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"National Conflict and Narrative Possibility in Faulkner and Garro"

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Abstract: In her paper "National Conflict and Narrative Possibility in Faulkner and Garro" Kristin E. Pitt explores two twentieth-century narratives of the Americas set during and after civil war. Both William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir* suggest that the historical narratives of the national community which have been celebrated by the U.S. South and Mexico have resulted in untenable contemporary social systems. Seizing the opportunity presented by national crisis, the central female characters of both novels attempt to rewrite the narratives of their imagined communities and reinscribe themselves within these revisions, doing so primarily by renegotiating the relationship between the nation and their corporeal selves. While the women's attempts ultimately fail on multiple levels, demonstrating the ease with which hegemonic articulations of the nation are able to close down the space their stories might have opened, Pitt argues that *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Los recuerdos del porvenir* nevertheless acknowledge the radical potential of the characters' revisions and offer suggestive models of how operative narratives of the American nations might be strategically engaged in order to disrupt or to subvert the limitations they impose.

Kristin E. PITT

National Conflict and Narrative Possibility in Faulkner and Garro

In the past two decades, comparative analysis in the field of Inter-American studies has blossomed. Asking variations of the question posed by the collection edited by Gustavo Pérez Firmat in 1990, *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?*, scholars have acknowledged that while the Americas may indeed be, as Edmundo O'Gorman argued in 1961, a "geosocial construct" which originally gained its coherence "only as the result of an inspired invention of American thought" (4), it is nevertheless through the very processes of this invention that the peoples and territories of the continent and islands of the region began to share a collection of broadly similar experiences. Inter-American studies explore the analytical possibilities arising from the historical and cultural points of contact between the multiple and diverse nations and societies within the Americas, sometimes skillfully negotiating difference across quite broad stretches of geography, as in Pérez Firmat's collection; Earl Fitz's *Rediscovering the New World: Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context*; Patrick Imbert's *Trajectoires culturelles transaméricaines*; José David Saldívar's *Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History*; Lois Parkinson Zamora's *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas* and *Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction*; Sophia A. McClennen's and Earl E. Fitz's *Comparative Cultural Studies and Latin America* (in book form as well as online in *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 4.2 (2002): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/>>); and Barbara Buchenau's and Marietta Messmer's *Intercultural Negotiations in the Americas and Beyond* in *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 3.2 (June 2001) <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss2/>>. See also the International American Studies Association <<http://www.iasaweb.org>> and its forthcoming electronic publication, *RIAS: Review of International American Studies* <<http://www.iasaweb.org/RIAS.html>> (for Latin American and Inter-American electronic bibliographies, see Buchenau and Messmer, "Selected Bibliography for the Study of Interculturality in the Americas: Theories and Practice" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss2/15/>> and McClennen, "Bibliography of Scholarship in Comparative Latin American Culture and Literature" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/13/>>). However, owing to the diverse cultural and literary histories of the Americas, much comparative Inter-American work limits its examination to specific regions, such as the Caribbean (see, for example, Benítez-Rojo; Dash; Glissant). More recently, several insightful and provocative studies have developed comparative frameworks for the analysis of relationships between the two "souths," that of the United States and that of the hemisphere, such as Deborah Cohn's *History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction*, George B. Handley's *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas: Family Portraits in Black and White*, and the collection *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*, edited by Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn.

It is within this sub-field of Inter-American studies that the present analysis positions itself through a comparison of the uneasy narratives of nation, gender, and history in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (1963, translated by Ruth L.C. Simms as *Recollections of Things to Come*). Both novels reveal multiple elements Deborah Cohn identifies as central to works of the two souths: they chronicle a troubled and incomplete transition from an agrarian society, based around the plantation or hacienda; they document the failures of patriarchy and apartheid; they depict societies plagued by prejudice, exploitation, racism, and violence (Cohn 7). Both Faulkner's and Garro's works also engage in temporal play, rejecting directly linear story lines in favor of simultaneously diachronic and synchronic narratives that Cohn, Handley, and Zamora all identify as a central feature of southern texts attempting to "mediat[e] and resolv[e] the conflicting claims of real historical anguish and the imaginative transcendence of that anguish" (Zamora, *Writing the Apocalypse* 18). Other particular similarities make *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Los recuerdos del porvenir* especially well-suited for extended comparison. They both move between a narrative present somewhat close to their date of

publication and a bloody civil war several decades earlier, with past and present coexisting in an open and mutually dependent relationship. They both situate their historical reflections in fictional enclaves -- Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi and Ixtepec, Mexico -- that come to represent much broader imagined communities. The intra-national conflicts the novels portray -- the U.S. Civil War and the Cristero rebellion, something of a coda to the Mexican Revolution -- are two of the most striking and extended attempts of young American states to renegotiate both the policies and the narratives of the nation, and while these attempts are not without their notable successes, neither war leaves the novels' characters convinced that the national narratives which they have been encouraged to believe do in fact reflect their experiences or that the national communities with which they have been encouraged to identify welcome their perspectives.

Described by Benedict Anderson as an "imagined community," the nation asserts itself as synonymous with a collective population and with an existing or desired political government and geographical territory. But the nation is not simply the land it lays claim to or the people it purports to represent; the nation arises from a collection of narratives that tell its story, articulating and organizing the multiple relationships that allow the community to be imagined as singular and whole. Ernest Renan, a nineteenth-century scholar whose work has been seminal for many more recent studies of nations and nationalism, including Anderson's, suggests that two things constitute a nation: "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories [and...] present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received" (Renan 19). However, as Renan must acknowledge and as contemporary scholars have explored in depth, these memories and the narratives through which they are passed on in order to create a sense of commonality are inevitably the result of what Etienne Balibar terms "a retrospective illusion ... It consists in believing that the generations which succeeded one another over centuries on a reasonably stable territory, under a reasonably univocal designation, have handed down to each other an invariant substance. And it consists in believing that the process of development from which we select aspects retrospectively, so as to see ourselves as the culmination of that process, was the only one possible, that is, it represented a destiny" (86). Anderson characterizes the tension between the "objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye [and] their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists" as a "paradox" (5), but as Balibar and numerous other theorists of the concept of nation have indicated, the opposing demands of the past, present, and future are easily transformed from paradox to crisis for national subjects and national narrators. Homi K. Bhabha argues that "the concept of the 'people' emerges within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement" or "a contested conceptual territory where the nation's people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authenticity that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process" (145). Particularly when two or more opposing narratives of national personality and national destiny struggle for political supremacy and material implementation, as is most vividly the case during periods of civil war, the selective nature of the purportedly singular and complete narrative of the nation becomes readily apparent as multiple articulations of perceived historical origins and proposed political processes erupt and clash. And while they are fraught with danger, such moments are also ripe with possibility, as Mary N. Layoun argues in *Wedded to the Land? Gender, Boundaries, and Nationalism in Crisis*: "instead of maintaining or even exacerbating normative positions, crises can generate radical or exceptional insights into social and cultural organization and possibility" (12), perhaps opening a space for more inclusive histories of the past and less iniquitous visions of the national present and future to arise. The characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Los recuerdos del porvenir* seize upon the narrative possibility of the post-war period in the U.S. South and in Mexico, for as Zamora has suggested, "when cultural traditions are disjunctive or destroyed, and the potential for historical projections apparently endless ... history becomes problematic and literature instrumental" (*Usable Past* 4-5). Tormented by a violent history and faced with an

equally forbidding future, several residents of Yoknapatawpha and Ixtepec attempt to take advantage of this opening, developing strategies to engage and reconfigure the narratives of their imagined communities.

In this study, I focus on the strategies of Rosa Coldfield and Isabel Moncada, the central female characters of the narratives. Both women come to recognize the ways in which the national narratives of the Confederacy and of Mexico have employed the female body, and the risks of violation or treachery it purportedly runs, to encourage multiple forms of gender-, race-, and class-based discrimination in the name of national purity and stability. In response, they attempt to offer new narratives of the national community and their gendered position within it. Debra Castillo argues, reading Carlos Monsiváis and Judith Butler in preparation for reading Juan Rulfo and Elena Garro, that "to open the space for articulating 'women' is also to open a space for the necessarily radical retheorizing of social relations and historical presuppositions in which social norms and norms are complexly interwoven. To speak 'woman' is also to mark a resistant site to traditional symbolic and political orderings" (64). *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Los recuerdos del porvenir* acknowledge the radical potential of Rosa's and Isabel's narratives while demonstrating the ease with which hegemonic articulations of the nation are able to close down the space their stories might have opened. Both Rosa's and Isabel's narratives are somehow misread or misheard, rendered inarticulable or indecipherable. More alarming is the fact that Isabel's and Rosa's bodies begin to lose substance or even to disappear as they attempt to reinscribe them within these new national narratives. As *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Los recuerdos del porvenir* draw attention to the personal and national costs of lending credence to the foundational fictions of the community, they simultaneously offer a cautionary tale of the price paid by those who challenge them too vehemently.

When the political entity of the Confederate States of America ceased to exist in 1865, continued national longings inspired a narrative of the defeated South, celebrating the community that purportedly gave rise to the short-lived nation-state. The "Cavalier myth" narrative of the regional -- and national -- past insists that the antebellum South had been a genteel, aristocratic culture, a noble cause worth fighting for. As Edward Pollard puts it in his 1866 history *The Lost Cause*, "the colonists of Virginia and the Carolinas were from the first distinguished for their polite manners, their fine sentiments, their attachment to a sort of feudal life, their landed gentry, their love of field-sports and dangerous adventure, and the prodigal and improvident aristocracy that dispensed its stores in constant rounds of hospitality and gaiety" (50). Within the "lost cause" narrative, Southern aristocracy is not presented as a form of tyranny -- like that which motivated the American colonies to wage a war of independence -- but rather as admirable system of *noblesse oblige*. Thus, the systematic oppression of African Americans, women, and poor whites is rewritten as benevolent, patriarchal protection. In 1930, the Agrarians who published the manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* under the name of the Twelve Southerners did not embrace Pollard's desire for southern secession, although as Michael Kreyling has argued, their use of the words "region" and "culture" are indeed quite close to Anderson's use of "nation" (ix-x). Nevertheless, the Agrarians celebrated several ideas about the South that were none too distant from Pollard's. John Crowe Ransom's essay "Reconstructed but Unregenerate," which opens the collection, incorporates the celebration of aristocracy in its invocation of "European culture," proclaiming that the "South is unique on this continent for having founded and defended a culture which was according to the European principles of culture; and the European principles had better look to the South if they are to be perpetuated in this country" (3). Cautioning that "younger Southerners, who are being converted frequently to the industrial gospel, must come back to the support of the Southern tradition" (Twelve Southerners x), the Agrarians advocate a return to an imagined historical origin of the region, a genteel and cultured society which they envision at the heart of the antebellum South. In contrast, in his narrative representations of the South, the Agrarians' contemporary William Faulkner emphasizes "less the re-creation of the lost world than its evocation and stresses the vanity of attempts of revive it" (King 78). In the wake of the U.S. Civil War and the defeat of the Confederacy, Faulkner's Rosa Coldfield tries to position herself within the narrative of Cavalier society, only to find no tenable role for her to occupy. As Mr. Compson

explains to his son Quentin in *Absalom, Absalom!*, there were distinct categories of women in antebellum society: "the other sex is separated into three sharp divisions ... the virgins whom gentlemen someday married, the courtesans to whom they went while on sabbaticals in the cities, the slave girls and women upon whom that first caste rested and to whom in certain cases it doubtless owed the very fact of its virginity" (135). White, planter-class women escape the denigration experienced by other women, precisely because it is experienced by other women, but as Rosa Coldfield comes to discover, there are disconcerting similarities between all categories of women. Ultimately, the virginity of a wealthy white woman becomes a commodity to be exchanged between patriarchs, much like the slaves upon whose bodies her successful commodification relies. Miss Rosa is the sister-in-law and erstwhile fiancée of Thomas Sutpen, who, upon arriving in Jefferson, Mississippi in 1832 with a wagon full of slaves from the French Caribbean, swindles a Choctaw into selling him one hundred square miles of land, blackmails a local merchant into sanctioning Sutpen's marriage with his daughter, terrorizes his own family and the entire county into submission, and establishes the wealthiest plantation in the region. But his willingness to oppress all those who surround him eventually leads to his ruin, and in *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner scrutinizes Sutpen family history as a possible key to understanding the collapse of antebellum Southern society. Rosa Coldfield suggests that the failures of both Sutpen and the Confederacy stem from the inherent immorality they uphold: as she struggles to come to terms with the complex systems of race, gender, and class privilege upon which the mythically benevolent Cavalier society relies, she recognizes a blatant contradiction between the narratives of Southern history she has learned and the facts of Southern life she has experienced. However, while she is unable to endorse the Southern narratives she has inherited, she is also unwilling to reject them, refusing any social interaction that suggests racial equality. When recounting the Sutpen family saga, Rosa's prejudices cause her to suppress information or to interpret it in ways that her evidence cannot support; she recognizes that her own narrative is faulty, and yet she also knows that the history she has received does not account for her experience. With no viable narrative into which she might insert herself, Rosa virtually wills her body to dissolve so as to not have to be incorporated into any history at all.

When Rosa goes to the Sutpen mansion on the afternoon that Sutpen's son Henry murders his sister Judith's fiancé, she encounters Sutpen's biracial daughter Clytie. Rosa is running up the stairs, but Clytie intervenes, or rather, Clytie's face does, for Rosa describes her as fragmented and disembodied: "*gradually the face, the Sutpen face not approaching, not swimming up out of the gloom, but already there, rocklike and firm and antedating time and house and doom and all, waiting there (oh yes, he chose well; he bettered choosing, who created in his own image the cold Cerberus of his private hell) -- the face without sex or age because it had never possessed either*" (169; all italics in the text are in the original). Sutpen is away at war, but for Rosa he is still an omnipresent force, dominating the actions of those he spawned. As awesome as this force is, Rosa catches sight of a potential means of warding it off: human contact. When Clytie grabs her arm, Rosa thinks: "*touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am's private own*" (173). Reaching what Rosa sees as the very core of another being, the touch of flesh with flesh makes impossible the simple annihilation that occurs when the impalpable force of Thomas Sutpen overtakes either autonomous subject or inanimate object. This touch, which requires interaction and mutual recognition, offers a means of countering the brutal and immoral force that Thomas Sutpen embodies. However, when someone else enters the realm of "the central I-Am's private own," this interaction threatens to leave a trace, thereby jeopardizing the integrity of the self as much as Thomas Sutpen's occupying, obliterating force. This intercourse also permits the transgression of the categories of identity governing social interaction in the South: "*there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering ... let flesh touch with flesh, and watch the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too*" (173). Touching another human and acknowledging her humanity threatens the socially-constructed divisions upon which Southern social hierarchies are based; ironically, such divisions rely upon a rhetorical characterization of racialized, gendered, and laboring bodies that cannot be sustained when confronted with physical

flesh. Rosa has developed her sense of self within the boundaries of these categories, and it is through them that she enjoys her most powerful privilege, as a white person; she cannot accept their dissolution any more than she can accept Sutpen's influence, and she cries out, "*Take your hand off me, nigger!*" (173). Although she claims to have been speaking not to Clytie but to Sutpen's indomitable force, she ultimately gives in to him with this demand: by insisting on the racial divides of the South, she refuses the human interaction and respect that she has recognized as necessary to defeat him.

Multiple critical readings of *Absalom, Absalom!* have remarked on the unbridgeable gap between the white characters' desire to figure themselves within an empowering narrative of their community and their refusal to allow that position to black and biracial subjects. Minrose C. Gwin provides a psychoanalytical analysis of Rosa's racist rejection of Clytie and concomitant denial of her own subject position (86-88). Philip M. Weinstein terms the denial of black humanity as "the central, unalterable fact of *Absalom*, against which all the imaginative energy of the novel ... is gathered to show at what cost this fact perseveres, what human loss it entails" (51), although his argument rests primarily upon the relationship of Charles Bon and his descendants with the Sutpens. What I would like to add to the analysis of this theme, and this scene, is a discussion of the ways in which it dramatizes Rosa Coldfield's struggle to account for individual bodies -- both her own, and those of others -- within the telling of the national narrative of the Confederacy. Barbara Ladd has argued that, in their narrative reconstructions of Henry Sutpen's murder of Charles Bon, "for all of the speakers except Miss Rosa, Henry was driven by some necessity for preserving his family's (i.e., the nation's) purity.... According to Rosa Coldfield ... Bon's murder is inexplicable except as the inevitable consequence of Sutpen's -- the American Innocent's -- own demonic nature" (Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line* 141, 144). As Ladd rightly points out, Rosa is the only one of the novel's narrators who reached adulthood before the Civil War and she interprets the conflict primarily as a consequence of antebellum actions rather than the cause of post-War conditions. But in the wake of the war, Rosa is nevertheless plagued by her own attempts to reconfigure the national community in such a way that she might encode herself within a pure nation while keeping others at bay; her reflections on corporeality and identity are central to these attempts. Rosa draws individual actions and familial strife into the same sphere as military engagements and political debates in her telling of the Sutpen and Confederate sagas, though the relationship between the individual body and the body politic remains vexed throughout the chapters she narrates. In fact, the two primary strategies her narrative employs to explain this relationship are starkly opposed: while at times, national history appears embodied by the figure of Thomas Sutpen, at other points in her story, the overwhelming forces of history lay waste to all distinct bodies, lending her narration the Gothic elements that critics such as Vickery, Levins, and Pitavy have noted. When Thomas Sutpen stands in for the nation -- and both the glories and the sins that shape it -- he provides a striking contrast to others who populate Rosa's narrative, those ghosts and shadows who have been rendered virtually disembodied in the face of Southern history. Rosa's chapters in *Absalom, Absalom!* vacillate between these disparate understandings of the individual, the nation, and history. Positioning Sutpen in a synecdochic relationship to the South grants him a power and prestige that Rosa is loath to bestow on one who, as she sees it, does not act in the best interests of the South or of his family. However, to strip Sutpen of this power would challenge the fundamental structures of Southern patriarchal society, and such a challenge would open the door to other -- that is, Yankee -- power structures that Rosa finds equally repellent. Unable to imagine a distribution of power capable of fending off both the crass materialism of the carpetbaggers and the racial equality of the Reconstructionists -- for again, her acceptance of racism radically limits her ability to imagine other communal structures -- Rosa tries to communicate this trap of Southern society to Quentin Compson.

Of course, as we know from *The Sound and The Fury*, Quentin is so enamored by the narratives of the Old South that he will commit suicide within the year rather than acknowledge their inadequacies. He mishears Rosa's arguments, recasting them in the "logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream" (22); as critics such as Gwin and Betina Entzminger have argued, Quentin and the other male narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* are unable or unwilling to understand

Rosa's claims as anything other than the hallucinations of a bitter, crazy, old woman. Yet while Rosa Coldfield is indeed bitter, and arguably logic-flouting, the urgency of her narrative stems less from her own insanity than from her need to communicate the insanity of a society that prides itself on its benevolence, gentility, and morality, but which structures all of its social exchanges around the accumulation of power and wealth, regardless of the moral cost. When Sutpen suggests that she help him to continue the Sutpen line and estate outside of a recognized marriage, Rosa reexamines her own family and determines that the South rests upon a crass coupling of sexuality with power. This coupling, which turns women into pawns in the exchanges between men and makes families primarily economic enterprises, places those that the South has ostensibly most celebrated -- white women -- in a position strikingly similar to those it has most denigrated -- black slaves. Unable to integrate these realizations into either a literal or metaphorical understanding of a righteous and benevolent nation, Rosa Coldfield lives her last forty-three years in a state of horrified indignation, searching for a narrative form in which to embody her "grim haggard amazed voice" (4). Sutpen, when he "first rode into town out of no discernible past and acquired his land no one knew how and built his house, his mansion, apparently out of nothing" (9), seemed to suffer from a similar disembodiment. Within a short time after his arrival on the Mississippi frontier in 1833, however, he transforms himself into what Rosa considers the most substantial force in Yoknapatawpha County. And although Sutpen is virtually unknown outside of northeastern Mississippi, his inroad into Jefferson becomes, within Rosa's narrative, the path that leads to the defeat of the Confederate States of America. Rosa focuses on Sutpen not simply as a synecdoche or metaphor; for her, the patriarch's individual actions and individual character are significant factors in the Confederacy's loss and the South's ensuing economic and emotional misery. She suggests that when the South welcomed into its ranks men of dubious character whose contributions on the battlefield could not outweigh their failures in civil society, it committed a grievous error: "that our cause, our very life and future hopes and past pride, should have been thrown into the balance with men like that to buttress it -- men with valor and strength but without pity or honor. Is it any wonder that Heaven saw fit to let us lose?" (19). The Confederacy, having equated itself with the patriarchs embodying its power, violated the values it proclaimed to uphold.

As a young woman, Rosa distances herself from her own corporeality, celebrating an abstract and romanticized humanity while shunning actual human contact. She publishes eulogies for Confederate soldiers that espouse love for men she has never met. Uniting romantic and patriotic love in her odes, Rosa commits herself to a form of passion that she cannot act upon outside of her poems. And yet, it is not an all-encompassing love of country, or not that alone, which accounts for Rosa's idealized, disembodied passion. The summer before the war, she visits Sutpen's Hundred while Charles Bon is there, and while she does not even see him, she feels something akin to love for him, proclaiming herself "*not mistress, not beloved, but more than even love; I became all polymath love's androgynous advocate*" (182). Championing the love of the polymath -- that is, presumably, love that manifests itself through the text rather than the body -- Rosa embraces love but does not identify with her own body. And yet, so certain is she of her understanding of love that, at age fourteen, she longs to go to Bon's fiancée Judith "*to say 'Dont talk to me of love but let me tell you, who know already more of love than you will ever know or need'*" (185). But in spite of her love for love, Rosa agrees when Sutpen asks her to marry him, although he does not encourage any pretense of romance with his proposal: "*You may think I made your sister Ellen no very good husband. You probably do think so. But even if you will not discount the fact that I am older now, I believe I can promise that I shall do no worse at least for you*" (204). The lack of romance, love, courtship, and even civility do not dissuade Rosa from marrying a man she abhors; she only refuses Sutpen once he proposes that they consummate their relationship, marrying only if she bears a male heir. This utter repulsion at the idea of reproductive sexuality provides an important clue to Rosa's vexed relationship to the body. As when she encounters Clytie on the stairs, Rosa shies away from physical contact, fearing it will compromise her independence and autonomy. But sexual penetration presents a particularly grave risk for Rosa, not only because it entails extended and intimate contact, but because she

understands sex and marriage to be tools of domination. Puzzling over what could possibly have led Mr. Coldfield to agree to a marriage between her sister Ellen and Sutpen, Rosa is indignant "that it should have been our father ... of all of them that he knew, out of all the ones who used to go out there and drink and gamble with him and watch him fight those wild negroes, whose daughters he might even have won at cards" (19). Unaware of the business deal allowing Sutpen to blackmail Coldfield into marrying off Ellen, she nevertheless understands that her sister was sold, despite the South's need to define white women over and against Black slaves.

At the end of the war, however, Rosa considers offering herself in similar exchange. Watching with Judith and Clytie as the defeated soldiers return home from the Civil War, she witnesses "*men who had risked and lost everything, suffered beyond endurance and had returned now to a ruined land*" and thinks, "*we gave them what and all we had and we would have assumed their wounds and left them whole again if we could*" (196). Having spent the first twenty years of her life in a struggle to distance herself from her body, Rosa suddenly embraces her body if only to sacrifice it to soldiers who have served the Confederacy. However, she realizes that these returning soldiers, heroes though they may have been, were beyond saving. While the rhetoric of both the antebellum South and the defeated Confederacy relied heavily upon the need to protect women and maintain their purity, the horrors of the war have erased even the pretense of such gentility in the soldiers. They were "*not the same men who had marched away but transformed ... into the likeness of that man who abuses from very despair and pity the beloved wife or mistress who in his absence has been raped*" (196). Because they lash out in defeat to wreak further destruction, a sacrifice to these men will not redeem the South but only degrade it more. Unlike the other soldiers, Sutpen returns virtually unchanged. He had been the least honorable man she knew before the war, yet the radical degradation of everyone else reveals Sutpen in a new light. While other white men in Jefferson gather in secret meetings as the predecessors of the Ku Klux Klan, Sutpen insists that "*if every man in the South would do as he himself was doing, would see to the restoration of his own land, the general land and South would save itself*" (201-02). He dedicates "*his old man's solitary fury fighting ... against the ponderable weight of the changed new time ... as though he were trying to dam a river with his bare hands and a shingle*" (202). His motives for the fight do not stem from Confederate nationalism or cultural pride, of course, but from the same desire to establish himself and his family line in a position of social power and dominance that drove him from Tidewater Virginia to Haiti to Yoknapatawpha County. Because his design is predicated upon the class structure and racial divides of the antebellum South, and because he is either incapable or unwilling to alter his design after more than forty years of struggle, he refuses to acknowledge the political and social upheaval that surrounds him. Rosa does not mistake Sutpen's self-serving frenzy for altruistic service to the nation, but she does determine that Sutpen's determination to rebuild his house and plantation is the most likely plan available to rebuild the ideal of the nation that she has aggrandized. By agreeing to marry Sutpen, Rosa makes an offering to the Confederacy and embraces a man "who, despite what he might have been at one time and despite what she might have believed or even known about him, had fought for four honorable years for the soil and traditions of the land where she had been born" (19). Sutpen's indefatigable pursuit of the past, of the culture and society that preceded the "holocaust which had taken parents security and all from her" and had caused "all that living meant to her [to] fall into ruins" (18-19) conduces Rosa to ally herself with the man she sees as having the closest ties to the narrative of the Confederate nation in which she wishes to position herself. This is precisely the same faulty strategy that Rosa accuses the Confederacy of employing, buttressing "our cause, our very life and future hopes and past pride" through "men with valor and strength but without pity or honor," and Rosa, like the Confederacy, is disappointed: Sutpen asks her to breed first and marry later. With this request, it becomes clear that a sacrifice to Sutpen is no more noble than one to the other soldiers. Rosa will not further any Cavalier traditions through an alliance with Sutpen. In fact, she is finally forced to recognize that there were never any real Cavalier traditions to further.

With forty-three years' distance, Rosa is not surprised that the South was defeated and her hopes dashed. At the time of Sutpen's proposal, however, she is shocked into silence, and nearly

into death: she tells Quentin that "my life was destined to end on an afternoon in April forty-three years ago, since anyone who even had as little to call living as I had had up to that time would not call what I have had since, living" (17). She counts herself among the ghosts that populate her history, ironically sacrificing herself and her autonomy to Sutpen even more completely than she would have by accepting his proposal. Rosa lives out her life-that-is-not-life as far removed from her body and from the material world as she can; however, the costs of such disincarnation are inordinately high. Patrick O'Donnell notes that Rosa, even abjected from her body and her community, "triggers the apocalypse which signals the end of the world which has abjected her. Thus, she is in an extraordinary position to speak in the novel, for, as she clearly enunciates what might be called the repressed material (i.e., the body) of the novel, she is close to all that precedes and threatens to undermine the hierarchies, prohibitions, and lines of succession Sutpen wishes to establish as the conditions of his domain and its continuance" (O'Donnell 33). But while she does indeed threaten at such radical reordering, the apocalypse she triggers does not in fact undermine the regional or national identities she had associated with that of Yoknapawtapha. And in the forty-three years before the apocalypse, Rosa's retreat from both her body and the body politic renders her nearly voiceless as well. Once Sutpen's indecent proposal leads her, already alienated from her physical self, to abandon her passion for the abstract bonds of romance and nation as well, she comes to recognize her celebration of the abstract over the material does not permit her the same liberating freedom that she had imagined; the ghostly and suppressed body she had celebrated occupies a radically disempowered position from which to influence others or even to maintain personal autonomy. Divorced from bodily contact and substantial human interaction, "*the touch of flesh with flesh*," she is powerless to dismantle the decorous constructs of hierarchical division or to challenge the iniquitous society they sustain. In requesting that Quentin Compson be audience to her tale and witness to her final trip to Sutpen's Hundred, she makes one final attempt to intervene; however, her liberated but insubstantial self is left "*thrusting blindly still against the solid yet imponderable weight*" (172) of both the society she has rejected and the myths of its history that empathize with those who dominate it.

After nearly two decades of violent military occupation -- during the long years of the Mexican Revolution and the subsequent decade in which the newly-installed federal government established a military presence throughout much of the south -- the residents of Ixtepec, and the town itself, struggle to find a means of escaping violence, torture, and oppression. While both the Constitutionalist army and the Zapatistas claimed to represent Ixtepec's interest during the Revolution, both armies also pillaged the town in the course of the lengthy civil war. After the war, the federal army, professedly in Ixtepec to uphold the new constitution and to enforce revolutionary policies such as agrarian reform, in fact establishes an alliance with a single wealthy Ixtepequeño, enabling him to increase his own land holdings greatly while making any legitimate land redistribution impossible. When, after his election as President in 1924, Plutarco Elías Calles decides to enforce constitutional articles restricting the power of the Roman Catholic Church, a decision resulting in a clerical strike and various armed conflicts that pit the purportedly revolutionary federal army against Catholic guerrillas known as *cristeros*, Ixtepec finds itself once again on the front lines between two armed forces who claim to have their best interests at heart but who nevertheless undermine their chances of gaining any meaningful democratic or agrarian reform. Eventually, this untenable position of starring in the rhetorical narrative of the revolution without reaping any actual benefits of the revolution -- and indeed losing some of the rights they had before the revolution -- leads many Ixtepequeños to attempt to negotiate different relationships with the national narratives within which they find themselves represented. *Los recuerdos del porvenir* traces the development of the strategies that Ixtepequeños employ in order to reposition themselves in Mexican history and its national narrative. As opposed to Rosa Coldfield's confrontational assault and retreat, the residents of Ixtepec tend to attack surreptitiously, converting patriotism into a performance that can be strategically manipulated and subverted (see Durán 50). In the wake of a particularly disastrous failure of one such performance, Isabel Moncada, the daughter of one of the town's leading families, takes on yet another role in the hopes of jolting Ixtepec out of its historical cycle of violence. Engaging with a

story that shapes Mexico's understanding of itself and of its citizens, Isabel inserts herself into one of the foundational fictions of the nation, behaving in such a way that both the military and the townspeople view her as the most conventional of stereotypes, the traitorous woman. Instead of fulfilling their expectations, however, she refuses the terms of the narrative and thereby endeavors to redirect the outcome of the story in which she stars. Although her actions are rapidly reincorporated into the conventional narrative, Isabel does succeed in altering the history of Ixtepec in significant ways.

Los recuerdos del porvenir implies that one of the primary narratives haunting the past and present of Ixtepec is that of the archetypal Mexican figure of "La Malinche" or doña Marina. While not mentioned directly in the novel, she casts a long shadow over the Ixtepequeños and their interpretations of female behavior, and indeed multiple literary critics, including Jean Franco and Sandra Messinger Cypess have commented extensively upon the parallels between La Malinche and the female characters of the novel. Historical accounts of La Malinche differ, but it is generally accepted that she was born in or around 1502 to a family of the ruling class and then sold into slavery when her father died and her mother remarried. When Hernán Cortés arrived in the territory of the Tabascan Indians, La Malinche was given as a gift to the Spaniards. Because she spoke both Nahuatl and Mayan languages, she came to serve as guide and translator for the Spanish and most likely as Cortés's lover as well; she gave birth to a *mestizo* son who is widely regarded as Cortés's offspring. Her services as interpreter and guide were undoubtedly beneficial to the Spaniards during the conquest, and La Malinche has come to be identified as a traitor who forsook her people in order to aid Cortés's invading forces. Of course, those indigenous nations that La Malinche may have helped to defeat had either sold her into slavery, owned her as a slave, or were foreigners with whom she had no more allegiance than she had with her final enslavers, the Spanish. Nevertheless, she has been transformed in popular narrative from a historical person in a difficult triple bind to a metaphorical figure who simultaneously births and betrays a nation. In other narratives of national origin, such as the nineteenth-century romances that Doris Sommer traces, La Malinche's political and sexual alliance with Cortés might position her as a beloved metaphorical mother of Mexico, figuratively giving birth to the future *mestizo* nation. However, the traditional Mexican reading of La Malinche positions her as a treacherous Indian woman who delivers her own people into centuries of colonial servitude. Octavio Paz has suggested that La Malinche functions in the collective consciousness of Mexico as a woman whose fascination with the Spaniards brought about her own rape: "Doña Marina becomes a figure representing the Indian women who were fascinated, violated or seduced by the Spaniards. And as a small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal. She embodies the open, the *chingado*, to our closed, stoic, impassive Indians" (86) ("Doña Marina se ha convertido en una figura que representa a las indias, fascinadas, violadas o seducidas por los españoles. Y del mismo modo que el niño no perdona a su madre que lo abandone para ir en busca de su padre, el pueblo mexicano no perdona su traición a la Malinche. Ella encarna lo abierto, lo chingado, frente a nuestros indios, estoicos, impassibles y cerrados" [94]). The disdain for La Malinche stems, in Paz's analysis, from her specifically female traits: "The *chingón* is the *macho*; he rips open the *chingada*, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world. The relationship between them is violent, determined by the cynical power of the first and the impotence of the second" (77) ("El chingón es el macho, el que abre. La chingada, la hembra, la pasividad pura, inerme ante el exterior. La relación entre ambos es violenta, determinada por el poder cínico del primero y la impotencia de la otra" [85]). For Paz, Mexican national consciousness rests upon a clear gender division that distinguishes between the *india*, the female Indian whose openness and inherent potential for betrayal becomes symbolic of all Mexican females, and the *indio*, the male Indian whose steadfastness and stoicism in the face of such betrayal characterizes the Mexican male.

In contrast or implicit challenge to Paz, whose commentaries on Mexico have themselves been incorporated into the Mexican national narrative, Garro (who was recently divorced from Paz when she wrote *Los recuerdos del porvenir*) suggests that treason is not so easy to identify. In Ixtepec, women of all classes who do not adhere strictly to middle-class codes of modesty and

decorum are readily labeled as traitorous; both male and female Ixtepequeños repeatedly identify female nonconformity as treachery, particularly when it is manifested through a demonstration of sexuality. Isabel Moncada seemingly replicates La Malinche's tale by becoming the concubine of General Rosas, the head of the military forces occupying the town. As the man responsible for the successful defeat of Ixtepec's most recent rebellion, one which ended with the death of Isabel's brother Juan and the imprisonment of her brother Nicolás along with several other leading members of the town including the priest, Rosas is clearly the invading enemy of Ixtepec. Traditional and superficial interpretations of her behavior label this alliance immediately as treachery, and both the military and the Ixtepequeños are predisposed to interpret Isabel's actions in accordance with the narrative of La Malinche, accepting the story not only as historical fact but as evidence of the essential nature of women. Because of this, Isabel is able to gain access to and influence over Rosas without raising his defenses. Yet because Isabel herself does not accept the motivations or desires attributed to La Malinche, she uses her access to Rosas to attempt to rewrite the foundational narrative from her strategic position within it. After the town's attempt to rescue the priest from the military ends with the death and imprisonment of the Moncada brothers, Isabel Moncada is the only person in Ixtepec who continues to challenge General Rosas directly. She does so not through force but by accepting the general's invitation to be his new *querida* or lover, thereby confronting him continuously with his own guilt. Her confrontation disquiets and threatens to overwhelm Rosas, and yet the Ixtepequeños who have known -- and liked -- Isabel since her birth nevertheless interpret her behavior as treason, viewing her actions strictly along the lines of the traditional narrative of La Malinche. Her parents are ashamed by her apparent inability to control her sexual desire, even when it means betraying her family and sleeping with the man responsible for the death of one brother and the imprisonment and impending execution of the other; the Ixtepequeños flock to her hotel for a chance to see or to shout at the traitorous "thankless daughter" (242) ("hija ingrata" [247]). It should be noted that, until Amy Kaminsky's analysis of the novel in "Residual Authority and Gendered Resistance" gained currency, the dominant critical reading of Isabel agreed with that of the town (see, for example, Bartow; Boschetto; Franco; Méndez Rodenas). However, regardless of anyone's assessment of her behavior, or perhaps because of it, Isabel is able to wield a surprising amount of influence over the general. No one, including Rosas himself, suspects her of having any motivation for her actions beyond an irrepressible urge to betray her family and her town, even as it becomes clear that Isabel has not just surrendered herself to the invading general. Rosas in fact comes to regret his decision to make Isabel his new *querida* almost instantly. He selected her to be his *querida* as the final sign of his victory over the town, saying to himself, "Now they will know that I fill my bed with the one who will hurt them the most" (239) ("Ahora van a saber que lleno mi cama con la que más les duele" (245)). Instead he finds that "Isabel's presence in his room had ruined his success" (238) ("la presencia de Isabel en su cuarto había arruinado el éxito" [244]), for she is sullen, rarely engaging in conversation and persistently challenging Rosas with eyes that bear a disconcerting resemblance to those of the condemned Nicolás. Once she has gained access to the general, Isabel is able to defy Rosas strategically, in a way that he does not anticipate. Ultimately, it is somewhat effective as well; Isabel finally wears the general down, and he agrees to save her brother from the firing squad. It is a promise he does not keep, but in order to avoid confronting Isabel once more, Rosas flees Ixtepec entirely.

Isabel takes advantage of the fact that the general will understand her presence in his bed in strict accordance with a narrative that he has heard from childhood about the way that Mexican women behave in the face of enemy invaders. Engaging with history to draw inspiration from the past without accepting the narratives she has been offered to explain it, Isabel adopts La Malinche's role but rewrites it from within. However, both Isabel Moncada's victory and her reinterpretation of the Malinche narrative remain outside of the historical record in *Los recuerdos del porvenir*. While the narrative voice of the ghost town of Ixtepec recounts Isabel's successful struggles against state occupation and oppression, such a narrative is "self-contained and condemned to memory" (3) ("encerrada en sí misma y condenada a la memoria" [11]) readers of *Los recuerdos del porvenir* are given an entrance into this self-contained memory, but the

Ixtepequeños are not. When Rosas betrays Isabel, she runs after him to confront him and disappears in a cloud of dust. The woman who accompanies Isabel begins a search and, "after looking for her for a long time, Gregoria found her lying far down the hill, transformed into a stone" (287) ("después de mucho buscarla, Gregoria la halló tirada muy abajo, convertida en una piedra" [291]). Rolling the stone to the top of the hill that overlooks the town, she inscribes on it the narrative with which *Los recuerdos del porvenir* ends: "I am Isabel Moncada, the daughter of Martín Moncada and Ana Cuétara de Moncada, born in the town of Ixtepec on December 1, 1907. I turned into stone on October 5, 1927, before the startled eyes of Gregoria Juárez. I caused the unhappiness of my parents and the death of my brothers Juan and Nicolás. When I came to ask the Virgin to cure me of my love for General Francisco Rosas, who killed my brothers, I repented and preferred the love of the man who ruined me and ruined my family. Here I shall be, alone with my love, as a recollection of things to come, forever and ever" (288-89) ("Soy Isabel Moncada, nacida de Martín Moncada y de Ana Cuétara de Moncada, en el pueblo de Ixtepec el primero de diciembre de 1907. En piedra me convertí el cinco de octubre de 1927 delante de los ojos espantados de Gregoria Juárez. Causé la desdicha de mis padres y la muerte de mis hermanos Juan y Nicolás. Cuando venía a pedirle a la Virgen que me curara del amor que tengo por el general Francisco Rosas que mató a mis hermanos, me arrepentí y preferí el amor del hombre que me perdió y perdió a mi familia. Aquí estaré con mi amor a solas como recuerdo del porvenir por los siglos de los siglos" [292]). The irony of this conclusion to *Los recuerdos del porvenir* is striking. Unable to confront Isabel's accusing eyes, Rosas flees the town immediately after Nicolás' execution; the army does send a replacement, but Isabel is successful in forcing Rosas out of Ixtepec. She does undoubtedly cause her parents to be unhappy, but she bears no responsibility for the death of Juan, who dies before she becomes Rosas's *querida*, or that of Nicolás, whom she struggles mightily to save. The novel does provide evidence making Isabel's transmutation into stone credible: determined to escape Ixtepec with her dead brothers, she repeatedly imagines herself buried or turned to stone, an unmoving statue like those she had pretended to be during childhood games of freeze tag. When she realizes Rosas's betrayal, she stands "in the center of the day like a rock in the middle of the countryside. From her heart stones sprang forth; they ran through her body and made it immovable.... Now no one would come to break the spell; her brothers were also frozen forever" (285) ("en el centro del día como una roca en la mitad del campo. De su corazón brotaban piedras que corrían por su cuerpo y lo volvían inamovible.... Ahora nadie vendría a desencantarla; sus hermanos también estaban fijos para siempre" [289]). But while Isabel's conversion to stone is plausible within the novel, Gregoria's interpretation of the causes of this transformation is not supported by other aspects of the narrative. As Amy Kaminsky has pointed out, Gregoria is fascinated by clichés of romantic love and sexual desire and consistently interprets the world through this lens. Ixtepec's collective memory offers multiple reasons to doubt Gregoria's ability to interpret the events she witnesses objectively, and it provides no record of Isabel speaking of her love for Rosas to Gregoria or anyone else. Generally silent in Rosas's presence, Isabel speaks to him at length only once, during an accusatory conversation on the morning of Nicolás' scheduled execution when she demands that her brother be spared. Gregoria is convinced of Isabel's treachery even though she witnesses Rosas's flight from the town, an expulsion that constitutes a communal victory which Isabel has won through considerable personal sacrifice. Gregoria is unable to interpret what she observes outside of the inherited narrative of La Malinche, which suggests that women are intrinsically inclined to act as enemies to the community and to the nation. And although General Rosas's occupation of Ixtepec has provided the town with ample evidence of the traitorous potential of purportedly patriotic calls to build and protect the nation, the Ixtepequeños have nevertheless proven unable or unwilling to rethink the conceptions that have facilitated their own disenfranchisement.

In an essay informed by Edouard Glissant's writings on space, Barbara Ladd suggests that "those who resist History in Faulkner do so out of a deep identification of the human with place and body" (Ladd, "William Faulkner, Edouard Glissant" 47). I do not suspect Ladd has Rosa Coldfield in mind as one who resists History-with-a-capital-H, nor have I argued that Rosa fits comfortably into such a role: she acknowledges the shortcomings of the Cavalier narrative of

history but attempts to resist only parts of it, at least until she renders herself, and her powers of protest, lifeless. But if Rosa's decades-long failure to challenge the historical narratives of southern identity that entrap her is due in some significant measure to her rejection of corporeality -- both her own and that of others -- then one might hope that Isabel Moncada's determination to confront the force of history (and the military) by inserting her own flesh into the struggle would lead to a substantially different result. Disappointingly, Isabel's strategy renders her either somewhat more ethereal than Rosa (if she vanishes completely) or considerably more solid (if she turns to stone), but in either case no more capable of being heard or of effecting change. Debra Castillo characterizes *Los recuerdos del porvenir* as describing, in part, "the fallen woman-traitor-witness hollowed out by the world and still witnessing to the tendency of the world to betray itself, to forget itself, to fall into the unknowable ... There is no buried truth to be found in such texts, only the broken, hesitant rhythms of a speech that reminds us of the recurrences of death, and of desire" (99). But while the truth is not buried, and thereby not available for excavation, neither is it entirely inaccessible as the result of Isabel's or Rosa's abortive and interrupted attempts to challenge the national narratives in which they find themselves inscribed. Rosa Coldfield is unable to piece together all of the details of the Sutpen saga, in part because she is unwilling to abandon the position of racial privilege she occupies, but she does provide Quentin and his roommate Shreve with enough information that they are able to compile the one version of history that is "probably true enough" (Faulkner 419). This is a fleeting story that will not remain accessible within the fictional world for long -- Shreve will return to Edmonton, Alberta, after graduation, and Rosa, Quentin, and his father Mr. Compson will all die within a year or two. Isabel's partial victory over Rosas and her new understanding of La Malinche are also not widely available to those within the fictional world, and by the novel's opening, Ixtepec is only a dry valley of abandoned houses, and the town thinks of itself as being "only memory and the memory that one has of me" (3) ("sólo memoria y la memoria que de mí se tenga" [11]). There are days when Ixtepec thinks, "I wish I had no memory, or that I could change myself into pious dust to escape the penalty of seeing myself" (3) ("Quisiera no tener memoria o convertirme en el piadoso polvo para escapar a la condena de mirarme" [11]). Yet Ixtepec knows that it looks down on its former site while sitting atop a "what looks like a stone" (3) ("piedra aparente" [11]), the potentially mislabeled and misremembered monument to Isabel. Although the town and its stone monument are now "self-contained and condemned to memory and its variegated mirror" (3) ("encerrada en sí misma y condenada a la memoria y a su variado espejo" [11]), the narrative voice of Ixtepec suggests hopefully that sometimes we are able to recognize the facts of history even when they are misremembered or unrecorded: "Perhaps acts remain written in the air and we read them there with eyes we do not know we have" (82) ("Tal vez los actos quedan escritos en el aire y ahí los leemos con unos ojos que no nos conocemos" [89]).

Of course, while a glimmer of hope remains, the "piedra aparente" that Isabel comes to embody -- which should perhaps stand as a monument to a heroine of the Revolution -- is converted instead, through Gregoria's misremembering, into one more testimony to the inherent treachery of Mexican women. Rosa Coldfield, for all the insight she provides Quentin, is reduced in his mind's eye finally to a dying woman "struggling and fighting like a doll in a nightmare, making no sound, foaming a little at the mouth" (468). Faulkner's and Garro's novels clearly insist upon the tremendous force with which the narratives of the nation continue to shape not only the historical record but the material conditions of the present; even the bodily substance of national subjects is not immune, as Isabel's stony permanence and Rosa's ghost-like ephemerality demonstrate. Yet the novels insist just as clearly that it is not merely the occasional renegade subject who is threatened by the traditional narratives of the nation. Ixtepec is already a ghost-town and Quentin Compson is "a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts" (Faulkner 9); the national communities themselves are threatened by extinction. Although the risks run by those who challenge the national narratives are great, the risks run by those nations that persist in relying upon the foundational American fictions which glorify a mutually beneficial relationship between the nation and its subjects while encouraging the sacrifices -- of land, of autonomy, and

of life -- that mark the past, the present, and the future of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha and Garro's Ixtepec are ultimately just as dangerous.

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