinzon tried to find her own voice away from the hegemonic discourses, while incorporating them. In another of her poems, she eludes any possible artistic definition and reveals her poetry as a poetics of her own:

> Uno mismo es el mismo de uno mismo
> con sus revelaciones y sus aves;
> qué pálidos están en el abismo
> cual náufragos hambrientos sin más naves.
>
> Uno mismo es el dueño de uno mismo
> aunque lleguen los cordeles y jarabes;
> no hay distancia novela ni cubismo […]. (*LRDO*: 13)

The strong sense of individuality and artistic independence that this poem exposes is highlighted by the clear reference to (and denial of) the popular literary genre (novel) and the avant-garde aesthetics (cubism). This is, perhaps, Silva Bélinzon's greatest achievement: while she keeps faithful to the traditional literary forms, and to some extent repeats the domi-

[144] For a concise analysis of the Imagist group, see *The Imagist Poetry* (Thacker 2011).

[145] In CSB's archive at the BN, it is possible to find a typewritten letter sent by T.S. Elliot's secretary thanking her for sending one of her books to the North-American poet. Elliot is considered part of the Imagist group.

nant discourses, she is, nonetheless, able to find and exercise her own voice, even if her voice is challenged by her social and cultural marginalisation.

In sum, Silva Bélinzon's writing manifests a conflicting identity in a withdrawn context that reflects the very complexity and heterogeneity of her times. Hence, her poetry allows us to identify a much more multifaceted cultural panorama of Uruguay of the mid-twentieth-century. As a "minor" poet, Silva Bélinzon's intricate, hermetic and syncretic poetry resists any specific and strict categorisation and, yet, it expresses the complex and ambivalent interrelation between her times and her own identity. Certainly, her tactic of not conforming to a linear or logical linguistic structure enclosed in a conventional metric suggests a way of reading gender identity.

Finally, in this chapter, I have shown that Silva Bélinzon's poetry reflects, interposes and negotiates the complexity of the (post)modern world. Through a more comprehensive analysis of her writing, I have considered time as a fundamental aspect to understanding her poetic realm by drawing on the insight of Bergson's theory. In opposition to the homogenous national discourses of the beginning of the twentieth century, I have argued that her poetry resists and challenges time as a chronological, uniform and sequential event. In doing so, her work exposes, as well as disestablishes, the nation's homogeneous discourse that left women misrepresented and outside the great discourses of the nation-state.

CHAPTER SIX

The Abandoned Sites: Poetry under/in Crisis

> [T]he struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.
>
> Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.

Silva Bélinzon's life and writing was developed within changing and antagonistic historical periods. In her long life, she witnessed the myths surrounding the *Batllista* era and the collapse of democratic stability. This section examines Silva Bélinzon's poetic production written under the country's political and economic deterioration, followed by twelve years of military rule in the 1970s and the slow return to democracy in the mid-1980s. Studying her last poetry books, published from 1962 to 1979, and considering some of her unpublished poems and manuscripts, this chapter will show how her production not only conflates with the difficult economic, political and social situation in Uruguay in the second half of the twentieth century, but also challenges it.

Introduction

Seen as purely solipsistic, hermetic and almost self-indulgent poetry, especially in opposition to the politically committed poetry from the 1960s onwards, critical interpretations – based mainly on traditional and stereotypical ideas – have overlooked, denied or ignored Silva Bélinzon's capacity to connote reality through her poetry. Although her poetry was not politically committed in an explicit manner, feminist and postcolonial theories have been showing in the last decades that the personal is, indeed, the political. In contrast to the critical corpus that has seen her poetry as politically detached, her writing from the 1960s visibly reflects and defies the conflictive world in which her writing was immersed.

From the 1960s, Silva Bélinzon's books merge the grave political and social situation with her own personal life; lonely, she was getting older, had great financial and health difficulties, her relatives started to die, and she was living on her own trying to cope with her precarious life. Outside, the world was going through a conflictive and revolutionary era, marked by a series of events that shook humankind: May 1968, the Prague Spring, guerrilla warfare in Latin America, the Vietnam War, as well as political, cultural and sexual revolutions spreading across the globe. In the 1970s, many countries in Latin America started long periods of dictatorships and military rule. In Uruguay, by the late 1950s, the economic, political and social stability that the country seemed to be so proud of, started to fall apart, as Juan Rial explains:

> [P]rosperity – based on agricultural exportations came to an end − a protracted period of social and economic crisis ensued. Thereafter, the paternalistic state failed to fulfil its customary role as "protector of the people". It was forced to abandon its function of mediator and arbiter of social demands, and it frustrated the expectations of poorer sectors of society. Class conflicts erupted over the calm surface of politics, and as these conflicts became increasingly visible, they prompted the gradual abandonment of consensual policies in favour of defensive and repressive measures. (1992: 91)

The times of the "Happy Uruguay", the "Uruguay of the Fat Cows" and the "Suiza de América" ended. This is what Rial calls the process of 'de-Batllistization' of the state (1992: 91). The political, social and economic situation in Uruguay started to deteriorate long before the actual *coup d'état* in June 1973. For complex reasons that exceed the scope of this study, by the late 1960s high inflation, public deficit and currency devaluation hit the country's economy, provoking an unprecedented political and social crisis. The fall of the welfare state meant an important radicalisation in some sectors of the population (Rial: 92), the *Movimiento de Liberación Tupamaros* (MLN-T), being one of the most important urban guerrilla groups, formed in 1965 and disarmed by 1972.[146] Oscar Gestido, a retired General, was democratically elected in the national elections in 1967, but died shortly afterwards. Jorge Pacheco Areco, his vice-president, succeeded him and imposed an unprecedented repressive govern-

[146] In an interesting political and historical twist, the current President of Uruguay, José "Pepe" Mujica is a former ex-guerrilla fighter, a member of the MLN-T, who was jailed for fourteen years in total confinement. The MLN-T became a political force after the military rule and joined the Left-wing political coalition party *Encuentro Progresista Frente Amplio* in 1989. Mujica was democratically elected in November 2009.

ment. Political tension rose, and street protests and strikes spread in the country. In 1969, the "Medidas Prontas de Seguridad" (Prompt Security Measures) were enforced by President Pacheco Areco, and led to the suspension of civil liberties and rights. Between that time and the *coup d'etat*, a complex and diverse succession of actions created a very unsteady political and social situation in the country. A new law of education was passed, leading to government intervention in secondary schools and universities and provoking student street demonstrations that were harshly repressed. The workers' union *Convención Nacional de Trabajadores* (CNT) was declared illegal (Rial: 94), and its members were persecuted.

This series of political and social events between 1968 and 1973 ended with a preventative repression imposed by a military government that lasted twelve years, from 1973 to 1985. It was the most brutal, oppressive and repressive dictatorship that the country had ever had, and one of the worst transgressors in terms of human rights. It was a period characterised by censorship, restricted freedom, proscriptions, illegal detentions and the imprisonment of thousands for political reasons, kidnappings, torture, murder, disappearances ("desaparecidos"), exile and *insile*. This last word describes what Jorge Ruffinelli calls 'a form of personalized exile brought into being by internal repression and ostracism directed at those who did not escape or go to exile', which is particularly relevant for this analysis (Shaw & Dennison 2005: 143). In terms of creative artistic production, Ruffinelli notes that self-censorship and ostracism characterised a mediocre period marked by ossified creativity under military repression (Shaw & Dennison 2005: 143).

Indoors, Silva Bélinzon's life started to decline. Money was scarce, solitude even more crude. Nonetheless, her poetry is particularly interesting at this stage, expressing a new imaginary bound to the new personal, political and social circumstances. Although some of her poems are politically ambivalent, in opposition to the severely restricted external reality, they become less conventional in form and somehow more revealing in content from 1965 onwards. Rhyme still seems to rule her poetic technique, and some poems become truly repetitive. Nonetheless, even if her poetry still offers a hermetic and disconnected imagery, she ultimately experiments with other poetic forms, such as free verse. She also becomes more reflexive and taciturn, and often ironic and bitter. Although not original in its appeal, the vocabulary dramatically changes at this stage, depicting a grim and threatening setting. In these books, we get hints of the external and internal situations in the face of death, starvation and poverty, repression and viciousness, longing and solitude. Clear allusions to words – such as revolvers, daggers and swords, prisoners and executioners, captivity and gags (*mordaza*s), along with the use of verbs and their derived adjectives such as "to burn", "to extinguish", "to

murder", "to cut", "to threaten", "to abandon" and "to destroy" – reveal a new imagery in Silva Bélinzon's poetry at this time. The evident use of a poetic language that denotes and connotes damage and deterioration, pain and suffering, crimes and sins, silence and anger, interruption, destruction and domination are very common in these books. Yet again, critics have overlooked this significant poetic variation in form and content.

In "Ideología y autocensura en la producción literaria: el caso de la lírica uruguaya en cinco años de dictadura (1973-1978)", Mabel Moraña notes the curious proliferation of poetry books in Uruguay at that particular time: 'casi veinte volúmenes de poesía de este género contra nueve novelas, un número aproximadamente similar de volúmenes de cuentos y unos pocos ensayos publicados en el lapso 1973-1978' (1980: 65). She considers one hundred and sixteen works by ninety-one Uruguayan poets in order to illustrate the different ideological and artistic tendencies and strategies used under dictatorship. Despite the limitations of Moraña's critical review – her research was pursued from abroad and at the time when Uruguay was still under military rule, hence, the access to information was difficult – her study provides a unique and fresh insight of the poetic expression under the regime.[147]

As Moraña explains, the severe political, economic and social situation of the late 1960s and beginning of the 1970s motivated the creation of a new poetic discourse in the country:

> La producción poética uruguaya adquirió en este periodo – al margen de la continuación de ciertas líneas de creación ya iniciadas con anterioridad y que habría que estudiar en sus peculiaridades, un sesgo denunciativo y contestatario, por el que se intentaba una aproximación comprometida al contexto político-social, que indicaba una voluntad de divulgación y popularización de los problemas debatidos en ese momento histórico. (70)

She quotes here the anthology compiled by Jorge Ruffinelli, *Poesía rebelde uruguaya* (1967-1971), published in 1971, as an 'indicio significativo del período' (70). Yet, this sort of production, Moraña continues, 'se repliega de manera total en los años siguientes, por acción de la creciente persecución ideológica o simplemente por emigración o encarcelamiento de sus autores' (70). Instead, Moraña observes that there are 'diversos tipos de manifestaciones, que tratan deliberadamente de mimetizarse con el sistema de valores que el régimen intenta sostener de modo inapelable' (70); in other words, 'volúmenes alineados dentro de la escala

[147] Moraña expanded this study in the book *Memorias de la generación fantasma* published in 1988, thus extending the analysis of the Uruguayan literary production published between 1973 and 1988.

axiológica oficial' (70). Moraña notices that the recurrent use and exaltation of '[el] Uruguay idílico' (71) and the national Liberator's figure, José Gervasio Artigas, as well as other patriotic symbols and topics, reveal a literature aligned to the military discourse '[que] intenta [así] construir una nueva versión de la historia [nacional]'(71).[148] Then, Moraña outlines other parallel literary strategies evident in the poetic works published in the aforementioned quinquennium:

> El análisis de las soluciones expresivas de la lírica del período indica que éstas se sitúan en una gradación que va desde las formas más tradicionales y apegadas a la norma poética hasta aquellas que se abocan al trabajo del lenguaje poético, concentrándose en formas herméticas […]
>
> Las primeras mantienen la primacía del sujeto lírico y desplazan el peso semántico hacia el interior de una temática subjetiva, que resulta estrecha y anacrónica para la canalización de los contenidos derivados de una situación contextual como la ya descrita.
>
> Las segundas se aplican a una modificación sustancial de los cánones de expresión establecidos, incorporando, por medio de variados artificios prosódicos, alteraciones que subvierten el uso normativizado de la lengua, pero que restringen las posibilidades de recepción. (81)

Moraña includes Silva Bélinzon's work (together with Carlos Sabat Ercasty and Sarah Bollo) as examples of poetry that kept attached to previous conceptions of the poetic act as subjective expressions of personal experiences 'concebidas como poéticamente transferibles' (74). She continues outlining this tendency by stating that those kind of texts 'inhiben de manera sistemática, deliberadamente o no, toda relación expresa con el contexto político-social correlativo' (74), although she recognises that topics such as solitude and isolation connote a certain relation with the context in question (74). Moraña concludes that 'resulta evidente, por las mismas características señaladas, que este discurso poético, en diálogo con una época desaparecida sustituye con las peripecias de una estética subjetiva las propuestas temático-formales que todo cambio contextual incorpora a los fenómenos de arte' (74). The paragraph closes with an endnote that suggests that this view should be confronted with 'las declaraciones de Concepción Silva Bélinzon en la revista *Imágenes* [...]' (74). In this interview, published in

[148] *Canto a Montevideo* by Sara de Ibáñez, published originally in 1941, was re-edited in 1976. Most likely, the civic, patriotic and epic character of the book made possible its re-edition under the dictatorship.

1978, Silva Bélinzon seems to be ambiguous and reluctant to provide information about her writing and creative process. She denies the existence of the outside world – as she had done before – and claims that inspiration and writing come in the form of "invisible beings". She is extremely elusive and concise in her responses, and the interviewer seems to struggle with her evasive answers:

> − Momentos de creación [asks the interviewer].
> − No existe el mundo, si el momento. Cuando llega la poesía a mí mandada por seres invisibles, los que se fueron. Los poetas que ya no están me dictan lo que en su tránsito no dijeron, las palabras que nadie imprimió.
> […]
> − Entre los espacios cubiertos… la soledad? [*sic*]
> − Sí y enorme. Pero en ella el espíritu crece. El hombre es un solitario. Nunca dice lo íntimo, jamás se entrega. El hombre es solo o rodeado de mil hombres, otras tantas soledades. [*sic*]
> […]
> − Y el hombre que además es poeta, debe "padecer la palabra", como nos decía el Profesor Roberto Ibáñez? [*sic*]
> − ¡No! El poeta no la padece, la usa y nada más. Bueno, yo pongo cualquier palabra…
> − ¿Influencias?
> − No las puede haber. Leo poca poesía.
> [...]
> − ¿Técnicas... temáticas?
> − Soy libre. La técnica es aburrida. Y ningún tema me obliga o sujeta. Los grandes invisibles – repito – me dictan. También ellos y otros que sí viven, luego me "explican" mis poemas. (12)

No external reality, no influences, no traditions, no techniques, and no apparent concerns; the bleak, almost unenthusiastic answers given by Silva Bélinzon suggest an apprehension to communicate. Marginalisation affected the poet even harder, and the consequent reaction is a much more aloof and repressed attitude towards the hostile world.

Moraña suggests that, in this period, the idea of art concerned with social issues was still predominant in the region: '[s]ubyacentemente, persiste una forma de concebir el acto poético como praxis expresiva y estetizante, de acuerdo con una concepción elitista y asocializada del arte' (74). According to Moraña, this conception of poetic expression 'sustrae [...] toda posibilidad de realizar, a partir de los textos, una actividad crítica o impugnadora, optando por la autorrestricción al aparato de la expresión subjetiva, que garantiza la pacífica coexistencia de

estos productos literarios y el aparato ideológico establecido' (74). Moraña's argument indicates that Silva Bélinzon's poetry, amongst that of other poets such as Jorge Arbeleche and Circe Maia, is a lyrical production that privileges and focuses only on the expressive function of language. However, she somehow contradicts her own argument, and exposes the inability to distinguish the diverse artistic strategies, when she shows examples of poems that clearly speak of an alienated world.

Moraña's article, written in the midst of the political repression, implies some generalisations and abstractions. Despite the bulleted structure of her analysis on the poetic tendencies under dictatorship, one might conclude after reading her article that, apart from the poetry aligned to the military regime, the rest seems to find alternative solutions to avoid censorship, and to reflect and/or denounce the oppressive political and social situation. That is to say, an elliptical or elusive language that seems to be completely alien to the political situation, but is, in fact, revealing it, and denouncing it from within. As Moraña suggests, Silva Bélinzon kept cultivating the idea of poetry as pure subjectivity that is, in effect, a strategy to redeem seclusion and futility. In a world surrounded by fear, loss and despotism, poetry becomes more meaningful and empowering. Indeed, subjectivity is able to redeem the ostracised poet from total alienation, as Amy K. Kaminsky states: '[s]ubjectivity can be rescued from solipsism or complete disintegration, and the individual can be redeemed from isolation from others and from representation itself, by the notion of "presence"' (Kaminsky 1993: 24). Thus, the fundamental idea that is expressed by Silva Bélinzon in her own poetry is: 'Quiero llenar contigo mi existencia / verdadero difunto sin tu arrullo; / temblaba por tu ausencia, y por mi ausencia / la historia universal se hizo murmullo' (*MEME*: 35); 'Un momento presente / de vivísima luz / donde tiendo las manos a las llamas' (*MEME*: 38); 'Suerte de estar aquí menos ausente / casi heroica poeta entre amarguras' (*EMJL*: 17).

If the projects of the nation-state had failed to include women in its discourses, as Jean Franco argues, the political process in Latin America in the late-twentieth century aggravated the invisibility of minorities:

> [T]he shift from projects of national autonomy to military repression and from repression to respectability in the eyes of the United States through the restoration of democracy (defined usually as voting) not only destroyed but exposed in that very process of destruction the multiple "invisibilities" on which the lettered city had been founded – certainly the invisibility of women but also the invisibility of entire nations [...]. (2002: 15)

At this stage, against the strict order that the military regime brutally enforced, Silva Bélinzon's last books offer more changes and variations in form and content than any of her previous works. Once more, Silva Bélinzon's poetry started to introduce in these books a language that seems to conflate and unmask the country's democratic failure with her own personal struggle. Facing more marginalisation and oppression, the poet defies and defends her own right to resist forgetfulness and invisibility with her poetry.

Significantly (and surprisingly?), an apparently estranged Silva Bélinzon appears in Ruffinelli's *Poesía rebelde uruguaya*, and is mentioned by Moraña. Amongst twenty-four other poets Silva Bélinzon's work features here side by side with some of her contemporaries (such as Juan Cunha, Roberto Ibáñez, Selva Márquez and Clara Silva), but more unusually with much younger and more politically committed poets such as Mario Benedetti, Amanda Berenguer, Sarandy Cabrera, Gladys Castelvecchi, Nelson Marra, Cristina Peri Rossi, Idea Vilariño and Ida Vitale. It is an astonishing inclusion if we take into account that, as has been shown here, Silva Bélinzon's poetry has been conceived as hermetic, solipsistic and politically detached, especially in the light of a new artistic trend that envisaged poetry as a tool for social struggle. It is even more surprising and paradoxical when we read the prologue written by Ruffinelli, in which he speaks of a compilation of 'poesía militante' or 'comprometida' (1971: 7). Ruffinelli even emphasises that the book should not be seen, in fact, as an "anthology" but as a 'muestra' whose selection was made in order to illustrate poetic works written with a socio-political concern: 'A diferencia de las antologías al uso, se buscó en este caso brindar un panorama ilustrativo y amplio de la poesía combativa que se ha escrito y está escribiéndose en estos últimos años, aquella que denota la preocupación por la realidad sociopolítica' (7). Also unexpected is the inclusion of Silva Bélinzon's poem when he states that '[la] muestra no pretendió ser exhaustiva: si bien la consulta fue amplia, no todos los escritores que han escrito o escriben poesía militante están aquí' (7). 'En cambio', he continues, 'intentó ser representativa, abarcando una gama de autores diversos en procedencia generacional, en estilos, en ideología, en testimonio vital' (8). Then Ruffinelli adds: 'Vale señalar expresamente que muchos de ellos no habían escrito hasta entonces poesía de contenido o formulación políticas; que ella corresponde como fenómeno general, al curso de estos cinco o seis años' (8). And there she is, on page one hundred and forty-eight, a seventy-one-year-old Silva Bélinzon, whose poetry is, for the very first time, considered as rebellious, as an example of 'poesía militante' during this critical historical period (7).

Indeed, some of the books she published during the most unstable and traumatic years of the country's recent history, not only conflate her personal situation with the external reality, but also defy it. In general, in the books written between 1963 and 1979, silence, solitude, sadness, fear, anguish, absence and lack of basic possessions disclose a desolate, impoverished and enclosed environment bereft of essential goods. Under these circumstances, subjectivity is especially threatened and, consequently, the grammatical subject is usually omitted, ambiguous or unclear, assuming occasionally the masculine voice. Yet, a seemingly solipsistic poet introduces a plural personal pronoun "we" to these books. Against the individualistic and despotic discourse imposed by the new political and economic system, Silva Bélinzon appeals in these books to collectiveness, solidarity and inclusion. She is not, however, alone in this approach. In the anthology compiled by Ruffinelli, it is possible to observe that, despite the diversity in content and poetic expression, the selected poets reclaim the need to remember and be united under the hostile situation.

Silva Bélinzon's linguistic variations, such as an unconventional use of grammar and syntax, reveal, once more, a personal writing that significantly becomes more disorderly against a repressive regime. New poetic structures appear intermittently along with the sonnets, whose discontinuous images follow similar patterns analysed in the previous chapter: a discontinuous montage of images that subverts the imposed order, in this case, by the new military regime. As Mary Beth Tierney-Tello has noticed of women's narrative, written under dictatorships in the Southern Cone: 'the authoritarian system could be seen as an intensification of the patriarchal order' (1996: 6). Although formally she continues to respect the rhyme, Silva Bélinzon's poetry becomes more flexible and varied in opposition to the newly imposed political order. Certainly, repetition and variation work hand in hand in these books, and the poet introduces changes in form and content.

Memory occupies a more vital position in Silva Bélinzon's poetry at this stage, when the modern nation's and her own past is at great risk of being manipulated, distorted or simply erased by the new regime: 'entre vidrios y papel aplazamientos / los periódicos callan Tu pasado' (*LYD*: 33). In this sense, she is, once more, not the only one. In Ruffinelli's anthology, many of the selected poems speak of a lost, forgotten and/or vilified past. Historical dates, as well as personal histories, symbolise and/or mourn a lost past and a troubled present. As Circe Maia's poem "1811" illustrates: 'El pasado está muerto y un duro viento sopla / sobre campos dormidos, dormidos sobre pueblos. / Brilla la antigua fecha. / El pasado / ¿está muerto?' (1971: 110). Here, Maia makes reference to one of the most important historical moments for the country's independence, namely the *Batalla de Las Piedras*. In this poem,

she explores the political situation through the country's most heroic past. Other poets refer to the nation's glorious past by invoking and lamenting the most recent, but also mythical times of the "Suiza de América" (using here the alternative label, "La Tacita de Plata", to refer exclusively to Montevideo city). As Washington Benavídez's poem "Fundación 1970" demonstrates, the past seems to be banished from national history and official discourses. Before that reality, memory appears as the sole resource for collective knowledge and redemption: 'Y el rostro el descompuesto y terrible / rostro del país te dio en la cara / y buscaste en los libros de historia / nacional y en los periódicos y en los / antepasados y en los hombres que vivieron / La Suiza La Tacita. […] Ahora sabes que ayer no existió. [...] No contamos con nada. / Si acaso la memoria' (20-21). For her part, Silvia Herrera uses a similar image to express their disillusionment in the face of the adverse present: '[…] Te llamaron tacita / de plata. No sé si lo creíste, pero fue el talismán / mil veces repetido para que fuera / cierto, / tierra mía' (86). The examples abound. Whereas these poems appeal to collective or social memory, personal memories as well as writing, are the sources to resist marginalisation and abandonment in Silva Bélinzon's poetry. In this sense, memory in Silva Bélinzon is usually expressed as a form of personal remediation and redemption.

House/Home: Dwelling in the Past/Contesting the Present

Restricted to the walls of her own dwelling place, experience and memory are usually expressed, contained and represented through the house/home.[149] House/home, along with body and writing, are the main metaphors through which Silva Bélinzon's poetic symbolism revolves in these books. At this stage, it is not only the Magnolia patio, a symbol of poetry and topos of identity, but also the whole house with its different areas and new interstitial spaces (such as staircases, corridors, windows and doors) that predominate in Silva Bélinzon's poetic realm, leading to an array of meanings during a personal and national crisis.

The place of language and memory, the self and the oneiric, house/home has been largely interpreted in Western cultures as a multiple and complex, real and fictional, literary and virtual, as well as a political and social space. From antiquity, the house has been associated with the self and private memory. Bettina Bergman explains that 'For a Roman's house was per-

[149] I have decided to use the compound term house/home since in Spanish the word "casa" stands for both meanings: house and home.

ceived as an extension of the self, signalling piety to divine protectors and social and genealogical status to the world outside' (1994: 225). More significantly, she states: '[t]he identification of the house with an individual [...] is manifest in the recorded instances of *damnatio memoriae*, which included the destruction of the home as part of the programmatic eradication of a person's memory' (225). From a psychoanalytical point of view, the house represents the human body and the psyche, whilst the staircases, along with the upper or lower floors, can be interpreted as the different levels of the psyche (Cirlot 2002: 153). In Gaston Bachelard's seminal work, *La Poétique de l'espace*, house is interpreted as a place where 'memories are housed' (1994: 8). 'At times', Bachelard says, 'we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability' (8). The 'oneiric house' (15) is, for Bachelard, a space that 'shelters daydreaming' and integrates thoughts and memories (6), where the self emerges from remembering. Referring to Bachelard's theory, Michel Foucault has argued that 'we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well' (1986: 3). Such a place, according to Foucault, can be '[...] a light, ethereal, transparent space, or again a dark, rough, encumbered space; [...] a space that can be flowing like sparkling water, or a space that is fixed, congealed, like stone or crystal' (3). Nevertheless, such heterogeneous place has worked as a traditional representation of the domestic realm and private sphere, which also functions as a metaphor for the nation (homeland) and the state.

In feminist readings, the house/home has been considered as an ambiguous political space. On the one hand, it has been treated as the site where women can reclaim power and identity. On the other hand, the house has been seen as the confined space traditionally assigned and (designed) by men. As a consequence, house/home carries strong political and social meanings that divide feminist theorists, as Iris Marion Young explains in "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme":

> If house and home mean the confinement of women for the sake of nourishing male projects, then feminists have good reason to reject home as a value. But it is even difficult for feminists to exorcise a positive valence to the idea of home. [...] House and home are deeply ambivalent values. (Holland and Huntington 2001: 252)

However, Homi K. Bhabha, amongst other theorists, rescues the gendered space as a place of intervention from where to denounce patriarchy and domination, and questions dichotomies such as private/public:

> By making visible the forgetting of the 'unhomely' moment in civil society, feminism specifies the patriarchal, gendered nature of civil society and disturbs the symmetry of the private and public, which is now shadowed, or uncannily doubled, by the difference of genders which does not neatly map on the private and the public, but becomes disturbingly supplementary to them. This results in redrawing the domestic space as the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and the police: the personal-*is*-the-political; the world-in-the-home. (1994: 15)

'Unhomely', according to Bhabha, 'does provide a "non-continuist" problematic that dramatizes, in the figure of woman, the ambivalent structure of the civil State as it draws its rather paradoxical boundary between the private and the public spheres' (15).

In Silva Bélinzon's poetry, house/home definitely brings an ambiguous meaning, sometimes described as a positive or homely place, other times as an ominous, oppressive (*unhomely*) space. House/home becomes in her writing, a multiple symbolic location where past and present, the private and the public, the personal and the political, 'the psyche and the social' are debated (Bhabha 1994: 19). Silva Bélinzon's house/home constitutes the last receptacle of her body and dwelling of memory, as will be studied here in each of her published books. The ambivalent character of the house/home obtains a new dimension under a new totalitarian state. Sometimes it is represented as either a sacred or a constricted place to preserve the past, to enhance memory or to contest the present. Frequently described as the hallowed ('fantasmatic', using Foucault's words) and traditional family/familiar space, the house/home is defended against the invasive outside. At times, it becomes the shelter and container. At other times, it is perceived as an oppressive and claustrophobic place. Often the house/home constitutes the symbolic, fictional region from where to reconstruct memory and confront her Self, her only remaining space.[150] In this sense, as Jean Franco explains, 'authori-

[150] In a famous public speech given by Argentinean President Raúl Alfonsín in 1987 after an armed group, known as "Los Carapintadas", threatened the nation's transition to democracy, he said: 'La casa está en orden y no hay sangre en la Argentina'. This shows how strongly attached house and nation were at the time of political and economic crisis, as many other politicians around the world. More recently, European representatives tended to speak in similar terms (the house is in order) to demonstrate that their local economies as well as the European Union were not going to collapse.

tarian regimes [in Latin America] had the effect of enhancing the ethical value of private life, religion, literature, and art as regions of refuge from the brutal reality of an oppressive state' (Yúdice, Flores and Franco 1992: 68).

The analysis of these matters in Silva Bélinzon's books of poetry is given below in a chronological order of publication, starting with *Me espera el mundo entero* published in 1963 and finishing with *Sitios abandonados* (1979). The significant title of the latter book that headlines this chapter refers to the poet's personal struggle, as well as the country's economic, political and social situation. Although, in this chapter, I will refer to various aspects of Silva Bélinzon's writing under this period, I will focus on the multiple metaphor of the house/home as a site of memory and identity, as well as a representation of personal and political circumstances, and of the nation.

Me espera el mundo entero (1963) and *El más justo llamó* (1965)

Both books were granted renowned national literary prizes, such as the *Concurso Literario Municipal de Montevideo* and the *Susana Soca prize* by *Universidad de la República* in 1965 and 1966 respectively.[151] These two books work as a hinge between her previous creations and the books written under the military regime. Here, it is possible to observe a poetic imagery in transition and in transformation from the previous production written before the 1960s and the books written under the new personal, political, social and economic context. In them Silva Bélinzon starts to introduce an unusual poetic realm.

Me espera el mundo entero with its paradoxical title, is perhaps one of the most interesting books written by Silva Bélinzon, where the author starts experimenting with new poetic structures. The poems unveil an exhausted, abandoned and resigned self, but, also, a somehow more ironic and bitter poet, disclosing a personal existential crisis that parallels the downfall of the external world.

Hypocrisy, disenchantment and artifice are also present in these books, disclosing a false, precarious and fearful reality: 'Otros mundos privados / en las calles de miedo y artificio' (38). Religious images, icons and symbols commonly recreate and/or allegorise human feelings and attitudes, as well as universal and personal circumstances. At other times, mystical

[151] In Silva Bélinzon's *Antología Poética* (1981) compiled by Marosa di Giorgio and Claudio Ross, *MEME* appears mistakenly as published in 1962.

concerns denote God as a powerful force which, amongst masculine figures (such as father and judges) symbolises power and domination, whereas the Virgin Mary and other Christian female icons, such as Martha and Theresa, are used to explore female identity. Here, I would like to concentrate the analysis particularly on the poems that are uncommon and infrequent in structure in comparison to her previous books. Although political allusions to the country's situation are not yet so evident, her poetry starts to offer hints of an uneasy reality.

In the anaphoric poem "Encontrar a un amigo" (dedicated to Gastón Figueira), the use of repetitive lines and words is striking. Silva Bélinzon begins by depicting a walled house whose staircases have also been blocked, suggesting an immobile and restrained position in an already reduced private space. The house is described as totally closed to the outside world, but also constrained in its interior, confining and containing the personal space: 'Han tapado las puertas y ventanas / también las escaleras' (17), an image that will be repeated in other books of this period, such as: 'han cerrado las casas y posadas' (*AODH*: 36).

Furthermore, not only space, but also time, is described immediately after the line quoted above. In an ambiguous account, the past is perceived and described as an injustice, brought to the present by founders of graves and, judges and consequently, monumentalising it: 'Traemos el pasado / fundadores de tumbas y de jueces, / y esa larga injusticia del recuerdo' (17). The past, manipulated and transformed, resignified and tainted by the new regime, becomes more powerful but also more confusing in her poetry. In the following stanza, a masculine (and undefined) subject, addressed in the formal pronoun "usted" is referred to his authenticity and, paradoxically, his individuality. Then the almost synaesthetic images evoke a lost time, suggested again by the symbolic recourse to magnolias. The poet's present physical senses of touch and sight are congealed (associated and reinforced by the last word of the previous stanza: 'snow') and are in contrast to the next line, where the image of her hand holding a boiled sweet evokes the time of childhood. In other words, the cold hands and eyes resemble an inert and oppressive present in contrast to a satisfying and gratifying past:

> Pero usted es usted de todos modos:
> donde viven magnolias
> donde crecen los gatos bajo nieve.
>
> Se me enfrían los ojos y las manos;
> la derecha tenía un caramelo.
>
> Pero usted es usted de todos modos:

caprichoso, monótono,
que tiene y da
que tiene y da
que tiene y da:
y hemos ganado todo, todo, todo. (17-18)

What is particularly remarkable in this poem is the uncommon repetition of exact words and lines that produces a rhythmical, but also a monotonous effect which is reinforced by the use of the adjectives 'caprichoso, monótono'. The synecdochic image of the hand is resumed and strengthened in the verbs 'tener' (have/hold) and 'dar' (give). This seems to be a positive outcome of the poem: a hand (a friend's hand?) able to give and rescue from ostracism and deprivation. Nevertheless, the repetition ('que tiene y da') suggests an almost mechanical and involuntary action, fostering an ambiguous judgement on possession and giving. In an unpredictable twist, the positive implication of generosity and charity turns out to be doubtful. Whether the use of colon implies an explanation, a consequence or synthesis, it also establishes a graphical frontier with the last sentence 'y hemos ganado todo, todo, todo'.[152] Hence, the personal pronoun 'usted' stands out against 'nosotros', establishing a distance between the formal 'you' and the collective 'us'.

A similar idea of authenticity but also inexorableness ('Pero usted es usted de todos modos'), is repeated in another poem, although here it causes anger. The poem, ironically titled "La fiesta", expresses disillusionment and rage at an underprivileged situation, and an unfair world unable to change:

El mundo es como es,
y tengo ira:
los santos tienen hambre
y están en la nevera las botellas.

Ya distingo el principio,
El poder del misterio.

Mi superior objeto es esta lucha:
embistiendo la piedra
ocultando alfileres de firmeza
donde la virgen vaga consumida:
¿el alma es una tela que se arrolla?
¿un helado de lilas que se traga?
De espaldas a la luz comen y mueren.

[152] Ideas taken from Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1994: 294).

No conozco a esta gente,
ni vinieron a verme:
plantaciones perdidas en maleza
mecanismo de brazos y de piernas
que se clava en el justo.

El mundo es como es, y tengo ira
Dios todopoderoso me perdone.

Ni una luna ni café;
aquel encantamiento no era nada.
Nada de nada. (29-30)

By contrast, poetry is defined as a revelation, as a mystery: 'Ya distingo el principio / el poder del misterio' (29), but also as a struggle. Denial or annulment expresses a dispossessed situation, in which struggle is articulated as an intense and forceful physical action: 'Mi superior objeto es esta lucha: / embistiendo la piedra' (29). In this stanza, domesticity, writing and sewing become – applying an overused word when speaking of women's creativity – interwoven. The needle has been largely identified in women's writing as a prevailing metaphor of women's domestic existence and creativity (Zakreski 2006: 19-21). In the line 'ocultando alfileres de firmeza', the sharp and pungent characteristic of the needle is underpinned by the noun 'firmeza'. By stressing the strong and firm – probably dangerous, yet powerful – character of the needles, Silva Bélinzon subverts the traditionally feminine activity of sewing as a powerful act which, nevertheless, needs to be hidden away. The image of a consumed virgin wandering around, immediately after this line, reminds us of a passage of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in which they note on Emily Dickinson's poetry that a 'longstanding mythic tradition [...] associates virgin women – women who spin, or spin/sters – with spinning spiders' (1979: 632). The association between the needles (spin) and the virgin (spinster) in Silva Bélinzon's poem is remarkable, creating a symbolic thread of traditional, Catholic, feminine identity.[153] Disguised as innocent and random, the following questions expose a more sceptical poet. The wanderer virgin asks about the meaning of the soul by using, again, synaesthesic images: '¿el alma es una tela que se arrolla? / ¿un helado de lilas que se traga?' (30). Although there is no clear allusion to webs, cloth functions here in a similar fashion. Memory-

[153] Furthermore, in the very same book, the poem "Vírgenes unidas" traces a clear identification between the two Biblical women, Mary and Martha, and her own life – possibly– with her aunts: 'Para nuestras cabezas solo un techo: / el olor de la lluvia − y no llovía − / ¿volveremos a hacer lo que hemos hecho?' (60). The book is, in fact, dedicated to the 'loving memory' of one of her aunts, Josefa Bélinzon.

images are used to decipher, explain and recognise spirituality through quotidian representations. Perhaps the child poet's voice makes these questions. The soul thus becomes materialised (is it a fabric that is coiled? – she asks), exposing an inability to comprehend or apprehend spirituality, and leaving a hopeless image of a futile and vain life: 'De espaldas a la luz comen y mueren' (29).

Solitude, unproductiveness, abandonment and disenchantment are once more reaffirmed in the last stanza of "La fiesta". The disconnected imagery reinforces, here, a sense of commotion and disorder also supported by a feeling of estrangement: 'No conozco a esta gente, / ni vinieron a verme: / plantaciones perdidas en maleza / mecanismo de brazos y de piernas / que se clava en el justo' (30). The last two lines insinuate a mechanical body which, without running the risk of oversimplifying Silva Bélinzon's poetic realm, may resemble the synchronised movements of the military marches, whose use of force to produce subjugation and domination is carried out by the next line 'que se clava en el justo'. A boot on a human body, working as a strong metaphor of oppression, is more notoriously referred to in a previous poem in this book: '− Aúpan los naufragios tu simiente; las palabras cordiales y caretas / bajo una bota grande y negligente' (22). The body becomes, almost literally, a mechanism of power or 'disciplinary power' (Foucault 1991). In other words, whereas the house is constrained, the body is oppressed.

Then, in "La fiesta", the poem's anaphora 'El mundo es como es, y tengo ira / Dios todopoderoso me perdone', repited in the first and sixth stanza, stresses the world's inability to change and provokes an inevitable anger that is incapable of obeying religious laws. Despite all the possible interpretations and symbolisms, the disillusionment and disappointment of the last stanza ('Ni luna ni café; / aquel encantamiento no era nada. / Nada de nada') reinforces the vision of a bleak and dispossessed existence which stands out against the repeated totality of the previously quoted poem 'todo, todo, todo'.

Finally, the idea of writing as a commanding, almost brutal force is described throughout the book, but it is more evident in this particular poem: 'Destrozando las páginas avanza / mas el vientre y los muslos son de palo; / va en mano sin anillo su pujanza' (24). The violent advancement of the writing traces an alternative or parallel power to the advancement of the regime. Furthermore, if the potent process of writing differs from the description of the lower parts of the body as a wooden belly (womb?) and legs, the body signifies both motor immobility and (perhaps), impossibility to procreate, but it also stresses its strength. The clear allusion to the ring, implying a social status (in this case, by its absence), whether as a symbol of marital status or wealth, contrasts once more with writing as a powerful and forceful instru-

ment able to offer an alternative status. Nevertheless, sometimes this idea finds other possible and contradictory connotations that turn writing and identity into a much more complex framework of meanings. On the one hand, mystical reminiscences are occasionally used to propose the poetic act as a process of accomplishing spirituality and often of serving as allegories for the country's political and social situation. For instance, in the poem "Los ojos que no lloran", poetry is understood as a mystical practice, able to find and reveal God's face: 'sobre el papel mi verso / bajo el papel tu Rostro' (42). On the other hand, whilst the book's title suggests a more adventurous attitude ('me espera el mundo entero'), the poem seems to describe a more settled and stable writer. It also shows a more submissive and conservative poet who obediently follows Christian rules: 'Y en el lugar de siempre / muy prudente y tranquila, / me encontrarán guardando tus ovejas: / en el lugar de siempre / guardando tus ovejas' (42). Beyond the clear Christian implications of this poem, I consider that the poet may not necessarily adopt here a passive or a traditional attitude. Alternatively, the poem can be interpreted as either preserving the past or protecting (shepherding) the human race under a perilous situation. Writing might be seen, in this case, as a tool for safeguarding humanity. In the book that I possess, there is a handwritten dedication to contemporary writer Enrique Estrázulas, signed in 1974 and probably never sent, that sustains this view. Here, Silva Bélinzon speaks of poetry as a force able to save humankind:

> La poesía de Enrique Estrázulas ha golpeado constantemente en las puertas selladas y mudas del egoísmo: en las atroces puertas tras las cuales se esconde la cobardía, las sombras, que él pudo taladrar de un solo golpe con la luz de sus poemas; no la revelación celeste, sino la que los hombres encienden, la luz que puede levantarnos y salvarnos entre nosotros mismos. (PA)

This idea of poetry as an instrument able to redeem humankind or save lives from an oppressive situation is retaken and mentioned in a few more verses and stanzas in her next book, *El más justo llamó*. There, she writes: 'quiero salvar al hombre que me insulta / aún de los jerarcas sus fracasos. / Una sangre por otra que sepulta / ¡renueva la promesa de tus brazos! / para quitar la furia más oculta / de millones de espaldas los zarpazos' (41). Therefore, writing and religion offer the possibility to understand and relate to other human beings. Belief is what rescues the poet from seclusion, vulnerability and restrictions: 'simplemente creer, su fortaleza [...] Un armario, otro armario, una aspirina: el reino de su cuerpo fue aplastado / simplemente creer, por cada espina!' (43-44).

EMJL was published in one the most difficult years in Uruguayan history, branded at the time as "El año terrible".[154] It was the year of the banking crisis and economic debacle, which exposed the precariousness of the political system and the advent of a revolutionary era. Consequently, the book includes similar themes also present in the subsequent volumes written during this critical period. Horror, fear and sorrow expose a distressing and dispossessed situation in a dangerous place where the desire to escape from an adverse reality strongly emerges: 'Extraños, nada mío y tengo miedo' (29) and 'Y en suma tuve miedo, mucho miedo; / imposible decir exactamente / el gesto estremecido de mi ruedo' (74).[155] In the suggestive poem "Serán cada vez menos", Silva Bélinzon depicts the image of a country being emptied, and, whereas a president seems to indulge himself in his own power and rhetoric, the poet situates herself amongst the people: 'Me alegro de no ser un presidente / entre sedosos aires y lecturas; / me quema la alegría sin la gente / como un viejo bromuro sin frescuras'(15);[156] 'Serán cada vez menos en la tierra: / manténgase a la izquierda sin barullo / no es agradable el miedo ni la guerra' (16); 'Cómo vigilan el común de gentes' (33).

Again, house/home (*casa*) occupies not only a fundamental position in Silva Bélinzon's imagery, but it is also a dual, even a multiple and ambiguous metaphor. It is an unstable site. Home/house in her poetry is undeniably the place from where the world is seen, reconstructed, represented and signified. As Homi K. Bhabha famously argues in *The Location of Culture*, 'the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the border between home and the world becomes confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting' (1994: 13). In Silva Bélinzon's poetry, house/home is generally described as the place to take refuge or preserve her privacy and/or her past against the external assaults. It is sometimes seen as a haven from a dangerous outside: 'Cuidado vete a

[154] In *Marcha*, 31 December 1965, p. 5. See also "Nunca imaginamos lo terrible que iba a ser 1965" in Chagas and Trullen (1998).

[155] In an unpublished manuscript, a poem entitled "Querido, tengo miedo", Silva Bélinzon writes in the first version: 'Tengo algunos amigos: [Antonio] Undurraga / Gastón [Figueira], [Roberto] Ibáñez, [Enrique] Fierro, [Carlos Martínez?] Moreno / y esa vaga esperanza que me sigue'. At the top of the page appear other names: Nancy [Bacelo] and Ida Vitale. The names are deleted and disappear in her second version, in which Silva Bélinzon rewrites: 'Tengo muchos amigos / y esa fiel esperanza que me sigue. Sin embargo tengo miedo […]', (PA).

[156] "Bromuro", as derived from "bromo", according to the dictionary of *Real Academia Española*: '[…] actualmente se usa en la fabricación de antidetonantes, fluidos contra incendios, productos farmacéuticos y gases de combate', <http: www.rae.es>.

casa, vete a casa / maldita madreselva y hojas viejas; / sin ninguna defensa como masa / todavía no hay lágrimas ni queja' (11). Even if it is sometimes depicted as an emptied, deprived, cloistered and silent place, house/home is seen as a retreat; it is homely: 'han cerrado las puertas del pasillo; no hay camas, ni refrescos a la vista.| Hay un alba distinta en tu castillo / (me gustaría ser ascensorista) […]' (21), 'Vacío el corredor / también las pipas / donde se alimentó la madreselva, / y el rostro humedecido / en el largo silencio de garganta. / ¡Lo bien que se está aquí!' (17). If, as Young suggests, one of the values of home should be preservation (Holland and Huntington 2001: 286), Silva Bélinzon shows that those values are greatly threatened: 'Una especie de garra de entrecasa / asesina a los niños como abejas: / no debo guardar nada ni una taza / es muy firme la mano que me dejas' (14). External and internal situation merge in these verses and become confused.

In "12 de julio", fear and secrecy reflect a state of uneasiness, insecurity and uncertainty, as well as a need to escape: 'A más del cumpleaños de mi madre / quería hablar contigo: / no estoy a salvo aquí. / La dirección precisa no la tengo. / Ya la sabrás después. / Yo seguiré a los pájaros radiantes' (27). Followed by the anaphoric verses the poem suggests an almost clandestine and secret dialogue, where information can only be given partially and imprecisely: 'Es el año mejor / y la primera vez que me libero; / No estoy a salvo aquí / ni en la tierra del norte […] No estoy a salvo aquí. / La dirección precisa no la tengo / ya la sabré después' (28). It is the first time she is (feels) liberated, and a sense of secrecy and fear surrounds her words. Significantly, a few pages later, her personal and real home address is, effectively, provided in full detail in the poem "Quiero salvar al hombre": 'En Lindoro Forteza mi retiro [...] Número veintiséis cincuenta y nueve; / tras un biombo de tela y palomas / la sólida sustancia sobre nieve' (42). Here, reality and imaginary are perfectly blended. The line of this poem works as a continuation of some of her handwritten dedications in which she used to add her postal address to the books she would send to different political and cultural figures, as has been mentioned previously in this thesis. By writing her real, specific address, Silva Bélinzon's fight against ostracism goes beyond the symbolic space. By registering her own place and identifying her real physical location, Silva Bélinzon tries to prevent her 'solid substance' from being banished.

Against a precarious political, social and personal situation, this book is a clear appeal to avoid forgetfulness: 'no me arrojes jamás entre perdidos / ahora, justamente / cuando todo se vuelve favorable / y defiendo tu vida / con un arma valiosa / mi vida / que rescata mi techo de las llamas' (49). In other words, to become more visible, more human ('volverse más huma-

no, más visible (37)); and, therefore, to find a more meaningful and transcendental life: 'diga que no fue en vano mi hospedaje / mi ternura mayor, y mi tisana' (61).

Al oído del hombre (1970)

By 1970, the economic, political and social situation deteriorated even further in the country. The "Medidas Prontas de Seguridad" created and imposed a state of siege. These conflictive historical circumstances are generally depicted in a new poetic imagery that includes words such as "war", "prisoner", "murder" and "blood", sometimes verses or stanzas that connote an ominous, repressive and violent setting. In this year, Sara de Ibáñez also publishes *Apocalipsis XX*, in Venezuela, a book of poetry that, from the title itself, describes horror and destruction.

In *AODH*, a poem written by her sister Clara Silva "Sola tras los vidrios" (already quoted in this thesis), prefaces the book and describes Silva Bélinzon as an alienated poet, 'left behind the glasses': 'Hablaba un lenguaje extraño.| Nadie sabía el por qué de sus palabras / ni la locura de sus pasos. / La dejaban sola tras los vidrios / como un asilo de inocencia / y desafío' (7-8). In an interesting literary strategy, Silva Bélinzon will explicitly contest the meaning of Clara's poem throughout this book and later works. For instance, in the last stanza of the last poem included in *AODH*, Silva Bélinzon adopts a daring, defiant assertion that enters into dialogue with the poem written by Clara. The stanza challenges not only the preconceptions and discrimination attached to her, but also Silva Bélinzon's very own fears: 'Puerta no tengo miedo puerta puerta; / y si acaso me escucha me conteste / entre vidrios oscuros descubierta' (76). Against an oppressive outside that pushes the poet to a more bleak and desperate personal situation, within volatile political and social circumstances, and with a government able to usurp the public and the private realms, invading houses and bodies, and forcing the people to obey, be mechanised and uniform, the cloistered house of the patriarchal society is greatly confronted. It is the strong wish to defy and resist that stands out in this stanza. The powerful repetition of the word 'puerta', working as a vocative for an inanimate object and so symbolically rich, reveals the need and will to be seen, freed and heard.

In the poetic realm, the poet dares to disobey boundaries, ostracism and repression. Her disobedience challenges, once more, Clara Silva's poem ('la dejaron sola tras los vidrios'). In doing so, it offers an alternative, more hopeful position for her assigned marginal location, for

her abandonment: 'entre vidrios oscuros descubierta'. It is an idea that is resumed later in the book, where in another poem, the poet shows herself still in a reduced place, which is, nonetheless, intentionally more open: 'sin visillos es la única ventana / detrás de los cristales no me acuses' (63). If her house/home has been limited to one single window, by not covering that sole window, she allows her private space to become more approachable and transparent. Once again, Silva Bélinzon's imagery is not an exception within women's writing at the time. House/home as a reduced, constricted and cramped space is also significantly mentioned and confronted in one of the poems written by Ibáñez in *Apocalipsis*: 'Porque vivo en estrecha casa / con paredes de sal y fuego / que comen puertas y ventanas. / Porque vivo en estrecha casa: dame libertad' (1970: 59).

A distressing, oppresive and repressing situation continues to be described in Silva Bélinzon's book in almost plain words: 'se prohíbe moverse medio dedo' (10); 'Poco a poco el espanto nos hundía: / dar vuelta a la manzana con apuros / la gente tenía miedo al mediodía' (74). The idea of an unpunished and violent situation imposed by the regime is pointed out in a few more lines in this book: 'casi todo lo arreglan con un velo / en la casa soldada un hombre herido' (13). The domestic word 'visillos', mentioned above, contrasts now with the veiled external situation, duplicated here by the image of the covered, solid and welded house (casa soldada) that hides a wounded man. On the one hand, the use of the homonymous 'soldada' (also standing for female soldier) produces the effect of a warfare setting. On the other hand, it plays with and reverses the traditional male/female positions.[157] The undercover situation also resounds in the form of a fragmented gaze or a gaze unwilling to "see": 'No nos perdonarán si perdonamos / engañan a los hombres con mentiras; / por todos sus costados tienen amos / tú que tienes cien ojos y no miras' (71). At times, an unfocused gaze works as a metaphor of the state's failure or unwillingness to defend its population: 'Apuntando a los cielos sus coronas / es mayor el martirio de las gentes; / sonrisas que no avanzan bajo lonas / y la mirada fuera de sus lentes' (55).

Along with the political and social crisis, Uruguay's economy also weakened, leaving the country in appalling economic instability. In 1967, the country's inflation had reached 100 per cent, the highest rate in Uruguayan history, while future measures and policies under the military regime made the Uruguayan economic market fluctuate extremely. It is not surprising, then, to find a clear reference to the economic situation in this book: 'esperanza, las calles son terribles; […] dame un poco de fuego y comestibles' (37); 'Todo costaba caro bajo leños: /

[157] In *EMJL*, Silva Bélinzon significantly writes: 'Las frases mejor hechas / son reveses [...]' (19).

inmensas multitudes como ranas' (52); 'Los hombres de paciencia y de sonrisa / en los escritos viejos con errores; / de banqueros que firman su divisa / con ladridos de perros seguidores' (53); 'Detenido un instante por los gatos; / en la mesa de luz los comprimidos / tendré que pagar caro los contratos' (66). Through references to shortage or excess of goods, tinged and mixed with military connotations, Silva Bélinzon assumes a critical attitude towards wealth and greed revealing social injustice and inequality: 'Épocas de indigencia y terciopelo / cuántas flores tenía ese partido... / cuerpos asesinados sin un pelo / el pequeño sirviente despedido' (13), and 'en nidos de algodón tanto glotones; los mercados abiertos sin comida (19) […] ¿Por qué he de preocuparme de los ricos? / Estrechamente envueltos en paradas / y el cuchillo apropiado desde chicos' (20). Solitude and deprivation finish the image of a desolate, poor and unfair reality dominated by powerful people: 'El plato boca-abajo sin entierros: / no hay percheros, ni estantes, ni frazadas / se vive solitario entre los perros' (20). 'Los poderosos son como ceniza / proyectos de tortugas inobedientes' (29); 'la casa tiene solo cuatro sillas / y la cómoda virgen de galones' (67). Nevertheless, there is, once more, a strong sense of resistance against ostracism, by (re)claiming solidarity and camaraderie: 'Con toda mi piedad me aferro al hombre / palabra que es mundo y para el mundo […]' (25); 'Visitarse los unos a los otros / para dejar el alma abandonada / sin agua las palomas y nosotros' (38); '[…] a los hombres con hambre mis anillos' (57).

The literary strategies described could be interpreted, in fact, under any other authoritative and/or oppressive circumstances. However, poet offers a few more hints to situate the reader in an identifiable context. There are a few dedications in this book, but one in particular stands out. It is the poem that gives the title to the book, "Al oído del hombre", and which is dedicated to Alba Roballo. Roballo was not only a friend of Silva Bélinzon, but also a renowned Uruguayan politician (less known as a poet) who was designated Minister of Culture in 1968 under Pacheco Areco's government, and became the first woman Minister in the country. She resigned a few months later, due to discrepancies with Pacheco Areco's political measures. In 1971, she joined the new left-wing party, *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front or FA, created that year), keeping politically active until she died. It was not the first time that Silva Bélinzon dedicated a poem or a book to a politician, but what is noteworthy is the point in the national history at which she does this, and what the poem's content in fact connotes, which works as a strong indication of the political situation.

The poem begins by speaking of being honest and truthful to oneself: 'Se ejerce ante el espejo más confianza / siempre y cuando se elija no mentirse' (31). It is a poem that signifies grief and sorrow, however, it encourages hope in the light of an impassive master (*amo*):

‘Haber vertido tantas lágrimas no alcanza / frente al amo impasible sin hundirse; utilicemos la última esperanza / gotea sangre fría sin pudrirse’ (31). Moreover, it calls for a more peaceful (painless) future, in a stanza that is written between brackets, and also suggests the ex-centric character of a group of people (in which the “we” includes the poet herself) unable to improve manners and thoughts: (Pero excéntricamente nos movemos / sin mejorar modales ni razones / porvenir sin dolor solo queremos)’ (32). The poem concludes with the use of a Christian icon, the Devil, to embody evil, depicting the outside reality and insinuating a state of war: ‘Nuestra sagrada tierra en que vivimos; / de producir propósito intenciones / hay bombas de Satán como racimos’ (32).

Along with the house/home, the body is another symbol strongly depicted in Silva Bélinzon’s poetry in this period, either in the form of corpses or as tortured beings, to expose the fragility and limitations of the human race. Depicted in its substance and flesh, sometimes as a cadaver, the body is seen as a commodity, exposed in its materiality, vulnerability and finitude. Tortured, tormented and distressed bodies are mentioned in many poems in this book, with the most frequently used verbs being “martirizar” and “quemar”. Functioning as metaphors of spiritual and emotional, personal or collective suffering, the poet uses recurrent images of burning and incandescent bodies, as well as other living organisms, such as flowers, to signify a desolate (blazing) and violent reality. It is significant that, although it is used metaphorically in her poetry, torture was a routine measure applied in the Southern Cone from the 1960s onwards. It was a frequent practice by the military and the police to spread fear amongst the population. Many poems included in Ruffinelli’s anthology mention torture, sometimes in an explicit way. As Juan Rial explains, ‘[t]he culture of fear spread outward from the prisons by [different] channels. [...] These communications conveyed knowledge of what could happen to those who opposed the regime. They were intended to convince potential opponents that terror had no limits’ (1992: 99). The limit was, in fact, the human body itself and its capacity to resist.

Finally, it is also in this book where Silva Bélinzon gives one of the most eloquent and powerful expressions of her own writing that summarises her lifetime struggle to be recognised as a poet: ‘La palabra sencilla es peligrosa: / extraordinariamente desdichada / extraordinariamente poderosa’ (44). A few pages later, a paradoxical poem with a no less sarcastic title, “Tienes suerte”, seems to refute, at first glance, her own aptitude to write poetry: ‘mi tempestad batiendo solo atiende / tengo más lucidez en los relatos’ (47). However, the result is a much more ironic, again defiant and noncompliant attitude towards women’s writing. If she is supposed to be more lucid in the narrative, she, nevertheless, has the courage to write in

verse. Indeed, writing is experienced as a rapid and overwhelming flow of words and phrases: 'y el oficio / de frases que se apoyan como aludes' (64).

Sagrada Cantidad (1973)

From this book onwards, the worsening political, social and personal situation reached its peak. A key year in Uruguayan history, the infamous year of the *coup d'état*, Silva Bélinzon experiments further with free verse while her surrealist images become more sober, sinister and macabre. Some clichés work amongst obscure and innovative metaphors to create a rich, sombre and ominous new imagery.

The book is dedicated to her sister, Clara, and many of the poems are dedicated to other Uruguayan women writers, such as Nancy Bacelo, but also to members of the Generation of 1945, such as Ida Vitale and Enrique Fierro, and Mario Benedetti, her "rebel" fellows.[158] The first poem of the book, entitled "Los pecados", is dedicated to Uruguayan writer, María de Montserrat.[159] The sonnet describes a turbulent, corrupt and sinful world: 'Gran manjar es el hombre con pecados / como viven las moscas viviremos… / hay tres cuartos de mal en los mercados / y en sillas voladoras no saldremos' (7). Evil is expressed as a product, found and sold in the marketplace. Hence, Silva Bélinzon substitutes the image of the market as a public space, full of goods and people, for an inhospitable place where malice can be weighted and even traded. The humorous last line of this poem reveals the impossibility of escaping easily from such an adverse reality, while the subsequent stanza starts by reaffirming scarcity and fear as a common, collective feeling: 'Tan escasos de todo... y asustados' (7).

The book is filled with these allusions, metaphors and allegories. Beyond the obvious title in "La muerte de los pájaros no es buena", Silva Bélinzon also depicts an obscure and sinister scenario where darkness conceals, threatens and traps birds: 'Su tiniebla espantaba las palomas / y enredaba mejor que telarañas' (19). Under a military regime able to abuse limits, laws, rights and civil liberties, the intrusion of the public into the private realm makes the poet demand: 'La muerte de los pájaros no es buena / ¿hasta cuándo lo externo entre lo interno? /

[158] Clara had dedicated *Guitarra en sombra* (1965) to her sisters Concepción and Felisa.

[159] Born in Cuba and settled in Uruguay at the age of 10, María de Montserrat Albareda de Canessa published *Tres relatos* (1944), *Cuentos mínimos* (1952), *Los lugares* (1965), *El país secreto* (1977), *El sonido blanco* (1979), *El caballo azul* (1991) and *Los juegos* (1993), amongst other literary and critical works.

como un canto quemado que envenena' (20). This should not be understood as the defence of the private sphere as a traditional place assigned to women. It is freedom, but also autonomy and identity, that is reclaimed here. Under an authoritarian government, able to violate and usurp the sacred private places such as houses and bodies, Silva Bélinzon reclaims those personal spaces. Then, making a clear reference once more to the poem written by Clara Silva for Silva Bélinzon, the poem continues: '[...] una casa de vidrio no queremos' (7). Confined to the walls of her house, Silva Bélinzon may be defending, here, her very bourgeois rights of civic privatism, or plausibly, in contraposition to Clara's poem, she is expressing her need to break away from her isolated, displaced position. Another possible explanation may be that 'casa de vidrio' also stands for the vulnerability of the house/home as a political and social institution. Even so, the nuanced poetic dialogue established between the two poets/sisters traces other interesting implications, as the stanza follows: 'No te apures por mí estoy segura: / no alcanzan padrenuestros para todos / son poquitos los hombres sin negrura' (8). Religion and sisterhood connect the two poets, producing a caring and sisterly reaction against the hostile world. The use of the diminutive in 'poquitos' emphasises this idea of a colloquial, loving and comforting, imagined or remembered dialogue between the two sisters.

The staggering, sometimes extremely hermetic, metaphors are blended with more conspicuous images that offer clear hints of a perturbed and conflictive reality, which is sometimes expressed in plain words as the title of one of the poem reflects: "Tiempo de guerra" (45). In effect, in 1972, President Bordaberry had declared the country in a state of "internal war". The hermetic structure, but also the fantastic hints of this poem, suggests treason and corruption: 'Trabajo peligroso entre cuchillos; / cuando comen o duermen los traidores / las monedas quemando los bolsillos' (46). Whereas the last stanza insinuates the destruction of a personal patrimony, as well as submission and silence: 'Añicos los roperos y vajillas; / sin levantar cabeza ni colores / forradas en silencio sus mejillas' (46). In "Casi peces (no peces)", the poem develops a similar tone: '¿pero cómo saberlo? - por ejemplo: el periódico no dice / ni el Estado / las cifras elevadas de sus bajas; / ni el filo para arriba / de sus venas' (12). The stanza is followed by a description of an overruled place controlled by unidentified characters covered with parrot masks that might resemble military masks: 'Pero las cosas todas reguladas: sus máscaras de loro' (12). There is something sinister in this image but also slightly satirical. It is the simile of a parrot mask for the military mask. Although this association can be questionable, the mask is representing a mocking performance, an almost carnivalesque description that greatly contrasts with an over-controlled environment. These bird-like masks differ from the most common emblematic meaning of birds as symbols of freedom: 'La rama

ya está rota / ¿por qué matan los pájaros sin miedo? Desastres la derrota / no levanta ni un dedo / siniestro movimiento el de su ruedo' (32). Once more, masks and birds are used in a similar fashion by contemporary writer Sara de Ibáñez. Whereas, in Silva Bélinzon's poetry, masks as well as disguises come on scene to continue illustrating the ominous, grotesque, almost carnivalesque, overruled power: 'Despedidas de sabios / y cabezas gigantes (espantosas) / frotándose los ojos, del gusano, / que tanto los gobierna' (21); 'Naciste en los años traicionados / donde cuidan las máscaras de reyes / hombres entre dos aguas maquillados / es esto lo que hicimos con Tus leyes' (47).

The country's new state of affairs leaves its citizens mourning, as orphans, homeless and hopeless: 'Enterró los cadáveres sin miedo […] quemó toda la casa con un dedo / las antiguas hortensias de esperanza' (13); 'Noches solas, sin padres ni cabañas / con las manos cerradas se marchita; / ayudan a los hongos sus entrañas / su caja de luciérnagas maldita' (25). This sense of orphanhood resounds in other poems written at the time, such as Cristina Peri Rossi's "La crianza de un padre": '[...] Desde ese día lo enterramos. / Ya no tengo más padre a quien educar y mostrar el mundo. / Soy huérfano' (Ruffinelli 1971: 138). Availing myself of a similar metaphor, the (paternal/istic) welfare state was dead and buried. Under those circumstances, Silva Bélinzon tries to safeguard her last remaining personal space; that is, her own body: 'Procura proteger lo que me queda: / el cuerpo entero y vivo sin malvados / cortando los tres cuartos de la rueda' (26).

Llamarlo y despedirlo (1976)

Three years after the *coup d'état,* Silva Bélinzon was seventy-six years old. Her sister Clara and her husband had died, as well as other members of her family, and Silva Bélinzon met Claudio Ross. *Llamarlo y despedirlo* is, again, marked by a bitter tone of great sadness, grief, solitude and frustration.[160] In this book, the future is uncertain in the image of a blind clairvoyant whose cards reveal a state of mourning: 'Y encontró a la Vidente medio ciega; / las cartas se trocaron en crespones' (14). The fragmentary gaze, barely able to predict or foresee a more prosperous future, is reiterated in another poem where the world seems to be perceived

[160] *Disimulada gloria* was also published in 1976. Being Silva Bélinzon's only book written in prose, I have decided not to include it in this thesis.

through the house's boundaries: 'Me resulta increíble lo que veo / por las puertas brevísimas del mundo' (21).

The house/home as either a real or a metaphoric space now occupies a central position in Silva Bélinzon's life and poetry. It is, once more, represented as a cloistered and silent, as well as a haunted place: 'Por los cuartos antiguos, / mariposas; / respuestas de retratos familiares / las camas bien tendidas silenciosas' (48). A poem entitled "Luisa (mi tía)" symbolises this ambivalence: 'Era la misma voz de otro verano / pero adentro miré cosas distintas […]. La casa estaba llena de amenazas: / quemando en el jardín los pensamientos / con manos y rodillas como brasas' (53-54); 'El cuarto está lleno de polillas / la culpa nos hunde como peces […] los hombres muriendo como reses' (59); 'Cajón cerrado con olor a luces / (algunas veces hablo con los muertos) / el polvo de los vientos / no los toca / muertos queridos' (66). The imagery is, however, contradictory, while the house/home is restrained and mystified, the memory of her ancestors reunites the poet with her past, with a personal and historical time that the present seems to refuse.

Furthermore, the opening poem contrasts powerful male figures with her abandoned self: 'Del Señor Admirable los andares / y faroles de fama / pierden mundos; / al instante / y, en todos los lugares / El puede contestar si son profundos [...]| Las voces de los jueces / no traspasa / Concepción y su verso abandonada' (7-8).[161] The poem finishes with this significant stanza: 'Me acusan de soberbia y de locura / hay millones de puertas en mi casa / pero ninguna tiene cerradura' (8). Remarkably, the closed door described in this book is now an open door, as the poem finishes with a significant stanza. A need to unlock and challenge that burdensome space is also rendered. This idea of an unlocked house, available for people to enter into, is reiterated in other poems that reclaim company and presence, contesting the enclosed, cloistered environment imposed by the outside: 'Las puertas bien abiertas / día y noche. / Puede entrar el que quiera / y Animales / ya corté los cerrojos y reproches' (16). In the previous stanza, a line reveals a determined position to be boundless. To succeed in this act of liberation, the poet makes sure that no keys are kept visible, and this significantly applies to her Father's keys: 'Las llaves de mi Padre bien guardadas' (60).

[161] 'Admirable", clearly resembles the word *almirante* (in English, admiral: naval commander). In fact, the more explicit word 'almirante' is not so alien to Silva Bélinzon's imagery in this period. In one of her latest unpublished manuscripts, Silva Bélinzon writes: 'Todos ellos banqueros y almirantes / enlazados en cárceles / escondidos en cuevas. […]', PA.

The next poem shows a poet delighted when surrounded by friends and unexpected visitors: 'seres queridos llegan sin aviso; / ha sido una reunión encantadora / menos disfraces' (17). In between the lines, a kind of confession reveals her solitude in the haunted house: '(a veces hablo con los muertos)' (17). It is against abandonment and solitude that those doors are claimed to be opened: 'Grandes reformadores de sombreros / se alejan de mi casa / tan extraña' (9); 'Completamente sola la dejaron / y prender una lámpara no puede / murciélagos ocultos se alejaron' (12); 'y las hojas del bosque me rodean / si nadie piensa en mí. / No me permitas tu separación / bendito hermano Luis.| […] Junto al jardín de dos palmas / una mujer reía: / "quiero ser reina"/ "quiero ser reina". | Yo temblaba. / No me permitas tu separación bendito hermano Luis' (74). The loss of family members brings memories of a lost past whose consequence reaffirms a poignant feeling of desolation.

A poem written by Clara Silva, entitled "Las furias del sueño", appears on page forty-nine, just after Silva Bélinzon's poem "Respuestas de retratos familiares" (quoted above), a few pages after another poem entitled "Concepción Silva" (35) and before "Luisa (mi tía)" (53). In this sense, the book seems to attempt to trace a family portrait, a family album, or a personal history and a tradition. Although Clara's poem seems completely unexpected within the general structure of the book, a close reading unveils its possible significance. It is remarkably similar in style to those written by Silva Bélinzon. At first glance, the poem seems to be a description of Clara and her relationship with the poetic act: 'Al hombre Luz altiva / carroza abandonada en el sendero. / Día y noche cautiva / tu verso carcelero / es la historia de Clara y su Madero' (49). However, a few stanzas later, the poem astonishingly enters into a new dialogue with some of Silva Bélinzon's poems published in the very same book, more specifically the poem entitled "El pasado y futuro conquistados" in which Silva Bélinzon writes: 'Tapado por la herrumbre de la duda, / el mapa del presente / retrocede / se olvida de su cuerpo y se desnuda' (12).[162] Clara Silva finishes her own poem with a stanza that takes the last line from this poem but slightly changes it. Whether or not this can be seen as an overlooked mistake, Clara modifies (or rewrites) Silva Bélinzon's line, substituting the suggestive word 'cuerpo' with a more prudish word 'tierra': 'Secreto descubierto / "Se olvida de la tierra y se desnuda"; tanta fe en lo cierto / al hombre desauna / marchito por la herrumbre y desacierto' (50). Although the small alteration seems to insist on the more delusional character of Silva

[162] As is typically the case in Silva Bélinzon's poetry, the title is usually extremely revealing by itself. As this title exposes, past and future are conquered, but the present seems to be an empty, unmentioned time.

Bélinzon, what seems more remarkable is the poem's intertextuality that interlaces the two sisters' lives and writings.

Sitios abandonados (1979)

Silva Bélinzon's last book of poetry, significantly entitled *Sitios abandonados*, is dedicated to her platonic lover Claudio Ross. The book reclaims hope and love within an unfavourable situation: '¿cómo será mañana sin trastornos / amor que desafía tantos credos?' (47); 'Más amor hoy que ayer y son brillantes' (62). There are some vestiges of optimism in the face of inspiration, but the book seems to express the last breath of her life. Repetitive lines and verses, as well as symbols and images, are here much more discontinuous, interrupted and hermetic.

Love, as was argued in chapter three, was an attempt to fight against a reality that was hitting her very hard. Love was a vital force able to compensate economic and personal deprivation. It is described as a source of spiritual wealth, as well as a renewal and revival, as expressed in "Sitios abandonados": 'Sitios abandonados, mi trabajo / estoy inaugurando otra existencia; porque ya recomienza muy abajo / repito millonaria esta presencia'| [...] Apenas son dos ojos que persigo / no me reservo nada cada día / cumpliendo con mi oficio voy contigo' (9). Writing is, in this sense, strongly connected to love as a persistent attempt to resist and fight against the inexorable passage of time, as articulated in "Ojos de diamante": 'Quiero escribir palabras de estas noches / en difícil o claro indivisibles; / un puñal está alzado entre los coches / y hay bocas con espinas invisibles' (11); 'Qué hacer qué hacer enorme en la tierra; / se marchita el amor sin las palabras / y este silencio herido nos aterra' (12).

Memory allows travel through time, through a tiny channel that opens up a revision, recognition and revitalisation of her life. In opposition, the frozen present is shut down. What she seems to see is an insignificant women's (his)story condemned to duties: 'Un conducto principia en la memoria / y la puerta se cierra contra nieve; / agujero de siglos con la gloria. | Remotas cabelleras de mujeres / veo la nimiedad de aquella historia / de manera maldita los deberes' (42). Although love and desire make her more free and beautiful: 'Bien limpia y bien cerrada la colmena; coleccionaba gatos y recuerdos / acaso más hermosa entre la arena' (30), the body limits those feelings: 'Soy el Sol que fermenta toda espera; / el color del destino es invisible / el presidio del cuerpo la barrera' (60).

In terms of writing and identity, Silva Bélinzon offers complex and sometimes contradictory accounts on these matters. In *SA*, it is possible to observe a poet that adopts a defensive, as well as defiant, attitude towards her writing and readers: 'Nadie podrá saber lo que Ella dijo / a través de tinieblas y futuros' (13). It is a harsh message that seems to close any possible understanding between her poetry and her readers. However, later in the book she writes: 'Concepción es extraña, es la batalla / suspende, nos enoja, y nos alumbra / un espejo sin marco es su pantalla' (66). At first glance, her body seems to be the mirror. If so, her identity is substituted and completed by another's reflection. But there is at least one other way to understand this stanza. The mirror might not be only her body, but the text: a boundless, unframed screen where readers enter into dialogue with her poetry. In this sense, the poetic act (conception) makes them/us angry, perhaps when we do not appreciate it ('nos enoja'), and enlighten us when we are able to identify with her writing ('nos alumbra').

In a nutshell, the book deals with the inexorability of the passage of time, the implacable advent of her death and the need to resist and transform that uncanny truth. Although some of these poems seem to be a positive portrayal of a life able to resurge, the book and its title contradict somehow these remnants of expectation. Not surprisingly, Silva Bélinzon returns to the hermetic structure of the sonnet. Only a few times she is able to break from this poetic form in this book and that is to say: 'Respirar / respirar / seguir viviendo; / demasiado escuchar sin un gesto... / glicinas y luciérnagas siguiendo' (14).

To conclude, although these books show the contradictions and ambiguities of a displaced writing, Silva Bélinzon's poetry, produced under an extremely difficult personal and political situation, becomes more experimental and audacious. In opposition to the static, paralysed and marginalised circumstances in which she was immersed, poetry offers the possibility to escape from that situation, to virtually travel and "jump" in time and space; in other words, to resist the abandoned site. Drawn into the walls of her own house/home, the external world seems to gain a new dimension in her poetry and, although ambivalent, the house/home becomes a central metaphor of the personal and the political. The depicted world becomes more constrained and restricted by her own physical and economic difficulties, but also by the ominous political situation that the country experienced in those decades. Against a new and radical form of oppression, her poetic forms, for so long attached to the sonnet, developed into more relaxed structures and, soon after, became even more fixed and hermetic. The poetic content grew more resistant to the internal and external situation, and her own voice more defiant. In other words, even if the world became more limited, her imaginary turned out to be

more irreverent. Memory and writing became the means to go beyond those limitations, in order to breathe... to keep living.

CONCLUSION

I grew up listening to my father singing songs and poems to me. One of my favourites was "Alfonsina y el mar" by Félix Luna and Ariel Ramírez, sung by Argentinean folk-diva Mercedes Sosa. I soon learnt that the song was about an Argentinean woman poet who committed suicide by drowning herself in the sea. She was Alfonsina Storni. Partly based on her last published poem, partly legend, the song is a sad recreation of Storni's final moments. Wonderfully written and hugely moving, one of the song's lines that I remember particularly striking me was 'Te vas Alfonsina con tu soledad. ¿Qué poemas nuevos fuiste a buscar?' It is, of course, difficult to discern what I felt as a child from what I remember as an adult, and what I choose to recreate from those memories. Yet, I do remember being unable to understand why Storni was so lonely and had to die in order to find more poems to write. I imagine that what I could not understand were the reasons that, almost thirty years later, I have tried to discover.

Writing has always been a difficult enterprise for a woman. Even in a country characterised by the large number of women poets, writing does not necessarily mean an easy practice for them. Finding female intellectual roles to identify with was, therefore, also a difficult task. If women poets were the limited cultural female figures of my upbringing, Juana was too maternal and dull, Alfonsina too sad, Delmira too wild, Gabriela too parochial and Idea, too bitter. Perhaps my mistake was to believe that one could identify with a poet. Perhaps I had the wrong idea of the importance of poetry in our society. Perhaps I should have understood that poetry is something you tediously learn by heart at primary school, that you pretentiously memorise at high school; afterwards, you only remember those monotonous repetitions of some verses and you get on with your life. My education, however, dragged the surpluses of a growing middle class that in the first half of the twentieth century, found in poetry and opera its highest cultural expression (Barrán 2001: 244-248). It is not surprising, then, that poetry was the most frequent and appreciated literary genre to be practised by the writers of that period. It is not unexpected, either, that the poetic canon was strong enough to be included in the national curriculum decades later. Consequently, the great number of women poets that the country has produced has been seen as a clear manifestation of such cultural and social aspiration, and a strong argument to prove the existence of an open society and a literary canon. What is more remarkable, however, is that, despite poetry being such an important genre in the national canon, women's poetry of the first half of the twentieth century was not inter-

preted as being *about* the nation. Even more incredible is the fact that such a substantial number of women poets significantly contrasts with the limited number who are included in the country's literary history. What is also significant is that the poetic critical corpus is not only biased but also rather limited. As this thesis has demonstrated, if some women poets have been included in the canon, they are usually seen as "exceptional" and incomparable. This biased inclusion has proved consistent and solid enough to persist even in the twenty-first century.

Indeed, women writers have been entrapped in conventional perceptions and assumptions that are still very much ingrained in our culture. In the English-speaking world, the recent shocking comments made by the Nobel Prize-winning author, V.S. Naipaul, have shown how the issues around women's writing and their reception are still very much an ongoing debate. Naipaul said: '[...] inevitably for a woman, she is not a complete master of a house, so that comes over in her writing too'. Adding, 'I read a piece of writing and within a paragraph or two I know whether it is by a woman or not. I think [it is] unequal to me'.[163] When he was asked to elaborate his statement, Naipaul said that this was due to their 'sentimentality, the narrow view of the world'.[164] As this quote and this thesis has exposed, the dominant critical corpus has historically refused the productive role of women, conceding them only the reproductive one. Consequently, women writers have faced a double-critical standard that usually dismissed or misplaced them for being conservative or naive, prissy or unconcerned, incoherent or repetitive, far too common or not "good" enough. Such appraisals have been widely accepted and the attempts to contest them rather shy.

Placed within the unconvincing parameters of cultural generations, mid-twentieth-century women's poetry in Uruguay seems to be full of exceptions. Their works have been "snipped" or made to disappear to fit with the established literary categorisations and to show a more harmonious national canon. Whereas the women poets of the Generation of 1930 have been trapped in stereotypical views, religion and mysticism as a constant line of interpretation to show their apolitical and conservative writing, women poets from the Generation of 1945 also faced a challenging cultural milieu that split their productions from its predecessors. Enrique Fierro maintained that Dora Isella Russell (1925-1991), was 'ignorada olímpicamente por su generación ("una generación de críticos", apuntó cierta vez Guillermo de Torre), que no le

[163] Interview by Rob Parson, *London Evening Standard*, 1 June 2011:

< http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23955458-women-writers-are-different-i-can-tell-they-are-unequal-to-me.do > [Accessed on 8 June 2011].

[164] Ibid.

perdonó su voluntaria fidelidad a un estilo, en vida y obra, demasiado próximo al de alguno de sus mayores,' and was considered, as he states: 'parafraseando una socorrida expresión de Martínez Moreno, que en ella las palabras sobran pero no alcanzan' (1968: 504-505). Meanwhile, in the same publication, Fierro "rescues" Amanda Berenguer's poetry by deliberately avoiding a reference to her initial work because he considers it too naive for a writer included within the Generation of 1945: 'No es el caso de empezar a hablar de la poesía de Amanda Berenguer remitiéndonos a sus orígenes. Porque […] tienen demasiado que ver con ese epigonismo engolado contra el que reaccionaran, saludablemente, los poetas del 45 […]' (504-505). As Fierro's comments illustrate, 'much of [women's] work [has been] ignored or misinterpreted to make the re-categorizing stick' (Russ 1983: 69). In this sense, one of the most interesting aspects that reveals how women poets have been constantly set aside from the national literary canon is the recurrent label of "reservista", which exposes their displacement from the hegemonic cultural discourses. This literary categorisation has served as a clear example to emphasise women's cultural dislocation within a national and cultural history conceived as patriarchal, homogeneous and teleological.

In opposition to an established traditional critical corpus, which has tended to immobilise women poets in cultural history, this thesis has provided a new reading that identifies and questions the traditional assumptions that sees these women poets as conservative, confessional and/or apolitical. It has offered a new critical framework that enables us to understand how, in a country with so many women poets, only a few are recognisable, and how those few are only acknowledged under certain persisting labels. By including a marginal and controversial poet, this research has shown that women's poetry of the first half of the twentieth century provides complex literary strategies that usurp and deconstruct the hegemonic discourses from within. By using a double-voiced discourse that incorporates, as well as challenges gender constructs, women's poetry in this period reveals the impossibility of 'the space of modern nation' to be read as horizontal and linear (Bhabha 1994: 293). As a "minor" poet, Silva Bélinzon's writing is, in this sense, a great illustration of an intricate poetry that resists any specific and strict categorisation, and yet, it expresses the complexity of her times and her own identity. Silva Bélinzon experienced one of the most significant transformations in Uruguayan history in almost a century of life. Facing discrimination, solitude and prejudice, her writing was her very space of resistance and recognition. If she only partially succeeded, it reveals the difficult endeavour of writing from the margins.

It is unlikely that Silva Bélinzon will be included in the Uruguayan literary canon any time soon. Nevertheless, the study of a non-canonical, marginal(ised) and eccentric poet enables us

to understand women's poetry within a decisive political, social and cultural period in the country. By highlighting the circumstances that determined Silva Bélinzon's personality and writing, this research has offered a better understanding of gender identity in Uruguayan modern society and the formation of its literary canon. When viewed in relation to the strongly gendered literary projects of the beginning of the twentieth century, it helps to understand women's cultural position within the nation-building process and to question ideas of value and the practices of canon formation. Silva Bélinzon's poetry has offered an interesting case study to illustrate how women's poetry intervenes in the construction of the state-building projects, creating a writing that deconstructs linear narratives of identity. If gender is temporally produced (Weston 2002: 120), and such time has been shaped from a masculinist perspective, this thesis has shown that her puzzling, labyrinthine and ex-centric poetry defies such constructions. Her writing thus forces us to review the homogenous and linear 'production of meaning and value' (Bhabha 2003: 247) and, in so doing, against general interpretations that see her poetry detached from reality and historical issues, it reveals that her writing is also about the nation.

This study has challenged an existing and complacent critical corpus that tends to reproduce preconceptions and stereotypes without revising the peculiarities of a multiple history constructed by many different voices. There are many more examples. The Uruguayan literary canon still occludes many fundamental writers and writings. Afro-Uruguayan voices, for instance, are still absent from it and the critical corpus is still very small.

Without fearing to conclude with an unfair generalisation, it is possible to say that women's poetry in mid-twentieth century Uruguay challenges the traditional categories of literary history (Maier & Valis 1990: 55), and in turn, the great national project of the nation (with the *Centenario* as its most clear expression) as a homogeneous and modern fatherland (*patria*). In this sense, this study is framed within other recent research that is also looking at gender and the formation of national literary canons in other countries in Latin America. That is the case of Sara E. L. Bowskill's recently published *Gender, Nation and the Formation of the Twentieth-Century Mexican Literary Canon* (2011). Although Bowskill concentrates on novels, her analysis, as well as her conclusions, can be compared to the Uruguayan context and vice versa.

Finally, at the time of submitting this thesis, Uruguay is joining the Bicentennial celebrations of independence in Latin America. A few projects have been carefully set in place to ensure women's representation in the national celebration, including a couple of conferences on women in the army and on women's social position in the last two hundred years, a special

postal stamp edition entitled "200 mujeres del Bicentenario", and a photographic exhibition of women's participation in the political, social and cultural life in the country in the last two hundred years.[165] Yet, it is too soon to assess the impact that these new celebrations will have in the representation and inclusion of women in the country's political, social and cultural life. Future works will be able to analyse the actual influence that these projects have had on the political agenda, the national and cultural history, and more importantly on women's lives. In any case, one fact that my research has shown me is that the reconsideration of these women poets depends on subnational networks and individuals also working at the margins of the official discourses.

[165] Available at: <http://www.bicentenario.gub.uy/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Guia-de-actividades-BICENTENARIO-web.pdf> [Accessed on 9 June 2011].

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