

Debates on Latin American Postmodern Novels through Solari, Sepúlveda and Bellatin's Literary Proposals

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ABSTRACT

In *The Transparency of Evil*, Jean Baudrillard who is a Euro-North American philosopher on Postmodernity, declares Postmodernity as apocalyptic and thus sentences historical subjectivity, referentiality in history, and the social (the ethical relationship between self and others in the social realm) to death. Nevertheless, in peripheral Latin America under dictatorships and post-dictatorships, we witness different kinds of Postmodernity, filled with the presence of a strong political subjectivity and the nets of the social. In the same way, Euro-North American theorists on Postmodernism view it as a universalizing concept, hence they wrongfully include Latin America's modern novels under the label of postmodern. This article examines Latin American postmodern novels within the framework of this new kind of citizenship as it evolves during the process of redemocratization and neoliberalism in Latin America. This article focuses on Uruguayan writer Ana Solari's *Scottia* (1997), Chilean author Luis Sepúlveda's *El viejo que leía novelas de amor* (1993), and Mexican writer Mario Bellatin's *Salón de belleza* (1994), to demonstrate the traces of different kinds of postmodern novels. Thus, it will explore the novels' various political subject positions as examples of the existence of a strong political subjectivity with a strong historical agency in Latin America, all of which was sentenced to death by Euro-North American theorists on Postmodernity. Thus, it denounces the fallacy of the Euro-North American universalizing theory on Postmodernity and Postmodernism, and clarifies the discrepancy between Euro-North America's definition of Latin American postmodern novels and Latin America's definition of its own postmodern literary texts.

Key Words: *Scottia*, *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*, *Salón de belleza*, Latin American postmodern novels

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INTRODUCTION

In *The Transparency of Evil* (1990), Jean Baudrillard, a Euro-North American philosopher on Postmodernity, declares Postmodernity as apocalyptic and thus sentences historical subjectivity, referentiality in history, and the social (the ethical relationship between self and others in social realm) to death. Nevertheless, in peripheral Latin America in dictatorships and post-dictatorships, we witness different kinds of Postmodernity. For example, Jean Franco in “Going Public: Reinhabiting the Private” insists on the existence of a strong political subjectivity in Latin America. To exemplify this, she uses the Argentine Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, who by “carrying snapshots of their lost children” (Franco 1992, 67) on Thursdays, bring out the “private life (as an image frozen in time) in public” (Franco 1992, 67), thus denouncing the military regime. This new kind of citizenship, which appeals beyond the State with its performances in public spaces, marks the difference between Euro-North American and Latin American Postmodernity. Furthermore, Latin America offers a new kind of Postmodernity filled with the presence of a strong political subjectivity and the nets of the social. In the same way, Euro-North American theorists on Postmodernism view it as a universalizing concept and wrongfully include Latin America’s modern novels as postmodern.

In this article, I will examine Latin American postmodern novels within the framework of this new kind of citizenship as it evolves during the process of redemocratization and neoliberalism in Latin America. I will focus on Uruguayan writer Ana Solari’s *Scottia* (1997), Chilean author Luis Sepúlveda’s *El viejo que leía novelas de amor* (1993), and Mexican writer Mario Bellatín’s *Salón de belleza* (1994), to demonstrate the traces of different kinds of postmodern novels. Thus, it will dive into the novels’ various political subject positions as examples of the existence of a strong political subjectivity with a strong historical agency in Latin America, all of which was sentenced to death by Euro-North American theorists on Postmodernity. In this way, this study will continue Santiago Colás’ investigation in *Postmodernity in Latin America* (1994), which denounces the fallacy of the Euro-North American universalizing theory on Postmodernism and clarifies the discrepancy between Euro-North America’s definition of Latin American postmodern novels and Latin America’s definition of its own postmodern literary texts.

POSTMODERNISM AND POSTMODERNITY IN LATIN AMERICA

In this section, I will present a review of the recent studies on Latin American Postmodernity and postmodern literature. Many Latin American theorists on Postmodernity and Postmodernism have affirmed that throughout history the Latin American socio-political context always has been heterogeneous. Nicolás Casullo in *El debate modernidad y posmodernidad* (1989) writes that in Latin America, the homogenizing project of Modernity clashed with a non-conforming resistance of a series of spots of discontinuous Afro-Caribbean, gauchos and indigenous groups, making Latin America an eternal “modernidad descentrada que agolpó en un mismo espacio y tiempo irrupciones industrialistas y testimonio de mundos indígenas” (Casullo 1989, 62). Thus, Latin American Modernity becomes “*desacople*” (unpaired) (Casullo 1989, 62) with progressive modernization, making Latin America a group of residues of various layers of culture. One of the most preeminent figures of the Latin American theorists on Postmodernism, Nelly Richard in *The Insubordination of Signs* (2004), cites Angel Rama's view of Latin America as “the multiplicity of levels and planes on which a work simultaneously develops” (Richard 2004, 67). This made Latin America's socio-political contexts of periphery heterogeneous and thus this peripherality achieved the distinction of being “Postmodernist *avant la lettre*” (Richard 1987, 10).

However, this Latin American heterogeneity faced the homogeneous force of military junta, which used the official history to silence the various voices of heterogeneous social groups. According to Colás, the political Postmodernity in Argentina began in 1976 with the *Proceso* where “a military junta, self-baptized as the *Proceso de reorganización nacional* [...] threatened, abducted, tortured, raped, disappeared, killed, and exiled thousands of Argentines” (Colás 1994, 121). In his work, Colás presents Ricardo Piglia's novel, *Respiración artificial* (1980), as the beginning of postmodern literature in Latin America. Piglia, who, from inside Argentina, “could not confront the *Proceso* head on and to himself, fell the task of representing a regime most of whose repressive practices aimed, in one way or another, at the elimination of all such representations” (Colás 1994, 121). By defining Piglia's *Respiración artificial* as the beginning of Argentine postmodern literature, Colás confronted Linda Hutcheon's universalizing theory on Postmodernism and her categorization of some Latin American texts as postmodern literature.

Linda Hutcheon, one of the most famous Euro-North American critics,

theorizes about Postmodernism in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) as the denaturing politics of representation with the use of subversive postmodern parody and pastiche. Hutcheon characterizes Postmodernism as “a move toward anti-totalization” (Hutcheon 1988, 42) which “undercut[s] any (conscious or unconscious) assumption of universal or transhistorical status for postmodern discourses” (Hutcheon 1988, 80). However, contrary to what she says, Hutcheon assumes a universal or transhistorical status in her postmodern literary theory.

Hutcheon’s incomplete understanding of Latin American historical background has made her produce theory, for which she is endlessly criticized because of her wrongful incorporation of some of Latin American novels that possess similar stylistic markers to Euro-North American Postmodernism as postmodern. For example, Hutcheon incorporates Manuel Puig’s *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976) as postmodern historiographic metafiction, since, according to her, it problematizes “both the nature of the referent and its relation of the real, historical world by its paradoxical combination of metafictional self-reflexivity with historical subject matter” (Hutcheon 1988, 19). Contrary to Hutcheon’s judgment, Latin American Postmodernism theorist, Colás, affirms that *El beso de la mujer araña* marks “Latin American Modernity in Crisis” (Colás 1994, 76), demonstrating the end of the possibility of utopian thought. Puig’s self-reflexivity is not a postmodern device which is used to demonstrate the instability of ontological understanding of history. Rather, it is a device to visually demonstrate “the final dimensions of that utopia” (Colás 1994, 121), thus representing the end of Modernity in Argentina. By incorporating Puig’s work into its historical background, Colás aims to clarify the purpose of Puig’s use of, what Hutcheon calls, “metafictional self-reflexivity with historical subject matter” (Hutcheon 1988, 19); all of this, in order to demonstrate that there is no “possibility of confronting and representing the catastrophe of massive state terrorism and repression” (Colás 1994, 121). In the same way, George Yúdice also criticizes that Hutcheon “lumps [...] Manuel Puig as practitioner of a subversive ‘postmodern parody’” (Yúdice 1992, 6-7). In a similar way, Hutcheon wrongfully includes Gabriel García Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a postmodern historiographic metafiction because of its “use [of] parody” (Hutcheon 1988, 129). Because of these reasons, Hutcheon’s universalizing theory on Postmodernism is highly criticized by theorists and critics specialized in Latin America.

Yet, even more attempts to universalize postmodern discourse were executed by another Euro-North American Postmodernism theorist, Brian

McHale. In his book *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), McHale categorizes technical literary devices that are used for “foregrounding the ontological dimension of recursive structure” (McHale 1987, 124). While he categorizes postmodern discourses with stylistic markers, such as *trompe-l'œil* or *mise-en-abyme*, etc., McHale also wrongfully refers to the Latin American boom literature, such as Julio Cortázar’s “Continuidad de los parques” (1956), as postmodern, due to its use of the same literary techniques for the purpose of “undermining of stable, univocal ontology” (McHale 1987, 170). Nonetheless, when “Continuidad de los parques” is put into its socio-political context, the text’s ahistoricity of placing the reality back into the fictionality is interpreted as the end of the possibility of utopian thought, thus the short story would belong to the end of Modernity as well.¹

Hence, if we decide to discern postmodern literature with identifiable stylistic markers of self-reflexivity, ahistory, pastiche, parody, etc. without understanding its historical background, we run the risk of being puzzled/confused when we face texts from different time periods that also fall under these categories. For example, the Golden Age literary work, *La vida es sueño* (1635), by Pedro Calderón de la Barca also has the same postmodern effect that McHale calls “foreground[ing] instability of ontological understanding of the world” (McHale 1987, 124). Thus, this Golden Age play faces the same danger of being categorized as postmodern.² Similarly, Yúdice also criticizes the Euro-North American simplistic categorization of Latin American Postmodernism by questioning, “doesn’t Cervantes’s intertextuality have a similar effect [of parody]?” (Yúdice 1992, 7), indicating that a parody, which Hutcheon proclaims as one of the most important characteristics of Postmodernism, can be found in any world literature and in any time period. This is the reason why Yúdice cites Escobar who states, “A theory of postmodern culture cannot rely on the formal techniques and properties of particular worlds. That’s why the myriad primers that attempt to register the feature of postmodern phenomenon thought they provide easily identifiable markers of style, are so unsatisfying” (Yúdice 1992, 6). As a consequence, in order to properly understand Latin American postmodern literature, it

1 Also, Cortázar’s short story, “Apocalipsis de Solentiname” (1977) demonstrates that Cortázar resents the use of self-reflexivity’s impossibility of influencing the reality and regrets having been unable to act as a strong political agent to denounce military dictatorship in his previous literary works.

2 Even though we acknowledge that many studies affirm the similarity between the Baroque literature and the postmodern one, it does not mean that Baroque and Postmodernism are the same.

is important to know that Postmodernism, as Yúdice writes, is not about the use of the formal techniques but, it is about “how conjuncture circumstances condition the ways in which those markers are to be interpreted” (Yúdice 1992, 7). For that reason and for the purpose of properly presenting characteristics of Latin American postmodern literature, in this article, I propose to relate Latin American postmodern literature with its specific socio-political and economic circumstances within Latin American Postmodernity.

Gary W. Wynia in *The Politics of Latin American Development* (1993), Anne O. Krueger in *Economic Policy Reform in Developing Countries* (1992), and Tulio Eduardo Ortiz et al. in *Origen y transformación del estado argentino en periodos de globalización* (2003) affirm that the socio-political and economic situation of Postmodernity in Latin America coincides with dictatorships, the implantation of neoliberal economic policy, and the transition to redemocratization. It proves that Latin American Postmodernity differs from Euro-North American Postmodernity (which presumes itself as universal) because of the experience of military dictatorships, neoliberal economic policies, and the residual presence of mental and physical wounds from the traumatic experience of the disappeared and the tortured, which also functions to unite people to revive political subjectivity to act out with the ethical responsibility for the dead and the disappeared.

In order to properly represent the literature that deals with political subjectivity in Latin American Postmodernity, I suppose different subject positions or attitudes of authors toward the representation of Latin American Postmodernity, aiming to demonstrate that there should not be a universal interpretation and representation of this period. I will first analyze Uruguayan writer Ana Solari's *Scottia* (1997) as a postmodern text which resists registering military discourse of the History and rejects registering the traumatic experience of the military dictatorship into the history. As a consequence, *Scottia* hides the potentially strong political subjectivity underneath the text. Once proving that Latin American Postmodernity refused the History written by the Proceso of the military, I will discuss Chilean writer Luis Sepúlveda's *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor* (1993) as another kind of postmodern text which deals with the present problematic relation between Latin America and the developed countries with the neo-colonialist implantation of neoliberalism. The political subject in Sepúlveda refuses to solve the present problems of the destruction of nature due to the privatization of the natural resources in neoliberal Latin America. Instead, the protagonist goes back to the pre-modern place in Patagonia, where he meditates embellished and fictional texts, romance novels (*novelas de*

amor). Even though we find a problematic political subject position with equally problematic utopian literary proposal of returning to the pre-modernity, the novel indirectly suggests building the strong nets of the social, thus underneath the text, the author suggests a strong historical subjectivity. Finally, I will move to another postmodern text which overcomes Solari's resistance to registering the trauma and Sepúlveda's escape from the reality by suggesting a stronger and more direct political subject position: the protagonist in Mexican writer, Mario Bellatin's *Salón de belleza* (1994), acts out to reconstruct the past medieval memories of the Morideros where people took care of the sick until their deaths. Bellatin, with the dialogic exchange of reality and fictionality, makes the reader reconsider our neoliberal situation of the lack of the medical care and makes the reader witness empathy and the ethical responsibility, for the purpose of building strong nets of the social in Latin American Postmodernity.

ANA SOLARI: REPETITION OF SELF-REFLEXIVITY AND REFUSING THE MILITARY'S APPROPRIATION OF THE DISCOURSE OF THE HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION IN POSTMODERN LITERATURE IN URUGUAY

In this section, I will continue my focus on denouncing the military's appropriation of the discourse of historical representation, as it was discussed in my analysis of Piglia's *Respiración artificial*, by analyzing Uruguayan author Ana Solari's *Scottia* (1997). In Solari's novel, "a man who wants to be a writer" creates, along with others, a character named Scottia. She is his invention and can't get out of his story; in other words, she is trapped in the story of the man who wants to be a writer: "no hay salida. La historia se devora a sí misma y si no interviene, si no actúa de inmediato, se consumirá de angustia, de ansiedad" (Solari 2001, 138).³ In this way, the novel indirectly insinuates that the man who wants to be a writer would become a torturer and Scottia, the tortured: "*Torturarla, hacerla*

3 In Chapter 57, the narrator also affirms, "Para mí está claro que Scottia no puede salir de este punto" (Solari 2001, 150).

sufrir, me resuena en la cabeza. Estoy cansado. Dejémosla en libertad un instante, veamos cómo era antes y cómo quiere ser” (Solari 2001, 51, itálicas de Solari); “No me ha dejado en libertad. No me dejará nunca. Ya no sé cómo era yo antes de conocerlo” (Solari 2001, 133).⁴ Moreover, at the end of the novel, these same characters realize their entrapment in words of his novel and decide to disappear from the story in order not to participate in the making of it. In other words, the only solution for them is to end the story and, consequently, not participating in the writer’s story, in the novel, means to make themselves disappear from it.

As in Euro-North American postmodern novels, *Scottia*, in appearance, also uses the self-reflexivity, one of the major narrative techniques of Postmodernism: the narrator in *Scottia* says, “Tampoco puede decir quién está pensando a quién, qué personaje es real y cuál una invención” (Solari 2001, 43). It also repeats the notion of ahistory where the past, the present and the future are trapped in one and eternal rotating circle: “si entiendo lo que dice, ha dicho que estamos condenados a vivir en un presente continuo, que, como tal, no conduce a sitio alguno” (Solari 2001, 160); “Me queda claro, también, que esa incomprensión es la que genera el tiempo circular, estático, el que termina por anular todo movimiento. Es un punto muerto” (Solari 2001, 163). Furthermore, this notion of ahistory is used to highlight the emblem of Euro-North American Postmodernism: the “dead-end street” (*callejón sin salida*). This characteristic of the dead-end street is also clearly shown in the following fragment in *Scottia*.

Narrar la historia de una muchacha que un día hizo un alto en su vida, miró hacia atrás, intentó narrar lo vivido hasta el momento, y se dio cuenta de que estaba atrapada en una red de palabras y acciones que no avanzaban hacia ninguna parte, porque en realidad ella no sabía para dónde quería avanzar. En el momento en que toma conciencia de su situación, conoce a un hombre, el hombre de los cuadros. Piensa que él puede ser quien haga cambiar el paisaje y por lo tanto la acción, pero como no está preparada para el cambio, los encuentros con ese hombre jamás tienen salida y se repiten una y otra vez (Solari 2001, 209-210).

In *Scottia*, Solari also writes about the process of writing a novel just like Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) and Miguel de Unamuno’s *Niebla* (1914), where the stories are centered in a character in search of the author. Thus, in appearance, if we only consider

4 The other part that insinuates the torture is as what follows: “Ella desea escapar de algo—una situación o una persona” (Solari 2001, 245).

the stylistic markers of the universalizing concept of Euro-North American Postmodernism, *Scottia* can be a perfect example of it in Latin America due to its uses of the self-reflexivity (loss of reference) and ahistoricity, which, according to Hutcheon, are a move toward anti-totalization (Hutcheon 1988, 42) and, according to McHale, postmodernist techniques to foreground the instability of understanding the world as a whole (McHale 1987, 124). According to Hutcheon, these techniques problematize “both the nature of the referent and its relation of the real, historical world” (Hutcheon 1988, 19).

However, this self-reflexivity in *Scottia* is not used to demonstrate the instability of the ontological understanding of the world, but to denounce the military's appropriation of the discourse on the historical representation, in this case, the History which would be written by the *Proceso* of the military regime. For that reason, the narrator in the novel says, “El extraño intenta apropiarse de la historia ajena. Cree que si habla como si le perteneciera, lo logrará” (Solari 2001, 121); “la historia que él construía era perversa. También de eso me di cuenta mucho después, incluso después de haberme liberado y de haber logrado construir otro personaje” (Solari 2001, 17). Thus, the novel does not adhere to the characteristics of a universal concept of Postmodernism. In other words, Solari's *Scottia* is considered as postmodern not because of its use of all the postmodern devices such as intertextuality, ahistory, self-reflexivity, and loss of reference, but because of the defiant use of those devices to indirectly denounce the military responsibility for the disappeared, refuse to register the official History, and register the various and different kinds of histories of postmodern Uruguay. Furthermore, these devices are also used to indirectly criticize the Uruguayan military regime's use of torture, what is exemplified by the way the man who wants to be a writer brainwashes *Scottia* and traps her in his story (his invention of her story).⁵ Solari refuses to register the military discourse and the history promoted by the *Proceso*, by eliminating and substituting them with the repetition of intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and ahistory. In the same way, the narrator, in the novel, also says, “Mi historia no tiene un principio y un final, es un círculo que crece en espiral. Eso es lo que te aterroriza. No has entendido nada” (Solari 2001, 181). That is to say, if you only see these devices as literary tricks, you

5 The narrator also says, “El hombre que quiere ser escritor ha creado a *Scottia* desde antes que se llamara así. [...] Y si duda, se responderá que el hombre que quiere ser escritor está usando a *Scottia* para descargar en ella su propia desesperación por no tener más opción que la de hablar una historia, la suya, que no ha elegido y a la que no puede dirigir” (Solari 2001, 59-60).

do not capture the real essence of them, in other words, you do not understand their true meanings.

A country's literature is an expression of the unconsciousness or the consciousness of its people. In that sense, in the remaining part of this section, I will apply Sigmund Freud's "*Fort-da*" game of Little Hans (Freud's grandson) as well as the process of acting out and working-through of a traumatized patient as theoretical frameworks to explain Solari's final solution not to register military's history of the *Proceso* in *Scottia*. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud uses the example of a little boy, Hans, whose mom always "disappears" (*Fort*) from him because of work, to explain a special type of compulsion to repeat, which he defines as the "*Fort-da*" game. The little boy has an occasional disturbing habit of throwing any small objects away from him into a corner, under the bed, "so that hunting for his toys and picking them up [...] gave a vent to a loud, long-drawn-out 'o-o-o', accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction" (Freud 1989, 13). Freud interprets this game of disappearance and return as the child's great cultural achievement of "the instinctual renunciation (that is the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction), which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. He compensated himself for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach" (Freud 1989, 14).

Similarly, in *Scottia* Solari creates her protagonists and later on makes them disappear into intertextuality and fictionality as a way to revenge herself on the military regime for the disappeared just as little Hans did with his mother. As Freud says, the child "revenge[s] himself on his mom for her disappearance from him. In that case it would have a defiant meaning" (Freud 1989, 15). In the same way, Solari's novel can be seen as her denouncement of the military regime, declaring not to cooperate with it. Therefore, Solari, in Freudian terms, makes herself "a master of the situation" (Freud 1989, 16) and makes "the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable. This is a convincing proof that, even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable not a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind" (Freud 1989, 17).

Further, Freud in "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through" writes about a patient who went through a traumatic experience and explains that, as a result of it, he tends not to register the traumatic memory into his consciousness.⁶ As Freud remarks, the traumatized patient's memory "could never have been 'forgotten' because it was never at any

time noticed—was never conscious” (Freud 1924, 149). Thus, in order to cure a trauma patient, the psychoanalyst needs to pull out the patient’s traumatic memory, and register it into the conscious as a memory of the past. Even though “he does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, however, he acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action: he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it” (Freud 1924, 150). In other words, his body acts out what the mind does not remember, which Freud called a “compulsion to repeat to the transference and to resistance” (Freud 1924, 151) to finally achieve to remember the loss of the traumatic memory. In the same way, I interpret *Scottia* as a form of acting out of Solari’s traumatic experience of the military regime and as compulsion to repeat that is similar to the experience of a traumatic neurosis patient who repeatedly “bring [...] back to the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright” (Freud 1989, 13). Therefore, instead of narrating the History of the *Proceso*, the author omits it and repeats only stories that are self-reflexive and thus, indirectly refuses the military’s appropriation of the discourse of the historical representation of Uruguay. In the same way, the narrator says, “Tantas ideas y venidas en su trayecto y en su relato, para encontrar una salida distinta, que abre otra narración” (Solari 2001, 273). This statement insinuates the attempt of the author to find a way out of this asphyxiating situation. Consequently, the text hides strong political subjectivity underneath the words of the texts, eliminates all the military discourse on history, and resists registering its traumatic experience. In this way, Solari’s imaginary way to resuscitate political and historical agency to the postmodern subjects is set for the purpose of de-dramatizing and thus indirectly re-dramatizing the pain caused by the dictatorship and thus, reinstating, through *Scottia*, history of those without voice in Uruguayan post-dictatorship.

6 The same phenomenon has occurred to Little Hans. His mother died when he became eleven, the kid did not cry because he could not remember his mom’s death, since he refused to register that traumatic memory into his consciousness as a memory. In other words, he refused to remember her mom being disappeared.

LUIS SEPÚLVEDA: AN ALTERNATIVE UTOPIAN MODEL OF BUILDING THE NET OF THE SOCIAL IN POSTMODERN LITERATURE IN CHILE

Different from Solari and other authors that eliminate or refuse to register the imposition of the military discourse on history in their works, there are other Latin American Postmodernist writers, who emphasize on purposely registering the way the military and thus neoliberal discourses infiltrate people's daily lives. Thus, they uncover what has been hidden or unseen under the military regimes in Latin America. Consequently, in this section I will examine Chilean writer Luis Sepúlveda's novel, *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor* (1993), and will argue that many Latin American literary works came out as a response to the harms of neoliberal policies. Therefore, I will focus on these alternative proposals of Latin American postmodern literature, that contests Euro-North American Postmodernity, in order to offer another point of view to approach Latin American Postmodernity during the period of dictatorships, neoliberalism, and re-democratization.

In *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor* Sepúlveda presents a utopian alternative to neoliberalism, introducing, at the same time, another type of political subject position, one that refuses life in a neoliberal society and opts to live in a pre-modern Patagonia. In this way, the reader is confronted with a protagonist that both acknowledges and refuses to solve the postmodern loss of subjectivity and the social, as well as the problems of nets of world power. Through his main character, el Viejo Antonio José Bolívar Proaño who voluntarily chooses to live in El Idilio, a remote town in Amazonia, Sepúlveda proposes a utopian world of anti-consumption, anti-capitalism, and anti-modernization, which goes against any kind of surveillance. Furthermore, in the novel, the careless, capitalist, and greedy "*buscadores de oro*" (Sepúlveda 1994, 28), who came to the Idilio for precious animal skins for example, "*pieles de tigrillos muy pequeños*" (Sepúlveda 1994, 28), "*cazando a indígenas*" (Sepúlveda 1994, 54) and tigers, put not only themselves in danger, but also everyone in Amazonia, including an indigenous tribe, los Shuar, and el Viejo Antonio José Bolívar Proaño. The author describes a special expedition that el Viejo Antonio José Bolívar Proaño had to reluctantly join, to search for the cause of the death of an expert who died, looking for precious animal skins. At the end of the novel, el Viejo had to shoot the tiger for the

protection of himself and others. In doing so, el Viejo Antonio José Bolívar Proaño says to the tiger, “Lo siento, compañero. Ese gringo hijo de gran puta nos jodió la vida a todos” (Sepúlveda 1994, 131). In this way, throughout the novel, the author indirectly denounces the harms done to the nature and the native indigenous people by the agents of neoliberal societies.

Nonetheless, at the end of the novel, the author makes el Viejo Antonio José Bolívar Proaño go back to the Amazonian jungle “semidesnudo” (Sepúlveda 1994, 44) where he continues to read romance novels, preferably full of “sufrimientos, amores desdichados y finales felices” (Sepúlveda 1994, 32):

Antonio José Bolívar Proaño se quitó la dentadura postiza, la guardó envuelta en el pañuelo y, sin dejar de maldecir al gringo inaugurador de la tragedia, al alcalde, a los buscadores de oro, a todos los que emputecían la virginidad de su amazonía, cortó de un machetazo a una gruesa rama, y apoyado en ella se echó a andar en pos de El Idilio, de su choza, y de sus novelas que hablaban del amor con palabras tan hermosas que a veces le hacían olvidar la barbarie humana (Sepúlveda 1994, 136-137).

El Viejo Antonio José Bolívar Proaño's indifferent attitude toward the apocalyptic postmodern society represented in the novel, in appearance, seems similar to that of Euro-North American Postmodernism, especially the part of it that joyfully accepts the end of the world with its loss of the referentiality, the death of the social and the political subjectivity, and that which continues to reproduce its logics, like for example, in Andy Warhol's “Campbell's Soup Cans” (1962) and his other serial pictures.

However, differently to what a first glance of the novel may show us, what the author is trying to do is signaling a warning: harming the cycle of the nature eventually will result in the destruction of all human nature. Sepúlveda unmasks capitalist society and its commodities and reveals, what he views as, the most basic and important element in the world, the nature. Then he insists that nature will only be preserved well when people collaborate to do so, thus underlining the importance of the social. This novel particularly emphasizes the importance of the social, which is an important distinction from the international cultural discourses on Postmodernity that declared the end of big slogans (*la fin des grands récits*). In this way, Sepúlveda within his imaginaries, encourages to reinsert the social to an already individualized capitalist society and emphasizes the importance of partnership and that of community building.

Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, Sepúlveda refuses to put back

a strong political subjectivity into the urban places where the problems are, and contrary to his push to build a social net, he makes his protagonist escape from society and its problems. In other words, even though Sepúlveda's literary proposal emphasizes the importance of reinserting the social, he fails to offer an alternative urban culture as an option to Euro-North American pessimistic or apocalyptic Postmodernity.

BELLATIN: REVIVING A HISTORICAL AGENT AND RESUSCITATING POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY IN POSTMODERN LITERATURE IN MEXICO

According to the dependency theory, Latin American neoliberal economic politics is situated within the problematic relation between Latin America and developed countries, which Euro-North American Postmodernist theorists consciously or unconsciously ignore. This problematic relation became more evident in recent years with the implantation of neoliberalism in Latin America. This attitude can also be found in Euro-North American Postmodernism, on what Hutcheon defines as “decentering the postmodern: the ex-centric” (Hutcheon 1988, 61) in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. In this text, the critic affirms that Postmodernism “suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality, rather than binary opposition and exclusion” (Hutcheon 1988, 61). Nevertheless, Hutcheon is unable to overcome exclusion since she only includes “the selected otherness” (*lo otro apropiado*). Even though Hutcheon says that postmodern literatures possess the attraction to an “ex-centric community outside normal society, outside the town” (Hutcheon 1988, 63), Euro-North American Postmodernism consciously or unconsciously ignores the periphery within Latin American societies in their postmodern literature. In other words, Hutcheon ignores “the inappropriate otherness” (*lo otro inapropiado*) or the invisible marginalized groups within Latin American society, such as the homeless or the disappeared. In this sense, Hutcheon's selection of postmodernist Latin American literature has neoliberalist characteristics, since it only adopts Latin American texts that are convenient for Euro-North American theory on Postmodernism leaving out those that are not. Latin American theorist Nelly Richard, precisely questions this type of Euro-North American Postmodernism discourse that negatively homogenizes and eradicates the positive differences of the periphery in Latin American literature.

Furthermore, the critic expresses that this type of “Postmodernism dismantles the distinction between centre and periphery, and doing so nullifies its significance” (Yúdice 1992, 6). In this section, I will examine Mexican writer Mario Bellatin's postmodern novel, *Salón de belleza* (1994), in order to exemplify Latin American postmodern literature that deals with the periphery of Latin American postmodern society. *Salón de belleza* deals precisely with the unseen, the invisible, the inappropriate otherness (*lo otro inapropiado*), such as the homeless and the sick.

Bellatin's *Salón de belleza* deals with the problem of neoliberal States that lack medical care for their citizens. In a city struck by a pest, where a homosexual narrator works during the day as a hairdresser and at night is a transvestite. From the very beginning, we are placed in society where those who are strongest survive and those who are not suffer. This can be seen when the narrator is decorating his aquarium; in the past, he preferred the strongest fishes, since they were “los peces más resistentes y por eso mismo los de más fácil crianza” (Bellatin 1994, 11). In other words, he accepts the survival of the fittest and the carnivorous nature of the fishes in his aquarium. For example, the narrator says “La otra hembra quería comerse a las crías. Sin embargo, los recién nacidos tenían reflejos poderosos y rápidos que momentáneamente los salvaban de la muerte” (Bellatin 1994, 12). In the same way, the narrator uses his aquarium as metaphor to explain the cruelty of his society, where his friend at the young age of 13 was a victim of abuse. The narrator remembers, “los mismos amigos del padre abusaron de él en una de las duchas individuales” (Bellatin 1994, 19), and he immediately juxtaposes his friend's experience to the reality of his aquarium: “en esos momentos siempre me sentía como si estuviera dentro de uno de mis acuarios” (Bellatin 1994, 19). Consequently, after creating a microcosm of his world within his aquarium, the narrator says, “sin remordimiento alguno dejé gradualmente de alimentarlos con la esperanza de que se fueran comiendo unos a otros. Los que quedaron los arrojé al excusado, de la misma forma como lo hice con aquella madre muerta. Así fue como tuve los acuarios libres para recibir peces de mayor jerarquía” (Bellatin 1994, 16). He also says,

también vivía el extraño sentimiento producido por la persecución de los peces grandes que buscaban comerse a los chicos. En esos momentos la poca capacidad de defensa, lo rígidas que pueden ser las paredes transparentes de los acuarios, eran una realidad que se abría en toda su plenitud (Bellatin 1994, 20).

In this way, the novel acknowledges the cruel nature of the neoliberal State and the people living in it.

However, after witnessing the town's people dying on the street, the narrator transforms his beauty salon into a Moridero, a Medieval concept of a place to die. In spite of his knowledge of the nature of the survival of the fittest, he had "la compasión de recoger a alguno que otro compañero herido que no tenía a donde recurrir" (Bellatin 1994, 15). He gets surprised by "la cantidad cada vez mayor de personas que han venido a morir al salón de belleza [...] no tienen dónde morir. Además del Moridero, la única alternativa sería perecer en la calle" (Bellatin 1994, 14). At the end of the novel, after witnessing the deaths of everyone in his beauty salon, the hairdresser burns the salon and, in this way, erases the traces of the place together with the memory of his existence.

In *Empire* (2000) Michael Hardts and Antonio Negri describe the concept of society of control, which is different from Michel Foucault's society of discipline. In Foucault's society of discipline, modern States use closed spaces (school, church, prison) to educate and punish the deviant behaviors of their citizens in order to reincorporate them to the society. However, according to Hardts and Negri, in the society of control, the postmodern States do not educate their citizens any more for their reincorporation into the society, but instead they only segregate them and erase their existence from the social scenes. This cruel face of the neoliberal States' project is always undertaken in hidden places and this operation is done silently and secretly, so the public never has access to it. Klaus Scherpe, in "Dramatización y des-dramatización de 'el fin': la conciencia apocalíptica de la modernidad y la postmodernidad", talks about a moment when the evil shows its face for a second and hides it from the public forever. The same phenomena happens in *Salón de belleza*, however, in Bellatin's novel this instant moment is a little bit longer, so that the public can have access to this hidden place and this moment of pain of the homeless and the sick without making them feel any remorse nor emotion. In this way, the author makes the readers experience their situation, even though, indirectly.

Thus, though the author leaves the cruel nature of the neoliberal society intact, what he tries to do in *Salón de belleza* is to stress on the importance of resuscitating the political subjectivity of the postmodern subjects, when the homeless, the sick, and the poor disappear from the official history, and when history becomes fiction and fiction reveals more history. For this, Bellatin with his novel revives the collective memory of Moridero and denounces the neoliberal politics of the small government and its

poor public policy. In this way, it uncovers the masked reality of the neoliberal State, which hides the pain of the homeless, the sick, and the poor. By creating an individual with a strong subjectivity in his novel, Bellatin refuses, responds to, and contests the processes of alienation of the subject from the political and social dimension of reality. In other words, by producing literature of this kind, he represents many different realities of society and engages with its social issues.

In appearance, *Salón de belleza* also seems similar to Euro-North American Postmodernist novels: this time, because it has an apocalyptic attitude toward the world⁷ and thus, seems to imitate and follow the apocalyptic side (opposite to the joyful side as that of Andy Warhol) of Euro-North American Postmodernism. Thus, in some critics' views, this novel can be interpreted as a celebration of the end of the world with its corresponding apocalypses. In other words, if we do not consider the novel within its Latin American socio-political context and if we simply accept this novel in the socio-political context of Euro-North America, it could also be included within the Euro-North American style of Postmodernism that describes the world apocalyptically and emphasizes to embrace it as such.

However, if we do consider the novel within the Latin American socio-political contexts, especially, the Mexican contexts, this novel can be interpreted differently. Since in the Mexican State, the well fare system and the neoliberal state are not established as rigidly as in the United States, the novel serves as a criticism of the establishment of the neoliberal State: in other words, a warning to the coming of the postmodern State which does not take care of its people with poor public well fare system and the social security. Thus, it is not just a celebration of the end of the world, nor a sentence to the death of the political subjectivity and that of the social.

CONCLUSION

In *The Insubordination of Signs*, Richard emphasizes the “dramatization of memory” (Richard 2004, 2) and speaks highly of the movement of CADA (Colectivo de Acciones de Arte) and of Eugenio Dittborn's photographic denouncement in Chile, where “the artist makes visible a

7 In the same sense, Ricardo Piglia's *Plata quemada* (1997) also can be included because of its message of the end of the symbolic value of the money.

new form of solidarity with the detained-disappeared through the problem of bodies as trajectory and circulation: Dittborn recirculates the image of subjects condemned to being forgotten” (Richard 2004, 9), while “the Chilean State attempted to take certain subjects out of circulation, condemning them to be forgotten” (Richard 2004, 9). Richard calls this action an insubordination of signs of pictures, literatures, etc., which speaks beyond the death of those who do not have voice. With their arts, the artists take a part in history with a strong subjectivity just like the authors of *Scottia*, *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*, and *Salón de belleza*, do by creating the protagonists with strong political subjectivities in their novels.

It becomes obvious that Latin American postmodern literatures reject Euro-North American use of the ahistoricity of self-reflexivity, which was to demonstrate the instability in understanding the world as a whole, thus the loss of referentiality. Rather, through the use of the same literary techniques, Latin American Postmodernist authors propose building a strong political subjectivity with a strong social agency with the affirmation of the existence of a future and a possible way out of Euro-North American Postmodernity in their literary proposals. This approach is contrary to the concept of Postmodernity and Postmodernism already sentenced to death by Euro-North American postmodern theorists, where there is a loss of referentiality as well as the death of political subjectivity and the social. Thus, by reflecting the reality of Latin America, Solari, Sepúlveda, and Bellatin suggest to re-define the history and make it come back from its trip to the land of dreams or fiction (*sueños o ficciones*) of the last decade to confront new frontiers (*nuevas fronteras*).

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