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Santitos: Loss, the Catholic Sleuth, and the Transnational Mestiza Consciousness

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Death is an unquestionable part of our lives, a matter of time, the only thing we know for certain. The death of your own child, however, is a matter of disbelief, perhaps madness. How do cultures account for the deaths of their children? How does literature address their loss, mourning and rage? In María Amparo Escandón's novel *Santitos* [*Esperanza's Box of Saints*][1] (1999), a young widow, Esperanza, stares death in the face walking the fine line between loss and madness, healing and trauma for over two hundred pages. As the author has explained, this is the main question of the novel: "What if I was told my daughter had died and I wasn't able to confirm her death? My immediate reaction would be to deny it. To prove them wrong I would do what anyone else would in this case: anything and everything. Call on otherworldly forces for guidance? Sure. Set out to find her who knows where in the world? Of course. Become a prostitute? You bet. And in the process of looking for her, I'd most likely find myself." (http://www.sdlatinofilm.com).

In the novel Esperanza Diaz has just lost her twelve-year-old daughter to an unexplained virus. The last time she saw her, Blanca was in the hospital to have her tonsils removed. Suddenly she is reported dead. What follows gives the novel an unlikely twist. The night of the funeral Esperanza experiences a vision from San Judas Tadeo, patron saint of desperate cases. Speaking through his image on the oven window, he tells her that her daughter is not dead. Then, Esperanza sets off with her box of saints to look for her daughter. This journey takes her from her native town of Veracruz to Tijuana, then to the Mexican side of Los Angeles and finally back home again.

Santitos not only articulates the complexities of loss, melancholia, and mourning but also links these elements to create new forms of representation for the most recent Latin American novel. As loss becomes the

starting point of the narrative, the rest of the novel explores of "[. . .] the numerous material practices by which loss is melancholically materialized in the social and the cultural realms and in the political and aesthetic domains" (Eng & Kazanfian 5). This is relevant given recent discussions on the crisis of representation within circles of Latin American Cultural Studies. In *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Alberto Moreiras states that the "[. . .] conditions of possibility for Latin Americanist discourse have shifted over the last decade" (1). He also suggests that "[. . .] what is at issue in the debate on literature and cultural studies is nothing but the specific valences of the critical function in the humanities" (2). What is being debated, of course, is as much the peculiarities of its specific valences as it is the exhaustion of the process of differentiated repetition, and the value of a literary and cultural representation that seems to be trapped in the binary cage of postcolonial thinking. Has Latin American discourse lost the power of representation in an increasing culture of globalization? In the light of these debates, how does loss (a central category of the novel) bring new forms of representation? To what degree does this concept allow space for a configuration of a new transnational mestiza consciousness? This article examines the remaking of a transnational mestiza literary tradition in the light of new Latin American creative writing and critical thought. I argue that this recent Latin American literary production seeks to create a link between personal loss, and the trauma of historical legacies, such as borders, migration or globalization. More specifically, in the case of *Santitos*, the different aspects at play activate a new kind of novel: the role of loss and mourning, combined with techniques from the traditional analytic detective novel, lead to the birth of a transnational mestiza cultural consciousness.

1. Loss and Mourning.

Mothers raise questions. When they go unanswered, rage takes over reasoning. While some family narratives seek resolution, or at least an explanation for the loss experienced by all the members, others get stuck on endless dwelling, trapped in the grief that changed the realities of their life. A loss without closure results in endless mourning, a state of permanent grief, and an attachment to the past that erases the present or any possibility of a future. The inability to resolve those moments of loss from the past coupled with the lack of grief's resolution, creates what Freud describes as 'melancholia.'

Escandón, who grew up in Mexico City, and spent long periods of her life in Veracruz, is by no means the first to use loss and melancholia as a vehicle for literary expression. Loss is as fundamental to Latin American literature as it is to the Western canon. But to really understand Escandón's use of loss in the context of Latin American cultural studies and its relationships to literary representation, we must place the matter in its historical context. Loss and melancholia have played an important role in contemporary Latin American literature. We need only recall Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* [*The Labyrinth of Solitude*] (1950) to understand the considerable influence these issues have had on the Latin American psyche.

Loss and the consequences of mourning explain to a great degree what Rulfo achieved at the peak of the Latin American modernist period. *Pedro Páramo* is not less than the most haunting state of erasure prescribed by the idea of loss in a specific symbolic setting. Comala (the mythical city of *Pedro Páramo*) portrays a perplexing state of perpetual loss that permeates all 'existence.' This place, usually associated with the Latin American cultural and political state of affairs since WWII, in many ways anticipates what Moreiras describes as the exhaustion of 'difference.' Rulfo's prophetic predictions on the limitations of the Latin American signifier (the sign of 'Mexican identity' in this case), involve not only the demise of the Revolution itself but its co-option by the political and economic forces at work since the 1950's. The result is a fixation on the father, with its mode of representation a monumental historical vacuum boxed by endless grief. Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* reinforces this fixation on loss and the infinite solitude that emanates from this state of the culture. And for Paz, it is the archetype of La Malinche (the Mexican Eve), that articulates the absence of the father, the Mexican's sense of (pathological) melancholia, and the loss of culture. Neil Larsen's *Modernism and Hegemony: A Materialist Critique of Aesthetic Agencies* argues for the cultural agency of the modernist aesthetics taken by these two writers during this period. He argues that Rulfo's mode of representation is an ideological and (negative) essentialist statement on the identity of Mexican culture:

> The aura of 'culture' that emerges from this vacuum has in its turn, however its own repressive logic. Culture in itself

> becomes the naturalizing and dehistoricizing containment of what is otherwise potentially an emergence of a particular counterrrationality directly opposed to that of the absent of state mediation. (Larsen 64)

But what Rulfo and Paz's states of melancholia, as the archetypal representation of the Latin American 'being,' imply is not so much a condemnation of the Revolution itself as the exhaustion of its signs of representation. Both writers underline the impossibility (Comala and the labyrinth being archetypes of a culture trapped in endless mourning), of coming into a closure with the loss of the (state) 'father' after the failure of the revolutionary impulse of the 1920's. This is especially pertinent for contemporary Mexican Literature since two of the most influential writers since the 1950's use the aesthetics of melancholia to make the readers aware of the political and cultural losses implied by the spread of modernity.

What does it mean, then, to enter the discourse of loss, mourning and cultural identity during the 1990's? Will Latin American writing be condemned, after being unable to heal the loss, to dwell in Paz's solitude or Comala's pathological melancholia?

Escandón brings back the question in new and creative ways. Esperanza uses both faith and rage, moving between insight and madness, as ways of disrupting the pathological melancholia affecting the mode of representation of Latin American culture since the 1950's. Surprisingly, these disruptions are performed through a sort of 'public theology' with heavy roots in the popular—apparitions, saints, miracles and other signs of Mexican Catholic spirituality. But Escandón uses these miracles to move into the ethical realm and beyond the traditional aesthetics of Magical Realism. In fact, she redefines the notion of the national absent 'father' with the more transnational symbol of the 'mother'—the Virgin of Guadalupe. Max Stackhouse, in the lecture entitled "Globalization, Public theology, and New Means of Grace," defines public theology as that which "[. . .] generates a faith-full worldview, recovers and recasts certain pertinent historic themes in the history of theology that bear on globalization, and challenges any trends in theology that sees all normative claims as privileged to specific gender, ethnic, social, or convictional groups" (5). *Santitos* generates this 'public theology,' through the constant investigation of her loss, and the exploration of those places in-between that refuse easy solutions.

In fact, her box of saints articulates the connection between those two aspects through the exploration of its "empty spaces." During her long trip north, the box where she keeps her saints becomes the connection with the memory of her daughter: "En el otro brazo llevaba una caja de cartón voluminosa y difícil de cargar. En un costado había escrito con marcador: 'Frágil. Santos.' La apretaba contra su pecho igual que si se tratara de un bebé. Su contenido resonaba dentro como si fuera un ser vivo que trataba de escapar" (78) ["In the other arm she carried a voluminous carton box that was difficult to carry. In one of the corners she had written with a marker: 'Fragile. Saints.' She held on to it against her chest like it was a baby. The insides of the box sounded as if there was a living person trying to escape"]. The box of saints recreates in humorous and creative ways the emptiness left by loss and migration, and this commonality becomes one of the main ways of collapsing her personal grief with the social. The box of saints allows her also to generate a public theology through careful attention played to the gaps created by loss. Joan Copjec, paraphrasing Lefort, states that:

> Someone dies and leaves behind his place, which outlives him and is unfillable by anyone else. This idea constructs a specific notion of the social, wherein it is conceived to consist not only of particular individuals and their relations to each other, but also as a relation to these unoccupiable places. The social is composed, then, not just of those things that will pass, but also of relations to empty places that will not. (Copjec 23)

If *Pedro Páramo* and *The Labyrinth of Solitude* believe these places to be past, and therefore absent objects of mourning, *Santitos* looks at the 'relations' to the empty places as the present fabric of the social. This form of hopeful melancholia is set in the present allowing for a creative reformulation of grief. Her box of saints 'embodies' these relations to empty places in the present, and becomes a creative force as it extends the way mourning becomes interwoven with other people's losses and border crossings. As this becomes one of the main issues addressed through Esperanza's loss, Escandón constructs a clever narrative structure that pushes beyond the traditional assumptions of Magical Realism and contemporary Latina fiction. It is not surprising that through her loss Esperanza becomes a witness for

those undocumented and exploited by the border. Her box of saints, embodying the relations to empty places, is simultaneously a reminder of her personal loss, and the tool that brings her closer to the prostitutes, abandoned children, wrestlers, and a large representation of the marginalized on both sides of the border. The melancholia as pathology is transformed into a positive form of melancholia that offers hope, community and growth. With each character, and with each tale told from this subaltern community, Esperanza gains new insights into the dynamics of the relationship between Chicano and Mexican life in the Southwest. Loss is taken beyond the pathology of melancholia as the signifier of representation, and her identity expands into a border identity, a discovery of a 'larger' community which implies the Mexican on the other side of the border, but also the blurred relationship between the dead and the living—the undead.

2. A Latina Catholic Sleuth.

How *Santitos* takes loss and transforms it into the aesthetics of the transnational mestiza consciousness is indeed one of the many accomplishments of this narrative. The underlying structure of the work is ontological—a search for the truth in the midst of loss. This loss, the death of her only child, forces her into a spiritual and emotional search; she is forced into reorientation in the face of death, and forced to experience multiple cultural and emotional landscapes. But what happens if after the initial catalyst, the meaning of loss itself becomes the main object of her search? And what are the strategies involved in order to make the reader part of this journey?

Richard Raskin states in "The Pleasures and Politics of Detective Fiction" that there are at least three main theories explaining the psychological appeal of detective fiction: the ludic (which emphasizes the inclusion of the reader), the wish fulfillment (gratification is the central element of the narrative), and the tension reducing (the narrative structure of the novel being able to dispel any kind of emotional feelings). As Escandón is shaping and remaking the traditional analytic detective work, it is important to notice that *Santitos* belongs to the first one: she lets the reader "[. . .] enjoy the writer's virtuosity in playing with and against the convention of the genre" (76). The advantages of this strategy are clear: Esperanza's journey in the direction of new communities is extended beyond the limitations of the text—there is an implicit invitation to us, the readers, to do the same kind of sharing.

Like many contemporary works of the twentieth century, Escandón borrows key literary techniques from the traditional detective form: self-consciousness as a central theme, the quest for absolute truth, text as a labyrinth, bipolar oppositions, and geographic symbolism. Like the traditional detective, Esperanza is given a mystery (her loss) to solve and completes the task by carefully considering all the evidence at her disposal. But as she continues using the traditional analytic detective techniques, she also experiments with form, creating new methods of interplay between the detective (a mother), the victim (her daughter), and the murderer (God). Esperanza is also a different kind of detective. Escandón creates a blend of idiosyncratic and sympathetic qualities that fuse religion and humor, feminism and adventure. If Esperanza is a new Sherlock Holmes, Saint Jude (and her box of saints) is her Dr. Watson. Furthermore, this detective is not only a mix of prostitute and compassionate mother; she also brings a humorous dissolution to the roles by which women have been classified within patriarchal societies. Breaking away from the whore/mother paradigm, Esperanza is a different hero on a quixotic quest. As she travels from Tlacotalpan (Veracruz) to Tijuana, from Tijuana to Los Angeles and then back again, Esperanza confronts the meaning of her loss with the precision and sophistication of a modern Catholic sleuth.

As we learn from the mystery posed as kidnapping, the search for the truth about the loss of her daughter becomes for the reader the hook that makes him/her keep reading. The reader is included in the process of transformation and awareness that leads to the discovery of a true sense of community. Furthermore, the novel functions like a puzzle to be solved. The reader receives multiple perspectives on the events, and Escandón keeps the reader guessing as she supplies bits and pieces of the information not entirely understood until the book and the story are completed.

An intimate relationship between Esperanza and the reader is established from the very beginning as we listen to this warm act of a confession: "Debí decírselo la vez pasada que vine a confesión, pero no me atreví. Las palabras me dieron la espalda, como amigas desleales" (11) ["I should have told him the last time I came to confession, but I did not attempt to do it. The words turned their back on me like disloyal friends"]. With this statement, the reader becomes one with Esperanza's spiritual tribulations, becoming part of the work, he or she interacts with the characters and draws conclusions.

Through this privileged position, the reader gains access also to the greater community of the border-crossers and the space they inhabit. The reader not only becomes part of the text, but also gets a sense of the greater community Esperanza is discovering. This involves an American judge, Scott Haynes, with a fixation for mothers; Trini, the transgender who is the most famous brothel-keeper in Tijuana; Paloma, the homeless girl; Angel, the wrestler she falls in love with, etc. Through this progressive production of meaning, the reader becomes acculturated into the community of the border, growing familiar with the customs and unspoken norms of the marginal people we encounter through Esperanza's journey.

We should not underestimate the forces of the journey since this is the second reverse to the traditional analytic detective work. It is in the postponing of the inevitable truth that Esperanza gathers the strength to push the boundaries of the unknown and the insights that bring cultural and spiritual renewal. The journey sometimes signifies suffering, but along with this there is also endurance, perseverance, and a deep sense of faith that values laughter, womanhood and hope. The novel points at the truth as the inevitable—the quest. And it is in this quest, and not in the answers, where she becomes one with her loss. Esperanza's hope is firmly rooted in her conception of loss and mourning, popular Catholic spirituality, her border crossing experience and the search for a new consciousness. Loss is transformed into an awareness of the greater community, the rainbow of characters and border-crossers that facilitate her cultural and spiritual liberation. This strategy becomes the link with the practices by which loss is "[. . .] materialized in the social and the cultural realms and in the political and the aesthetic domains" (Eng & Kazanfian 5). In the uncertain border, the present quality of her loss, Esperanza is able to forge a consciousness and a sense of grief that allows space for self-empowerment. As Esperanza escapes the isolation of her life, the quest for the truth opens up her view of the world. Framing the investigation within the context of the journey allows for the novel to explore simultaneously individual and social self-empowerment.

Borrowing from the detective analytic story, *Santitos* builds "[. . .] a continuous engagement with loss and its remains [that] generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future." (Eng & Kazanfian 4). The mystery then becomes the mourning subject, and this aspect of investigation

allows her to embark into a journey of self-restoration, of integration of the missing pieces of her life. Through her initial refusal of closure, Esperanza learns how to investigate uncertainty, be fearless in the journey, and respectful to the mystery of her 'mourning remains.' In the face of trauma and loss, the negative energies of loss are temporarily suspended, then transformed into endless creativity. This relationship between the particular and the totality gives to Escandón's work a form of expression to recapture a new consciousness and its relationship with history.

3. The New Mestiza's Consciousness.

Santitos is also at its heart a tale of self-searching and the birth of a new consciousness. A child dies and it turns out that faith and the analytical detective skills of Esperanza, with the help of several border crossings, provide the transformation. But what changes in the narrative is not so much loss (death) as Esperanza's role as a wife and mother. To a vision of the world comprised by passivity and submission, *Santitos* postulates a vision of Esperanza as a questioning individual and border crosser.

Esperanza's border-crossings and her practices as a female sleuth, subvert the symbolic nature assigned to women within Mexican and Catholic traditional culture. Escandón uses humor to reverse the discourse imposed on the feminine (the dialectics of mother/whore as the only roles of access to power for women), and Esperanza goes in and out of these roles, never letting any of them touch her deepest search for a new self. As humor dissolves the false boundaries of the paradigm, it also shows the repressive nature of the Mexican nationalist discourse imposed on the feminine. The conflicting articulation of gender and identity can be traced back to the creation of a Mexican 'revolutionary' culture during the 1920s and 1930s. The contemporary patriarchal vision of Mexican identity will be reinforced later by the analysis of the Mexican self in Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* during the 1950's. Paz's construction of the archetype of La Malinche as linked to the 'loss' of the original Mexican (Malintzin being the mother of all mestizos), creates a vision of the feminine radically antithetical to the discourse of 'Mexican' identity and nationalism. As his discourse positions the original 'mother' of all Mexicans at the roots of betrayal and loss, the paradigm of nation-state, identity and creativity shifts towards patriarchy and a pathological sense of melancholia.

Escandón's new sense of identity emerges from a discourse of Mexican identity that gives meaning to the lives of people in the margins, and her insights are born out of the complexities of the dual consciousness of the Border and an all embracing 'mother'—the Virgin of Guadalupe. As Esperanza expands her consciousness into the greater cultural community of Mexico and the U.S. Southwest, a space emerges that helps bring a sense of interconnectedness and history among Mexicans and Chicanos living in the United States. The real innovation of *Santitos* is the attempt to situate personal loss within the frame of border crossing and its economic, psychological and spiritual consequences. Escandón speaks of loss in a multifaceted way that "allow us to understand the lost object as continually shifting both spatially and temporally, adopting new perspectives and meanings, new social and political consequences, along the way"(Eng & Kazanfian 5). In fact as Esperanza's search takes her to Tijuana, she also discovers the experience of crossing illegally. Referring to the saint of the undocumented border crossers (Juan Soldado, not recognized officially by the church), the narrator points at how he was "[. . .] un pobre desgraciado, como nosotros. Aquí necesitamos más santos que en otras partes. Esperanza también necesitaba más santos, ahora que estaba decidida a cruzar la frontera" (132) ["[. . .] a poor disgrace, just like us. We need more saints here than in other parts. Esperanza also needed more saints, now that she had decided to cross the border].

Within this context involving the sociopolitical situation and cultural production in both sides of the border, Escandón also uses a specific spiritual image that expresses best the space of the 'transnational-mestiza' experience: The Virgin of Guadalupe. In this novel, both Mexican and Chicano popular Catholic spirituality are joined by the devotion to the Mother. This symbol becomes a tool for both deconstructing geographical separations and facilitating the inclusion of a space of consciousness in-between cultures. Furthermore, there are intrinsic emancipatory cultural values associated with the deconstruction of the other 'mother' of all Mexicans. Escandón is able to replace the negative connotations of La Malinche, created by the official discourse of nation-state, with one that takes part in a tradition that theorizes mestizaje and a popular religious faith as the basis for a cultural and spiritual greater community of hope. Escandón not only reverses the logic of patriarchal structure and its pathology of loss, but also offers a spiritual and geographical reconstruction of a 'Mexican'

identity beyond borders. It is not by chance that Esperanza finds her consciousness in the midst of her reflections on the 'mother' as she remembers two moments of her life associated with Mexico and the Mexico of the other side of the border. Remembering the same Virgin of Guadalupe painted in one of the murals of East Los Angeles, and the one in Mexico City, Esperanza again asks to her Dr. Watson (San Judas Tadeo) for guidance. It is then, in this new understanding of her loss (a climatic moment that seals her moment of consciousness) that Esperanza is able to return home: "Por fin sé lo que me quiso decir San Judas Tadeo. Blanca no está muerta. Blanca no está viva. Está en ese espacio pequeñito entre lo uno y lo otro. Ahí es donde debí buscarla" (218) ["At last I know what San Judas Tadeo wanted to tell me. Blanca is not dead. Blanca is not alive. She is in that small space between the one and the other. It was there were I should have looked for her"].

It is at his point that 'home' is recreated as the discovery of a larger community that extends not only beyond borders but also beyond the borders of life and death. The fact the Blanca, her daughter, can still be contacted in the spaces in-between life and death allows for Esperanza a new sense of reality, connected to spiritual and sociopolitical insights. The re-elaboration of this tradition of heterogeneity and hybridization (using the Virgin of Guadalupe as a symbol) is transformed into a space in between that unites popular Catholic spirituality, feminist awareness and an aesthetics of border-crossing.

To loss and mourning, *Santitos* responds with a quest that gives new meanings to self-consciousness. Transforming loss into laughter, adventure into spiritual insight, the border crossings become journeys of self-empowerment and redemption, of faith searching for human dignity and truth that naturally gives rise to the connecting features of the greater cultural communities not divided by borders. In a new more complex type of heroism, the heroine acts from a sense of motherhood whose faith allows her to witness the downfall of melancholia as pathology. Self-empowerment takes over loss, and a new consciousness emerges at the end. In many ways *Santitos* radical crossings corresponds to Bhabha's 'savage hybridity,' defined by Moreiras as "[. . .] the radicalization of the reticent version of cultural hybridity on the basis of its constitutive negativity: it turns a reticent understanding of cultural change into a principle of counterhegemonic praxis, and it places it at the service of the subaltern position in the constitution

of the hegemonic system" (296). This is relevant to our initial discussion of the conditions for a new Latin American discourse and the exhaustion of the process of differentiated repetition. As many critics question the role of Latin American discourse in an increasing culture of globalization, Escandón gives loss a new value as crossings become not only the distinctive sign of the narrative but also the bridge connecting different geographical cultural traditions, blurring the spiritual territories of grief and creativity and the construction of a new consciousness. In the light of her border-crossings, Esperanza awakens to new sexual and spiritual experiences, to a new understanding of her role as a mother, and a consciousness as a transcultural mestiza that creates bridges connecting the Mexican and the Chicano experience.

Escandón explores (literally) the spaces in-between that escape the homogenizing control of both national states (the Mexican and the American), and transforms Esperanza's border crossings into vehicles that define both a cultural and spiritual policy. I find this particularly interesting, as the novel seems to suggest that it is the nation-state that legislates a pathological past-bound form of melancholia, as opposed to the hope, present-bound melancholia of Esperanza. In the spiritual world of Esperanza the solution to the mystery of loss comes back over and over again through the pursuing of the journey, the discovery of self-realization and the building of a greater community of hope. This positive re-elaboration of melancholia (which could be called a 'hopeful melancholia') within the Latin American tradition of hybridity becomes the element that unites the spiritual and the cultural, the geographical journey and individual self-empowerment. In *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Leigh Gilmore argues that "[. . .] placing a personal history of trauma within a collective history compels one to consider that cultural memory, like personal memory, possesses 'recovered' or 'repressed' memories, and also body (or body politic) memories of minoritized trauma like racial and sexual violence" (31-32). In this novel, personal trauma placed in the collective history of the Southwest is transformed into metaphors of healing through hybridism, border-crossings, and the search for a space from which one can propitiate the reconstruction of a community able to transcend the separation of borders—a 'transnational mestiza consciousness.' Furthermore, the emancipatory values of this transnational mestiza consciousness theorize a new space that creates a link between personal loss, grief, melancholia, and the trauma of

historical legacies, such as imposed borders (the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo), migration or globalization.

The most important aspect of *Santitos* as a detective novel, however, is the solution. This 'solution' to the mistery of loss and grief seems to emanate also from her own daughter's border identity in that space in-between living and death. Despite the actions of Esperanza and her practices as a female sleuth, the novel postulates a vision of a world comprised not of specific outstanding individuals but of spiritual interconnectedness and community. Escandón's novel with its analytic detective structure, produces an on-going investigation on loss, trauma and the struggle of the marginalized that ultimately recapture spiritual interconnectedness and the community experience on both sides of the border.

This culture of transnational crossings becomes the quest for absolute consciousness, a totalizing perspective that has to be redefined by the reader given the evidence: the text. The aesthetics of *Santitos* becomes a call for the reader to construct alternative stories, which, in turn, become also alternative to the official History. Through these strategies the reader is exposed to the spiritual, cultural and historical truths of Esperanza as a border-crosser's historical legacy of trauma. As a result, it proposes in its place, a new space, a new history, represented by the new consciousness. Through this intellectual challenge the reader is allowed to get closer to the truth of the experience of this people, become a participant in this search for self-empowerment, and recapture the meaning of loss in this geographical area. Escandón creates a metastructure that at certain times engages in the particular and at others, in the universal mysteries of life and death, sacrifice and redemption. Because of her faith, an unbreakable spirit drives her search; because of her refusal to fixed solutions, her energy is endless. Esperanza also finds meaning in search of her past, her relationships, and the truth about how she was displaced from her traditional role in the family by the loss of both her husband and her only child. And what the reader discovers through the knowledge of history and facts (this evidence is announced by Angel) is that "[. . .] la esperanza es lo ultimo que muere" ["Hope is the last thing that dies"].

Note

1. All translations from Spanish to English are my own unless otherwise noted.

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