

Letras Hispanas

Volume 11, 2015

SPECIAL SECTION: On Masculinities, Latin America, and the Global Age

TITLE: The Ends of Masculinity in the Urban Space in Ana Clavel's *Los deseos y su sombra*

AUTHOR: Vinodh Venkatesh

E-MAIL: vinodhv@vt.edu

AFFILIATION: Virginia Tech; Foreign Languages & Literatures; Major Williams, 339; 220 Stanger Street; Blacksburg, VA 24061

ABSTRACT: Current debates on the urban condition underline how the postmodern city undergoes what Fredric Jameson calls a crisis of boundaries where the borders and categories of space are blurred. Where does it begin, or, better yet, what are the limits of the urban? The indeterminate physical space in turn contributes to an indeterminacy of the subject, as Fredric Jameson suggests that the postmodern space is inextricable from the phenomenology of the subject. Jameson's question, however, incites a challenging of the ontology of the subject that is blurred in this process of late capitalism. Addressing this disjunct, Kathleen Kirby argues that Jameson's subject is categorically masculine in nature, as the consciousness of indeterminate corporeality experienced by the postmodern subject is an extravagance that women have never been able to identify with. Women, Kirby argues, have consciously and wearingly been aware of their embodiment. Gender then is not only a factor in how the city is formed, metastized, and structured, but in our actual everyday experience of the urban. In the following pages I examine the symbolic spaces in Ana Clavel's writing of Mexico City in *Los deseos y su sombra* (2000). I reflect on how masculinities regiment the public and symbolic within the urban, and speculate on the possibilities of redefining the public spaces that maintain and perpetuate a masculine order.

KEYWORDS: Ana Clavel, *Los deseos y su sombra*, Urban Space, Masculinity

RESUMEN: Los debates actuales sobre la condición urbana subrayan la manera en que la ciudad postmoderna experimenta lo que Fredric Jameson llama una crisis de fronteras, esto es, una crisis donde las fronteras y categorías del espacio se desdibujan. ¿Dónde comienza o, más bien, cuáles son los límites de lo urbano? El espacio físico indeterminado contribuye, por su parte, a la indeterminación del sujeto ya que Jameson sugiere que el espacio postmoderno es inextricable de la fenomenología del sujeto. En relación con esta idea, Kathleen Kirby arguye que el sujeto de Jameson es categóricamente masculino en naturaleza, ya que la conciencia de la corporalidad indeterminada experimentada por el sujeto postmoderno es una extravagancia con la que las mujeres nunca han podido identificarse. Las mujeres, arguye Kirby, han sido siempre conscientes de la agotadora materialización de su cuerpo y que la masculinidad reglamenta el espacio de la ciudad hasta tal punto que cualquier evaluación de su naturaleza en términos de género debe tener en cuenta la forma en que la masculinidad opera dentro de ella. En las siguientes páginas examino los espacios simbólicos en la escritura de la Ciudad de México que Ana Clavel elabora en *Los deseos y su sombra* (2000) y reflexiono sobre cómo las masculinidades regulan lo público y lo simbólico dentro de lo urbano al tiempo que especulan sobre las posibilidades de redefinir los espacios públicos que mantienen y perpetúan el orden masculino.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ana Clavel, *Los deseos y su sombra*, espacio urbano, masculinidad

BIOGRAPHY: Vinodh Venkatesh is an Associate Professor of Spanish at Virginia Tech. His research is primarily centered on issues of gender, subjectivity and the urban space in contemporary Hispanic narratives. A secondary area of research concerns the cinematic production of Spain and Latin America. His current work focuses on ethics, politics, and spectacularity in Spanish cinema. In addition to several articles, he is the author of *The Body as Capital: Masculinities in Contemporary Latin American Fiction* (Arizona, 2015), and the forthcoming *New Maricón Cinema: Outing Latin American Film* (Texas, 2016).

The Ends of Masculinity in the Urban Space in Ana Clavel's *Los deseos y su sombra*

Vinodh Venkatesh, Virginia Tech

Writing on the position of the metropolis within global geopolitical tectonics of the 21st century, Iain Chambers argues that metropolitan centers such as Mexico City have “invariably functioned as the privileged figure(s) of modernity” (55).¹ They are the apotheosis of aesthetic and economic forces that become models of financial and social development and metaphors of modernization and “metaphysical reality” (55). It is in this metaphysical understanding that Edward Soja, working with theories put forth by Henri Lefebvre, posits a triadic understanding of spatiality, where the real is at times conflated with the symbolic to thus better understand how space is lived.² In line with this critical gesture, Chambers furthers a demystification of the urban center, when he argues that the metropolis is only a:

[M]yth, a tale, a telling that helps us to locate our home in modernity [...]. The metropolis is an allegory; in particular it represents the allegory of the crisis of modernity that we have learnt to recognize in the voices of Baudelaire, Benjamin, and Kafka [...]. [T]his metropolis is not simply the final stage of a poignant narrative, of apocalypse and nostalgia, it is also the site of the ruins of previous orders in which diverse histories, languages, memories and traces continually entwine and recombine in the construction of new horizons. (112)

By alluding to the textual nature of the city, Chambers calls to attention a need to understand the mythology of the urban space. Aside from identifying its phenotype, he poses the necessity for a critical understanding of how it operates and how power runs through and is captured by its real and imagined outcroppings. This postmodern city undergoes what Fredric Jameson calls a crisis of boundaries where the borders and categories of space are blurred. Where does it begin, or, better yet, what are the limits of the urban? The indeterminate physical space in turn contributes to an indeterminacy of the subject, as Jameson asks if this postmodern space does “not tend to demobilize us and surrender us to passivity and helplessness, by systematically obliterating possibilities of action under the impenetrable fog of historical inevitability?” (86).

Jameson's question, however, incites a dialectic challenging of the ontological “us” that is blurred in this process of late capitalism. Addressing this disjunct, Kathleen Kirby argues that Jameson's “us” is categorically masculine in nature, as the consciousness of corporeality experienced by the postmodern subject due to the indefiniteness of his surrounding space is an extravagance that women have never been able to identify with. Women, Kirby argues, have consciously and wearingly been aware of their embodiment. The metropolis as a city-text is a postmodern space that is negotiated differently by men and women, as Kirby notes:

For the man [...] the most prominent feature of the landscape would be pathways, along which he projects himself, making his world a space that returns to him a self-image of movement, command [...]. For the woman [...] I imagine a world structured not by pathways but by obstacles [...] rather than seeing how to get from 'point A' to 'point B' I often see what is keeping me from getting there. (53)

Gender then is not only a factor in how the city is formed, metastized, and structured, but in our actual everyday experience of the urban. As Kirby notes, the masculine (as position and expression) regiments the cityspace, so much so that any evaluation of its gendered and genderizing nature must take into account how the masculine operates within it. The city, after all, houses the centers of power that code for Raewyn Connell's theorization of hegemonic masculinity.³ I will use the 'Masculine' to identify the idealized and poly-faceted position of Connell's term. It is akin, in a structural sense, to Connell's apical position, but functions on other semantic and symbolic levels, beyond, yet at times in tandem with, variable structural hierarchies of gender. It is through dialogue with the Masculine that femininities, masculinities, and Queerities come into being, taking the former as a sociohistorically specific normative position. The Masculine, as Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui argues, "designs itself from the outside of culture and society, and doubles an idea of itself as the very interior of that culture and society" (108). Those characteristics deemed powerful, desirable (both to the projected and real heterosexual, and repressed homosocial imagination vis-à-vis desire) and viable as the pillars of the social matrix—as organizational tenets—are enshrined as the Masculine, intrinsically linked to the male body and the cityspace. The Masculine is consecrated and assimilated through aesthetic, discursive, behavioral, and even sartorial cues and practices and is enabled and reiterated/reproduced by all gendered bodies within a given culture and society.

Through buildings that typify institutions of power, law, and sanitation (amongst others), the urban is also a metaphysical reality that establishes, perpetuates, and practices in the design of the Masculine.

In the following pages I examine the symbolic spaces that genderize and are genderizing in Ana Clavel's writing of Mexico City in *Los deseos y su sombra* (2000). I reflect on how masculinities regiment the public and symbolic within the urban, and speculate on the possibilities of resemanticizing the buildings and public spaces that maintain and perpetuate a masculine order. The novel articulates the need to map-out the Masculine city, and to understand the subject's position within this textual space as an intrinsic step in the development of creating an identity vis-à-vis a nation or community; a tactic that is read in tandem with a shift towards a global order or space as Chambers, Jameson, and others have posed in the development of the modern metropolis.

Born in 1961, Clavel has been considered to belong to what critical circles have called New Mexican Narrative, or the second generation of the *boom femenino*, and gains literary accolades in the 1980s with the publication of two collections of short stories. Aside from *Los deseos*, she has published *Cuerpo naufrago* (2005), the controversial *Las Violetas son flores del deseo* (2007), *El dibujante de sombras* (2009), and *Las ninfas a veces sonríen* (2012). Her works have tended to focus on questions pertaining to the body and desire, and their relationship to language and the symbolic. My interest in *Los deseos* resides in its explicit discussion of the Mexican urban space, which is a theme that slowly dissipates in her trajectory. *Cuerpo*, for example, evokes several sites in the City, but ends instead with a complete deterritorialization of the diegesis that is perpetuated in the later works, akin almost to the trajectory of the territorialized urban space in another contemporary, Cristina Rivera Garza. In Clavel's most recent novels, the city is anonymous, indistinct, and ephemeral, in stark contrast to its protagonic role in *Los deseos*. What precipitates this change?

Discussing *Los deseos* and its relation to the Mexican literary scene, Jane Lavery affirms that the novel is “notable for its dialogic richness, interweaving the historical, the fictional, and the fantastic” (1068). The use of the fantastic and hints of magical realism position the author amongst contemporaries such as Ana García Bergua, Adriana González Mateos and Cecilia Eudave, all of whom Ana Rosa Domenella defines as “autoras neofantásticas” (353). The critic affirms that the fantastic in Clavel is not necessarily the mixture of realities or paradigms, but is instead a focus on the body as a fantastical creation that can be played with, teased, and molded into whatever we want. The latter is of interest if we are to return to the critical point of entry into the gendered interplay of the city and the body.

The novel traces the life of Soledad García, a young, introspective and precocious girl who lives in Mexico City from the 1950s through the 1980s, a period of urban renewal, growth, and increasing internationalization.⁴ The timeframe of the novel reflects a period rife in social and economic change in Mexico, problematized by internal migrations and the setting up of industrial centers sustained by foreign investment.⁵ Blending temporalities and levels of lucidity, the text explores the life of Soledad as she negotiates the streets and spaces of the city in a process of self identification. The body-city metaphor, noted by Beatriz Barrantes-Martín (25), which is a leitmotiv in many contemporary fictions is taken to a fantastic level as the body-text and citytext are entangled in a complex and multi-layered tracing; it is not a simple analogy or metonym, but instead a radical evaluation of both. Soledad talks of her childhood, her revolutionary father, the brother of her best friend who was killed in the 1968 student revolts, and of the mysterious *Desconocido* who repeatedly rapes and molests her in her youth. As an adult, the narrative picks up from her relationship with a visiting Hungarian photographer, Peter Nagy, who abandons her in Mexico when he leaves

for his homeland. Soledad spirals swiftly into a self-destructive gloom of loneliness, lyrically evocative of her own name. She fools her mother and brother into thinking that she has been given a scholarship to study abroad and instead takes up a photo-archival job in the Palacio de Bellas Artes. It is as an adult that the narrative diverges into the fantastic as the reader is left to decipher whether Soledad is alive or dead, as she is suddenly able to walk unnoticed through the city, challenging in a sense Kirby’s impressions of gender-movement in the urban.

Keeping the dematerialization of the female body in mind, Luzma Becerra argues that the novel undertakes a “desprendimiento de la realidad, sin que llegue a desaparecer un ‘estar ahí’” (370). Through the narrative of Soledad, Clavel succeeds in hazing the limits of space but we are never fully disarticulated from a narrative of the city or a citytext per se. Space and the city, after all, are central to Clavel’s positioning of Soledad in relation to other characters in the novel. From the Palacio de Bellas Artes and the Castillo de Chapultepec the protagonist centers the expansive and multiplicitous city through a narrative telephoto lens that establishes its spaces as the canvas that must and will be painted over by Soledad. Keeping this conception of spatiality in mind, Becerra observes that “la historia de *Los deseos* y su sombra reelabora un contexto cultural, que es el de un imaginario femenino con su educación tradicional en lo referente al registro genérico” (372). The novel’s narrative trajectory is mapped out as Soledad constructs a fake world in response to the weight of patriarchal systems; an alternate mapped out space with the individual as the sole cartographic referent and the locating device of language as an obfuscated medium of finding and plotting points of contact between the multiple worlds that Clavel’s protagonist negotiates.

Los deseos y su sombra focuses on the elements and voices of society that hegemonic power chooses to silence or ignore, but which can very easily upset the status quo. These

groups, which Edward Said denotes as the “ignored group” (“Foreword” v), represent the oppressed, deobjectified and unprivileged sectors that Armando Ramírez shockingly put to ink in *Pu* (1979); they are the masses who migrated to and subsist in Mexico City.⁶ But Clavel does not perform a textual ventriloquism of their voices, as she instead focuses her attention on making Soledad a metonymic and corporal representation of the fractured city and its voices. The novel becomes, therefore, an authorial and reader-intense activity of unearthing the truth about Soledad and/or the city and all that it represents, leading Lavery to hypothesize:

The unknowability of her truth becomes inextricably interconnected with the text’s comments on historic reality, symbolically illustrating that what we might perceive as reality or ‘truth’ is ultimately an imaginative construct [...]. Even though historical realities are subordinated to social and psychological issues, the physical violence suffered by Soledad and various other characters reflects the experiences of silenced Mexicans under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI: Partido Revolucionario Institucional) between the 1950s and 1980s. (1054)

The role of gender within Clavel’s greater literary endeavor is evident in the choice of a female character that actively perambulates through the defined city as observed from the Palacio and Castillo. Establishing an alternative understanding of the nation and its history necessarily debunks traditional patriarchal and phallogocentric conceptions of state.⁷ The reimagining of society in turn sets up an analogous process within an understanding of the subject as traditional ideas of gender are discarded.

Stemming from the early memories of intercourse with the *Desconocido*, which go

unexplained and without much detail, Soledad’s journey of self-discovery forces Clavel to conceive a non-patriarchal notion of female subjectivity. She walks the city, actively evaluating herself in relation to her surroundings, posing thus a litmus of gendered experience within the spatiality of the urban. This exercise, not quite unlike that of the protagonist of Luis Zapata’s *El vampiro de la colonia Roma* (1979), breaks from traditional narratives of the city as the subject-enunciator provides a subaltern perspective of how the city is formed and lived. Lavery comments upon this, as she explains that the protagonist’s journey and “remapping of her own body in the megalopolis feminizes the traditional male quest in the Mexican urban novel. The notion of the city as a whore, which provides the space for male journeys over what is depicted as prostrate female terrain, continues to hold sway in Mexico’s masculine literary (postcolonial) imagination” (1056).

Following a Kristevan understanding of the subject in process, Lavery analyzes the text in relation to the formation of the female without necessarily unearthing a critical interest in Soledad’s phenomenological relationship with space. The critic does, however, open a pathway into an understanding of the city as a patriarchal stronghold when she comments that “the foundation of the city is intimately connected to the cartography of male desire, where man writes the body of the other (woman) and brutally inscribes upon it his own history” (1056). These centers of patriarchy, or closely delineated topographies that capture phallogocentric power, are pervasive and effluent in *Los deseos y su sombra*.

The bodies that capture and perpetuate phallogocentrism as a cultural and national paradigm begin in the ubiquitous space of the household through the figure of Soledad’s mother, Carmen. After the death of her husband she reminds Soledad that her brother is now the man of the house and must be respected, and that she as a girl must fit into

the role afforded by patriarchy: “las niñas no hablan cuando están entre mayores, quietecita como una muñeca de porcelana: si se mueve se rompe” (21). Carmen is strongly subservient to the tenets of a heteronormative society controlled by the Masculine: men, in her worldview, are always correct and knowing whereas women lack reason and subjectivity. She also perpetuates the idea of public female genitalia, whether in form or use, as shameful when she spies Soledad plumping her lips in front of a mirror. She tells her daughter to bite her lips to make them seem smaller and less alluring. When Carmen demonstrates this to her daughter she is described as having the mouth of a fish or a monkey, emphasizing Clavel’s authorial position that patriarchy and phallocentrism desubjectify women. They become animals who cannot speak and communicate, part of the “ignored group” that aimlessly and mechanically mull through the corridors of the city and keep it alive with their work, yet who cannot and must not partake in its construction and spheres of influence. Carmen and Soledad are, ironically, the sole breadwinners in the family as they sell pastries and breads in the local community.

The domestic space is controlled by the voice of patriarchy and not necessarily a hegemonic male, as this latter subject position is reinforced by the chidings of the terrible mother and not the heir to the phallocentric throne, Soledad’s brother Luis, who prefers to play football with his friends. His other pastimes include the hunting of flesh, as he joins other boys in stalking “un buen trasero, unos ojos soñadores o un cabello suave” (47), reinforcing the traditional idea of the city as a whore to the urban male subject. The outside space, which is to say the city-text that lies beyond the kingdom of the domestic, is controlled by the marauding bodies of homosocial masculinity. As a result, Soledad as a young girl feels trapped and asphyxiated in the busy commercial streets of the center, as though “el espacio que ocupaba en el aire no le perteneciera” (16).

Clavel personifies the urban as she describes how the city “despertaba, perezosa, en el valle: estiraba los brazos de humo de sus fábricas, contoneaba las piernas de sus avenidas, se arrebujaba de nuevo en las cúpulas de sus iglesias” (19). This gesture gives way to an understanding of the city not only as a character but also as a stand-in for Masculine control, defined by heteronormative components that further a spatial contract of acceptability, where gendered bodies must act out certain roles within culturally specific loci of heterosexism. These loci can further be defined as semantic, physical assemblages of the lines and structures of power that keep patriarchy functioning. A brief list of such spaces may include a church, a school, a single-family home, and even the neighborhood bar. Clavel’s city, furthermore, anatomically includes factories that create economic wealth that enslaves the masses to what Connell terms transnational business masculinity, or the rising hegemonic group that controls gender, political and economic systems across national frontiers (Connell and Wood “Globalization and Business Masculinities”). Dressed in uniformed suits and deeply interested in indiscriminate economic amassment, Connell’s multinational masculinity has loose sexual ethics and is purely concerned with the subjugation of others. The network of streets and avenues calls attention to Soledad’s inability to breathe outside and the actions of the predatory urban homosocial groups that actively hunt women. Lastly, the church and its resounding bells signal an understanding of the clerical binds that enslave the feminine and non-heteronormative to ecclesiastical social doctrine. The novel thus explores the spatial contract of gender, or how lived space engenders particular gender expressions.

The avenues of the public city-text establish a viaduct for hegemonic control in the form of patrolling police troops. They are the city/body’s antibodies that flow through its arteries, identifying and eradicating all threats to the greater self. After Peter leaves her and

she spirals into a self-defeating depression, Soledad finds herself in the company of a blind man (Matías), a young mime (Jorge), and a group of street urchins who regularly steal and use intravenous drugs. In one of the group's adventures Jorge calls them to a halt as he notices a truck slowly approach, with:

[H]ombres que colgaban de los estribos y mostraban sin pudor los brazos desnudos y amenazantes, el gesto fiero y desvergonzado del que sabe el increíble poder de la violencia de su parte. No levantaron a nadie pero se paseaban alardeando por aquella avenida tan cercana a la Plaza de la Constitución con la prepotencia que les otorgaba esa cara siniestra de la represión y el terror instituidos como medidas de orden y seguridad social. (262)

The circulatory agents of hegemonic masculinity are even able to see the ghostly Soledad though they only sense her presence and not her actual corporality. They are responsible for keeping order and peace, which can alternatively be interpreted as keeping the silenced and ignored under the yoke of economic and social modernization that was politically, and still is, promulgated. The author's description of these men is visual in that it establishes an aesthetics of virility that privilege the strong masculine body over the lanky and effeminate mime and the blind Matías. The text further visualizes a spatial position of this interaction between the hegemonic and the oppressed in a topographic relation to the Plaza de la Constitución, or what is commonly known today as the Zócalo, the main square in the center of historic Mexico City, which has served as the heart of government of both the nation and the capital and where popular protests have often taken place. In the exchange between the police and Soledad, *Los deseos y su sombra* is careful in its mapping of the subject and subjectivities in relation to a territorialized spatial referent that is inextricably linked to the national imaginary. The police agents,

corporal antibodies that circulate the veins and arteries of the city-body, keep under control any threats to the symbolic national-or Masculine-body.

The need to root the national imaginary within the Masculine is further traced in the placing of Soledad within the physical city when she discovers the Castillo de Chapultepec. She brings to mind Chambers theory of the metropolis as myth when she remembers "aquel niño héroe que se había arrojado envuelto en la bandera nacional" (17). Clavel references the taking of the Castillo during the Mexican-American War by a band of US Marines that stormed the building. During the conflict, six young Mexican cadets valiantly defended the space (of the nation) from the foreigners, with one of them, Juan Escutia, purportedly wrapping himself in the tricolored flag before jumping from the tower. This much contested story has, however, come to form what Soledad calls "la necesidad de un país de inventarse una historia admirable y prodigiosa" (17), bound invariably to the virile, youthful male.

The connection between nation and masculinity is further concretized in the Paseo de la Reforma and the many statues and monuments that dot its 12 kilometer incursion into the heart of the city. After leaving her mother and brother, Soledad routinely walks along the Paseo's streets and plazas, stopping at the many statues that include monuments to the *Niños héroes*. As she approaches the *boulevard de los héroes*, she engages in one of many moments of existentialist pondering as she wonders: "¿Dejo de ser porque ellos no pueden verme? [...]. ¿Entonces esta ciudad existe o solo la imagino?" (197). This line of inquiry requires the reader to pause and take a step back from the diegesis, if only for a moment, and ask ourselves the same questions. This tangential exercise, however, permeates the passages that follow, as Soledad walks amongst the statues and figures that adorn the metonymic space of the nation in the city, "como una lección de historia tridimensional que ya pocos—o nadie—leía" (197).

Like in several other points of the narrative, Clavel situates her protagonist in a topographic space that is pinpointed by statues that are “situados en lugares estratégicos que obligaban a la vista a reparar en ellos” (198). It is in the placing of a silenced, ignored feminine subject in a spatial relationship to the stone soldiers, politicians, and other primal male figures of Mexican nationhood do we concretize Clavel’s assertion that the city is an intrinsically masculine space, and that the *boulevard of heroes*, with its vertical epitaphs and figures, its particular contribution to the imagining of the nation. Each statue with its inscription and historical note sutures together an imagined topography of Mexicanness.

The blind Matías furthers this thesis in a story he tells Soledad and the street children, one of the many short intertexts that populate *Los deseos y su sombra*. Here he recounts how “México fue una ciudad vehemente como el deseo que le dió origen” (254), as its founding, he notes, originates in the dreams of a band of tribal hunters (evocative of Luis’s own prowls through the city-whore). He explains:

Vieron a una mujer que dormía en las aguas de un lago. Soñaron que la forzaban y que ella, sin despertarse, respondía a sus caricias y a su violencia. La tomaban una y otra vez pero ella no despertaba del sueño de agua y ellos en realidad no la poseían. Al despertar, los cazadores buscaron aquel lago. Peregrinaron de un sitio a otro pero no encontraron rastros del sueño y, en cambio su sed por la mujer iba en aumento.⁸ (255)

It is at this juncture in the tale that the men chance upon a valley surrounded by thick vegetation and spy a woman asleep by a lake. They rush to possess her only to find that she is nothing more than an illusion. The physical root of the mirage is where they decide to settle and to build a city that keeps present the woman’s “caderas, el horizonte de su rostro, sus párpados tenues” (255). The genesis of the

urban space is further described as being reflective of “la brutalidad del asedio, la violencia al someterla” (255), reinforcing Lavery’s hypothesis of the city as a whore, and Octavio Paz’s idea that Mexican identity is best captured by the void left by the abject mother, as he explains that “la cuestión del origen es el centro secreto de nuestra ansiedad y angustia” (84).

The narrative side-trip into Matías’s interpretation of the history of the city keeps with the characterization of the urban as a metonymic construct of the Masculine, and as a terrain that keeps those gendered bodies that do not conform to its rules in bondage. Clavel addresses the mythopoetic conceptions of the metropolis by acknowledging popular myths of an underground Indian city below the roads patrolled by the current government’s police forces. This is done through Soledad’s work where she is charged with photographing the subterranean recesses of the Palacio de Bellas Artes under the direction and supervision of Martín Rueda, a rich, omnipotent and sexually predatory businessman that embodies many of the characteristics of Connell’s contemporary variant of globalized, neoliberal masculinity. He is physically fit and virile with well-manicured fingernails that stress the importance of hygiene as ontological to modernity and modernization. He is quick to undermine the rights of workers and does not hesitate to flirt with a young girl who enters a café holding hands with her boyfriend. His eagle-like looks, which cause discomfort in Soledad, contextualize him within a given space as the alpha hunter in the urban jungle where beta packs of youth like Luis and his friends hunt. As a metonym of a new global order, this character evidences the shifting context of the cityspace to that of a global metropolis, with a corresponding change in the gendered order of the Masculine.

His subjectivity and position vis-à-vis the city is highlighted when he has Soledad go below the floors of the Palacio to unearth

its history. It is in these subterranean rooms and spaces, which Clavel describes in great ekphrastic detail, does Soledad reveal that the buried past of the city, like the myths of foundation that Matías perpetuates, are truly masculine spaces. They are now written over with details that code for the Masculine, as the many workers who regularly use the tunnels play football and get drunk in the underground rooms, leaving pools of urine and “carteles de mujeres desnudas y hermosas” (137) pasted onto the walls. It is this underworld space, the prehistoric antecedent to modern day Mexico City that Rueda wants catalogued by Soledad’s camera, as though through her prints he can gain discursive control over the past, in his role as globalizing agent in the present.

The probing of the subterranean space in Mexican fiction is summarized by Villoro, who argues that “la operación literaria de buscar el esqueleto urbano, el paisaje fosilizado bajo las apariencias, ha sido común a escritores [contemporáneos]” (30). In *Los deseos y su sombra*, an older worker at the Palacio talks to Soledad about the possibility of an underground city, which is brought up repeatedly by different characters as a mythological Edenic answer to Paz’s hypothesis of Mexican identity. The worker, Gallegos, dismisses the underground city as “puras fantasías inventadas por la gente” (173). But the repetition of a space below the three-dimensional city-text is pertinent to any post-modernist understanding of the urban, as the present is invariably built upon and/or added to past and poly-valenced iterations (just as, in fact, current notions of the Masculine layer over a substrate of past iterations).

It is this historicized understanding of the citytext, combined with a circulatory understanding of its roads and underground tunnels that suggest to be most fruitful to the protagonist’s existential quandary; the demythification of the Masculine city is inevitably linked to the dismembering of the female subject. The ghost-like state of Soledad that

hinges between lunacy and sanity is exemplified in the conversations she holds with the statue of Leandro Valle in the Paseo de la Reforma. By giving the statue speech, by removing it from the silenced and manipulated bodies that the Masculine controls, Clavel subverts the position of the male hero. This desecration is carried out to full force when Soledad describes how the statue has had its sword removed, thereby effectively castrating the hero as a bastion of the Masculine. This is taken a step further when it is revealed that the street named after him in Mexico City is now a home to prostitutes and drug dealers. (The demythification of a historic figure of patriarchy is akin, in a sense, to Rivera Garza’s portrayal of *Porfiria* in *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999)). This plotting of the road vis-à-vis the symbolic importance of the statue is poignant in the sense that Clavel remaps or resemantizes the hegemonic strategy of naming roads and streets within a privileged político-historic discourse. The statues are further removed from a phallic position of power as the groups of street children and Jorge mock their poses. Forever conscious of the textual power of cartography, Clavel astutely places the performative pantheon of children and mime in a spatial juxtaposition to “las estatuas de soldados que vigilaban desde las cornisas de Palacio como gárgolas fantasmales” (273). Herein the reader notes an explicit and compulsory juxtaposition between the self and space, the self and the national imaginary.

This connection is central to the development of Soledad as she experiences and rehashes a childhood struggle with the maternal voice of patriarchy that continues into her adult years. The search for identity, or an equation of self, and her resultant inability to recognize herself as a whole subject is reinforced by “metaphors of the female body as abject, disfigured, and grotesque” (Lavery 1062). Soledad’s cessation from the patriarchal order occurs as she breaks from her mother when the latter tells her to pinch her lips shut lest they should resemble genitalia.

The protagonist's search for self and independence is only realized when she is able to separate herself from her mother's instructions in this scene; it is through the recognition of herself as an individuated body, away from the hold of her mother and the voice of patriarchy, does Soledad gain footing in the realm of subjectivity. Soledad, however, resists complete separation from the gendered order and instead participates in a Kristevian subject-in-process model of formation, which leads Lavery to observe that Soledad "comes to embody the abject itself, oscillating ambiguously between life and death [...] between the fully and partially formed subject, the semiotic and symbolic" (1060).

The dismembered feminine subject is further brought into tension by the series of relationships Soledad has with men. From the violent encounters with the unnamed and undifferentiated *Desconocido*, to the boy-friends of friends that she ruthlessly beds, Soledad lacks a centripetal force in relation to the masculine. She is never conceived of as a whole in relation to the male, as though she never fully succeeds in silencing the maternal call to subservience and phallic adoration. The idea of desire, which often holds a central position in Soledad's existential musings, is defined by a lack and a void, and not another gendered body or fetish that points to an unresolved unconscious drive. The novel can thus be seen as being about the undefined shadows of desire, and more importantly about the unresolved desire of disappearing which is repeated throughout the text. The latter is a physical and at times metaphysical wish, as the protagonist engages in a continuous entanglement and desire of detachment from the power of masculinity as inscribed onto the city and, by extension, society.

The dissolution of the feminine body becomes fundamentally connected to the narrative's attempts at dissecting and disarticulating the cityspace, particularly through the spatialization of Soledad's relationship with Peter Nagy in Mexico City. After he leaves her to return to his native Hungary, the text hints at a slow desubjectification of the

body as Soledad notices that "las manos se le despellejaron" (73). The practice of corporal representation is sutured to a formation of the citytext, as Soledad wonders, "¿cómo describir esa ciudad en aquellos días posteriores a su abandono?" (73). Space, like her body, enters an existential purgatory of being and not-being as she explains "a donde pusiera la mirada, los edificios y las calles, los cafés y galerías por donde con frecuencia deambulaban y por donde vagó después solitaria, adquirieron para ella una nubosidad escalofriante: tal era la sensación de irrealidad, de caminar en falso, ajena por completo de sí misma" (73).

Peter embodies the paternal voice that Carmen channels to her daughter at an earlier age. He repeats the mantra that women must be held silenced and subjugated, scolding Soledad when she asks him a question: "las niñas inteligentes sólo hablan si tienen cosas importantes que decir" (75). As a foreigner, the relationship with Peter initially represents an escapism from the national Masculine, though this is reversed as he perpetuates an almost animalistic oppression of Soledad, suggesting then that the rules of the Masculine are more global than localized. During intercourse, for example, he routinely penetrates Soledad's increasingly fragile body from behind and enforces a role-playing relationship of dominator and dominated with him occupying the former position. Parting from a master-slave relationship, Soledad is further desubjectified and commoditized as a woman when he offers her body to a friend, Montero. The feminine is sanitized under the guise of a nurse's uniform as Montero and Peter take turns penetrating Soledad. The final stroke of feminine dismemberment occurs one night as the three characters engage in a *ménage à trois* and Peter penetrates Soledad but concentrates his desire on their moving shadows and not her curves and touches, putting forward the first steps in Soledad's dissolution.

The departure of Peter coincides with a self-imposed exile on the part of Soledad from her family and work into the streets of

Mexico City that begins to lose shape and definition as her own body slowly begins to dematerialize. The body and city are further deconstructed by the inclusion of a large Chinese vase in the plot that houses Soledad's alter ego, Lucía, and an angry red dragon that makes several appearances in the novel during moments of crisis. The fragile yet magically extensive space of the vase becomes both a metaphor of her body and the city she maps out as she observes that "la ciudad y sus calles podrían convertirse en un laberinto propio y quién sabe, tal vez podría encontrar, a la vuelta de una esquina, más que el dragón o a Lucía, su rostro verdadero" (213). This confusion of outside and inside spaces, of the body-text and the citytext, is underlined by Soledad's repeated refusal to be mapped as a subject within the city as she emphasizes her invisibility and lack of belonging to the social and spatial milieu of contemporary Mexico City. This refusal proposes a narrative quandary in *Los deseos y su sombra* as it is only by means of Soledad's positioning in relation to the Plaza, Castillo and Palacio amongst other buildings do we gain access to Mexico City as a narrated citytext.

A strategy of breaking from the Masculine city is evoked towards the end of the novel as Soledad imagines a heavenly angel descending upon *avenida 20 de Noviembre*. She notes how "por un momento, ese instante único entre la nueva inmovilidad del ángel y la celeridad retomada de la avenida, [...] habría podido jurar que la gente había atisbado un rincón del Paraíso" (259). Though Clavel hints at the underlying mechanisms and bodies of control in the urban space, the reader is left with a series of existential questions that ponders feminine subjectivity in the light of Masculine social and spatial codes. The protagonist ultimately materializes within the diegesis when she poses for a photograph with Matías, Jorge and the street urchins. The photographer composes a portrait of the silenced and ignored, and when the photo is finally revealed, "los niños aparecieron más delgados que de costumbre, Jorge—que se

había movido en el último momento—se veía desafocado y Matías tenía los ojos en blanco. La única figura favorecida [...] resultó ser una muchacha que de seguro pasaba por ahí y que la cámara había captado en la última fracción de segundo" (304).

Soledad as a subject in process is re-subjectified in the epilogue to *Los deseos y su sombra*, which in turn functions as a diegetic epitaph for the protagonist. We learn that her mother contacts the "Centro Nacional para la Localización de Personas Desaparecidas y Extraviadas" (307), a fictitious though official-sounding organization that is a social arm of the Law and the forces that patrol the streets of the citytext. The organization continues the mapping process that Soledad began by pasting posters describing her and the conditions of her disappearance around the city, emphasizing the linkages between the cityspace and the protagonist. The posters specify the 23rd of June, 1985 as the day of her disappearance, which coincides with the terrorist bombing of an Air India plane. More relevantly, however, the date coincides with the first *Reunión Nacional sobre Movimientos Sociales y Medio Ambiente* at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, signaling a tangential connection between Soledad and the rise of an interest in urbanization and its effects within Mexico in the mid-1980s after decades of urban migration and sprawl. The connection, furthermore, evidences a textual preoccupation with the theme of globalization, thus linking Soledad's denouement to the shift in the cityspace towards a global order.

The novel, however, refuses to close the chapter on Soledad (and her city) by simply explaining in the epilogue that she is a runaway with possible mental conditions. The epilogue as a component of a novel is often a textual strategy that negates the aesthetic and/or ethical postulates developed over the body of the novel. In *Los deseos y su sombra*, the epilogue notes how on one poster someone writes a graffiti that challenges the official discourse of the Centro Nacional. Written in a rush, it reads: "*Su cuerpo no la contiene*"

(307), suggesting that after all Soledad may have been dematerialized, posing thus a change in narrative mode. Are we to now read the novel through the scope of the magical, or perhaps simply acquiesce to the fact that the city, like her, is never contained? The graffiti as an unauthorized textuality codifies a counter-voice to the narrative's own authority as Soledad may have escaped the confines of her physical form that visually and socially ascribed her onto the national cityspace.

More than anything we realize that once the city is written, plotted out, and spatialized, once exposed to the power channels and controls of hegemonic masculinity, it cannot be easily dislocated or disarticulated. The epilogue as textual challenge, and the final piece of graffiti, give us hope that a textual deconstruction of the city as metonymic and allegoric of the Masculine is possible, and that the metaphysics of both are only contained by the limits imposed by narrative—limits that are malleable and ever-changing.

Notes

¹Anadeli Bencomo's *Voces y voceros de la megapolis: la crónica periodístico-literaria en México* (2002) provides a well-thought introduction to the textualization of the postmodern city, or "la megapolización de la capital mexicana" (36).

²The conception of the urban or the megacity, therefore, is understood along the planes of first, second, and thirdspace as an interactive and physical locus of spatiality, behavior, and meaning. Soja articulates a triadic understanding of spatiality: firstspace, "a set of materialized 'spatial practices' that work together to produce and reproduce the concrete forms and specific patternings of urbanism as a way of life" (10); secondspace, which occupies a dialectic position where cityspace becomes "more of a mental or ideational field, conceptualized in imagery, reflexive thought, and symbolic representation, a *conceived* space of the imagination" (11); and thirdspace, where the urban space is "a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual, locus of structured individual and collective experience and agency" (11). It is

formed by a process of synekistic agglomeration, which is a "behavioral and transactional as well as political and economic concept that activates, makes into a social and historical force, the spatial specificity of urbanism" (13). It is this understanding of space vis-à-vis urbanism that explains Neville Brown's strongly imperialistic description of Mexico City as a "feral" city (239). Under a precociously innocent subheading of "Cities too soon?" the critic posits that third-world centers such as Beijing, Johannesburg and Mexico City are not ready for urban modernity. In the latter example he points out that "both the police force and the judiciary are seriously corrupt, a reality that no doubt reflects the situation nationwide" (239). It is the condition of being "feral" that Edward Soja, however, assigns to all contemporary urban centers of synekistic agglomeration, as he argues that the traditional binary of center and periphery no longer applies in the 21st century, and that the idea of a "tame" urbanism is a practical and theoretical fallacy. Echoing this sentiment of the modern urban space, Juan Villoro asserts that "la descripción de la ciudad como caótica no implica por fuerza una crítica ni un lamento desesperado. Se trata, más bien, de un retrato de su peculiar condición operativa" (*El Olvido* 17).

³See Connell's posing of a structural argument in *Masculinities*.

⁴A discussion on the narrative changes seen in Mexico City through the second half of the twentieth century would not be complete without a reference to José Emilio Pacheco's *Las batallas en el desierto* (1981). Noting the textual development of Carlos throughout *Las batallas en el desierto*, Beatriz Barrantes-Martín argues that the development of narrated self runs parallel to the development of the narrated cityspace. She notes that the city and Carlos are spatial recipients of the changes brought about by globalization and urbanization in the post-War period, observing that "el proceso de transculturación sufrido por el país, en el cual el precio de la *tecnología* y el progreso son una galopante *norteamericanización*" (25).

⁵The sociological work done by Jonathan Kandell and Judith Adler Hellman prove interesting in understanding this shift towards synekism that occurs from the 1960s onwards. They study the demographic cephalization that resulted in massive waves of urban migration that intensified in the 1980s. The move towards urban living is stressed by Hellman who observes that only 35%

of the population in the early 80s lived in rural areas with the majority being concentrated in nodal centers such as Mexico City. Similarly, internal migration is explained by Kandell: "The migrants were expelled from the countryside by prolonged droughts, the inability of *ejidos* (communal farms) to sustain families, the mechanization of private farms, and the growing population resulting from health care improvements that cut mortality rates of infants and adults" (186-87).

⁶Mapping as a narrative necessity is performed by Ramírez through the visual descriptions that are generated from a first-person journey through the city's roadways. The cityspace is organic in the sense that it can only be accessed through this over-ground network of pavement that breathes life into the notion of a dual Mexico City that deviates from firstspace conceptions of the urban. The author's take on the city and its spaces, more importantly, shakes the foundation the neoliberal ideas of globalized spaces in contemporary Latin America. Ramírez points to the already existing schism between the rich and the poor, the privileged and the invisible, that exists in the 1970s with the shift towards urbanization and the rupture of a *civilización* and *barbarie* topography of the national imaginary.

⁷For a complete understanding of Mexican masculinity in relation to the state and nationalism, please see Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba's *Modernity and the Nation* (2007), where he argues that through a practice of sensuality and violence representations of masculinity and the male body abound in the historical period of modernization in the 20th century.

⁸The old man's story is a veiled reference to the role of the feminine in Mexican lore of origin, making reference to the Aztec goddess Cihuacoatl and the popular myth of *La Llorona*. The former represents the tropes of motherhood and fertility whereas the latter consecrates the negative stereotype of the feminine in popular culture. *La Llorona*, in particular, represents the archetypal evil woman who violates her role as mother and wife (Candelaria 93).

Works Cited

- Barrantes-Martín, Beatriz. "Transformaciones seculares en la ciudad de México: *Las batallas en el desierto* de José Emilio Pacheco." *Taller de letras* 34 (2004): 25-37. Print.
- Becerra, Luzma. "Otra forma de estar en el mundo: Sobre *Los deseos y su sombra* de Ana Clavel." *De márgenes y adiciones: Novelistas latino-americanas de los 90*. Ed. Jorge Chen Sam y Isela Chiu-Olivares. San José, Costa Rica: Perro Azul, 2004. 369-91. Print.
- Bencoma, Anadeli. *Voces y voceros de la megalópolis: la crónica periodístico-literaria en México*. Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2002. Print.
- Brown, Neville. *The Geography of Human Conflict: Approaches to Survival*. Portland: Sussex Academic, 2009. Print.
- Candelaria, Cordelia. "Letting *La Llorona* Go, or, Re/reading History's "Tender Mercies." *Literatura Chicana, 1965-1995: An Anthology in Spanish, English, and Caló*. Ed. Manuel de Jesús Hernández-Gutiérrez and David William Foster. New York: Garland, 1997. 93-100. Print.
- Chambers, Iain. *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity*. London: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Clavel, Ana. *Cuerpo naufrago*. México, D.F.: Alfaguara, 2005. Print.
- . *El dibujante de sombras*. México, D.F.: Alfaguara, 2009. Print.
- . *Las ninfas a veces sonríen*. México, D.F.: Alfaguara, 2012. Print.
- . *Las violetas son flores del deseo*. México, D.F.: Alfaguara, 2007. Print.
- . *Los deseos y su sombra*. México, D.F.: Alfaguara, 2000. Print.
- Connell, Raewyn. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995. Print.
- Connell, R.W. and Julian Wood. "Globalization and Business Masculinities." *Men and Masculinities* 7 (2005): 347-64. Print.
- Domenella, Ana Rosa. "Tres cuentistas 'neofantásticas.'" *Cuento y figura (la ficción en México)*. Ed. Alfredo Pavón. México: Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, Serie Destino Arbitrario, 1999. 351-75. Print.
- Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, Héctor. *Modernity and the Nation in Mexican Representations of Masculinity: from Sensuality to Bloodshed*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Hellman, Judith Adler. *Mexico in Crisis*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. Print.
- Kandell, Jonathan. "Mexico's Megalopolis." *I Saw a City Invincible: Urban Portraits of Latin America*. Ed. G.M. Joseph and Mark Szuchman. Wilmington: SR Books, 1996. 181-201. Print.

- Kirby, Kathleen. "Re:Mapping Subjectivity: Cartographic Vision and the Limits of Politics." *Body Space: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*. Ed. Nancy Duncan. London: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Lavery, Jane Elizabeth. "Beyond the Shadow of Solitude: Self, Desire, and (Dis)embodiment in Ana Clavel's *Los deseos y su sombra*." *Modern Language Review* 102.4 (2007): 1053-68. Print.
- Paz, Octavio. *El laberinto de la soledad*. 1950. Madrid: Cátedra, 2007. Print.
- Ramírez, Armando. *Pu*. 1979. México: Oceano, 2003. Print.
- Rivera Garza, Cristina. *Nadie me verá llorar*. México: Tusquets, 1999. Print.
- Sifuentes-Jáuregui, Ben. *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin American Literature: Genders Share Flesh*. New York: Palgrave, 2002. Print.
- Soja, Edward W. *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000. Print.
- Villoro, Juan. *El Olvido: Un itinerario urbano*. México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2009. Print.
- Zapata, Luis. *Las aventuras, desaventuras y sueños de Adonis García: el vampiro de la Colonia Roma*. México: Grijalbo, 1979. Print.