

**“WE ARE TAKING YOU TO ATTEND THE  
BIRTH OF HISTORY”: TLATELOLCO IN CARLOS  
FUENTES’S *LOS 68: PARÍS, PRAGA, MÉXICO* AND  
ROBERTO BOLAÑO’S *AMULETO***

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**“LA LLEVAMOS PARA QUE ASISTA AL PARTO DE LA HISTORIA”:  
TLATELOLCO EN *LOS 68: PARÍS, PRAGA, MÉXICO* DE CARLOS FUENTES  
Y *AMULETO* DE ROBERTO BOLAÑO**

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Fecha de recepción: 16 de agosto de 2012

Fecha de aceptación: 31 de octubre de 2012

Fecha de modificación: 30 de noviembre de 2012

RESUMEN

Este artículo se propone analizar la novela de Roberto Bolaño *Amuleto* (1999) y en particular su interés por el límite de una resistencia política. En este estudio se yuxtapone la descripción en la novela de la masacre en Tlatelolco con la obra de Carlos Fuentes *Los 68: París, Praga, México* (2005), y su uso tanto de la memoria no ficcional de París en 1968 como el recuento ficcional de lo sucedido en Tlatelolco. Este artículo intenta demostrar cómo en *Los 68* se intenta recuperar un tipo de subjetividad cuyos imaginarios utópicos definían los años sesenta, y cómo el uso de alegoría en *Amuleto* marca el vaciamiento de ese imaginario.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Historia, Carlos Fuentes, Roberto Bolaño, Tlatelolco, alegoría.

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes Roberto Bolaño's *Amuleto* (1999), and in particular its interest in the cotemporary limits of political resistance. The essay subsequently juxtaposes the novel's depiction of the massacre at Tlatelolco with Carlos Fuentes' *Los 68: Paris, Praga, Mexico* (2005), and its use of both a non-fictional memoir of Paris in 1968 and a fictionalized account of Tlatelolco. Ultimately, this essay demonstrates how *Los 68* attempts to recuperate a kind of subjectivity in which utopian imaginaries defined the 1960s, but which *Amuleto's* mobilization of allegory reveals as emptied out.

KEY WORDS: History, Carlos Fuentes, Roberto Bolaño, Tlatelolco, allegory.

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“We are taking you to attend the birth of history”...

*“Los hechos graves están fuera del tiempo, ya porque en ellos el pasado inmediato queda como tronchado del porvenir, ya porque no parecen consecutivas las partes que lo forman.”*

Jorge Luis Borges, “Emma Zunz”

*“The impossibility of being without repeated legitimation (without books, man, family).  
Impossibility—depressing possibility of ‘transgression.’”*

Julia Kristeva, “Stabat Mater”

Three decades after the massacre in Tlateloco, carried out by Mexican President Díaz Ordaz’s military, Roberto Bolaño’s *Amuleto* (1999) and Carlos Fuentes’ *Los 68: Paris, Praga, México* (2005) return to the events of October 1968. Unlike Fuentes, Bolaño does not memorialize this moment in order to point to some lost political possibility. Instead he creates a voice of resistance whose power lies in the recognition of the failure of political utopias that would mark Latin America in the aftermath of 1968. This paper analyzes *Amuleto* in relation to the breakdown of a type of subjectivity in which utopian imaginaries defined the 1960s. But while this breakdown is ultimately embodied in the recursive and fragmented testimony of Auxilio Lacouture—the narrator imagined as the allegorical mother of a younger generation of Latin American poets that inevitably dissolve into the fringes of Mexico City—Fuentes offers his reflections on Tlatelolco as a type of document that justifies his account of May 1968 in Paris. My use of the term *testimonio* in this paper does not correspond with John Beverley’s definition (1991) since the main fictional characters that recount their experience of the massacre, carried out by Díaz Ordaz’s military, are not real-life protagonists<sup>1</sup>, but they nevertheless capture the catastrophic consequences of dictatorship.

Fuentes’ *Los 68* is comprised of three sections, each of which recounts the events that unfolded in Paris, Prague, and Mexico in 1968. Told from the perspective of Fuentes himself, the text recalls the Parisian student movements and the Prague Spring. Written shortly after 1968, the first two sections emphasize the youthful resistance to state repression that, according to the novel, not only characterized the protests in Paris and Prague, but also formed part of a larger and more global rebellion. Fuentes’ *Los 68* can be seen as a chronicle that makes use of autobiography in order to produce a factual and chronological account of historical events.

1. John Beverley defines *testimonio* as such: “By *testimonio* I understand a novel or novella-length narrative told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real-life protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts. In recent years it has become an important, perhaps the dominant, form of literary narrative in Latin America. The best-known example available in English translation is ... I, Rigoberta Menchu, the life story of a young Guatemalan Indian woman, which, as she puts it in her presentation, is intended to represent “the reality of a whole people” (2).

What readers encounter in the third section, however, is a fictional account of the massacre at Tlatelolco originally included in Fuentes' novel *Mis años con Laura Díaz* (1999) and written well after the first and second section. Told from the perspective of Laura Díaz, who photographs the slaughter in which her grandson is killed, the protest is imagined as taking place in a multiethnic Mexico, "un país arco iris" (161), and which, is described as forming part of those same revolutions carried out by a younger generation of dissidents throughout the world, "un país unido a la gran revuelta de Berkeley, Tokio y París" (161). The optimism that informs this protest ultimately yields to both the force of the repressive Mexican state and the impossibility of *any* future different from the one imagined by an older generation, as suggested by Laura Díaz's grandson before he is killed: "No cabemos en el futuro, queremos un futuro que nos dé cabida a los jóvenes, yo no quepo en el futuro inventado por mi padre" (167).

It is the essay concerning the events in Paris, however, that makes up the bulk of *Los 68*. Conceived as part of a global form of resistance, the events of May 1968 are revealed here as the mirror image of a Latin America rising against state repressions: "Hemos discutido el destino probable, los imposibles sueños y las pesadas condenas de nuestros países: en el espejo de los sucesos franceses" (101). And yet, as Diana Sorensen has noted, the failure of the protests in France and Mexico had varying political repercussions: "The central difference lies in the question of violence and in the relationship between the state and the citizen's bodies. For while in the turmoil of May '68 in France the total number of deaths is estimated at five, in the Mexican case it is generally estimated that over three hundred students lost their lives on October 2" (60). For Fuentes, however, the utopian promise of 1968 not only persists in the present, but is also underwritten by the connection between a Mexico City that sees itself mirrored in the protests that took place in Paris.

This connection is emphasized in the text by the inclusion of images taken from posters created for the protests in both Paris and Mexico. Comprising representations of censorship and violence, these images simultaneously point to the possibility of social change; hence, the image of a pen transforming into a screwdriver to suggest a notion of writing as resistance<sup>2</sup>. As Idelber Avelar argues, the desire to canonize Latin America as a kind of political and thematic watershed was characteristic of the boom generation of writers, a generation that had been largely inspired by the Cuban Revolution in 1959: "The more intellectuals had to leave their countries, in a diasporic phenomenon of considerable proportions, the more the nation acquired the obsessive status of lost object

2. The images that appear in Fuentes' *Los 68* are taken from Aquino, Arnulfo and Jorge Pérezvega and Gasquet, Vasco.

and utopian promise" (36). This connection between the nation as both an object of loss and utopian promise is manifest in the exiled narrator's gaze, which, looking from the outside, marks the desire for the dissolution of dictatorships.

In contrast, the section devoted to Tlatelolco in 1968 begins with the voice of authoritative repression: "Arrójenlos a la fosa común. Que nadie los reconozca" (157); as host of the 1968 Olympics, the Mexican State could not afford to observe over five hundred funerals. The opening scenario is immediately contrasted with the actions of Fuentes' protagonist, the seventy-year-old Laura Díaz, who photographs and records the last moments of the life of her grandson, Santiago, in a manner indicative of the desire to remember. Readers consequently encounter a kind of *testimonio* that entails a desire to resist forgetting. Laura Díaz's camera is described as a gun: "Disparaba su cámara, la cámara era su arma disponible y disparaba sólo hacia su nieto" (167). The camera is here understood as a weapon precisely to extent that it contrasts the Mexican state's desire to make the victims of Tlatelolco disappear. The camera does not kill, but it intends to leave the mark of the past in the present. Laura Díaz consequently reflects on what she imagines as a form of injustice implied in neglecting to photograph the rest of the assembled multitude. At the same time, however, the effort to capture what the novel describes as a "totality" is conceived of as a kind of madness, a madness that seeks to represent an 'unrepresentable Real', and as such fails: "El flujo del tiempo era imparable y conservarlo en su totalidad sería la fórmula de la locura misma, el tiempo que ocurre bajo el sol y las estrellas seguiría transcurriendo con o sin nosotros, en un mundo deshabitado, lunar" (158).

This sense of madness reemerges in Bolaño's *Amuleto* as the product of a similarly unfulfilled desire to capture and represent a past that gives rise to an allegorical trauma. The presence of this trauma, in turn, alerts us to a subjective state that remains anchored in a particular moment in time and, as such, continuously interrupts the chain of signifiers that constitute the underlying historical narrative. Thus, the trauma produced by an unresolved mourning assumes the shape of melancholic petrified time. Unlike Laura Díaz's account, which suggests the *possibility* of capturing the traumatic moment in the form of a concrete, photographic image, the *testimonio* of Auxilio Lacouture, Bolaño's main character, comprises abstractions that persist in purely figurative and paradoxical language.

Refusing the nostalgia for a deferred future that underlies Carlos Fuentes' *Los 68*, Roberto Bolaño's *Amuleto* is narrated from the dystopian urban spaces of Mexico City. Bolaño presents readers with the story of Auxilio Lacouture, the self-proclaimed "mother of Mexican poetry" (1), whose hyperrealist *testimonio* constitutes a traumatic historical memory; a trauma which, moreover, functions as a condemnation not only

of the events of Tlatelolco in 1968, but also of Salvador Allende's downfall in 1973. Based on an anecdotal figure that formed part of Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM) popular folklore, Bolaño's protagonist is presented throughout as a marginalized individual; an exiled Uruguayan who works for León Felipe and Pedro Garfias, two Spanish Republican poets, Auxilio Lacouture later accompanies a younger generation of poets through the streets of Mexico City.

"This is going to be a horror story. A story of murder, detection and horror" (1), explains Auxilio Lacouture in the opening of the novel. Addressing readers as "my friends" (59), Auxilio nonetheless seems to be narrating a monologue to herself, recounting events, which, extending from 1965 to 1975<sup>3</sup>, revolve around a singular trauma to which the novel continuously returns: following the Mexican military's storming of the UNAM, Auxilio remains hidden in a bathroom of the Faculty of Arts for thirteen days<sup>4</sup>. In this way, the narrator repeatedly revisits what might be understood as an act of personal resistance that does not presume to be political, despite the degraded and humiliating space in which it takes place. It is from the bathroom where she will see and bear witness to the numerous arrests and detentions carried out by the military, while reading poems written by the exiled Republican Spanish poets: "the soldiers and riot police were arresting and searching and beating up whoever they could lay their hands on, irrespective of sex or age, marital status or professional credentials acquired one way or another in the intricate, hierarchical world of the academy" (23). The declaration of this personal form of resistance, moreover, will serve as a means of reaffirming her identity: "And I knew what I had to do. I knew. I knew I had to resist" (32). It is this emphasis on her resistance that will allow Auxilio Lacouture to identify herself as the legitimate mother of the Mexican poets that she intends to protect, conceiving of herself as the embodiment of a future collective memory. For this reason, although she does not witness the massacre at Tlatelolco first-hand, Auxilio Lacouture nevertheless insists that it must be remembered: "That was in Tlatelolco. May that name live forever in our memory!" (22). No doubt this affirmation is later echoed by Fuentes' protagonist, Laura

3. Locating the end of the period of revolts that marked the 1960s between 1972-1974, Fredric Jameson explains, "It is the moment of the onset of a worldwide economic crisis, whose dynamic is still with us today, and which put a decisive full stop to the economic expansion and prosperity characteristic of the postwar period generally and of the 60s in particular" (205).

4. The events that culminated in the measures taken by Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's army against the student movements and workers' strike have been revisited by several authors, including Elena Poniatowska, in *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971) and Carlos Monsiváis in *Días de guardar* (1971). The massacre would later become the subject of a film directed by Jorge Fons, entitled *Rojo amanecer* (1989). Of course, the novels, films and documents that deal with Mexico in 1968 are by no means limited to those mentioned here.

Díaz, who insists: "Es un pecado olvidar, es un pecado—se repetía sin cesar" (173), Yet unlike Fuentes' Laura Díaz, whose position is biologically defined, Bolaño's protagonist can claim to be the mother of history precisely by bearing witness to these same events, and, in so doing, produces a form of resistance. If Fuentes' character feels an obligation to remember, the allegorical mother in Bolaño's novel imagines the act of delivering a petrified moment in time as the hallucinatory birth of history, a birth that can only account for the ruins of that moment.

Recalling that traumatic experience and, in particular, the moment when the Army's infantry had finally abandoned the university, Auxilio retroactively transforms this bathroom into the operating room where she will give birth to history by being a witness of the event. Reproducing a kind of hallucination, she imagines herself carried off on a gurney to the operating room and asks, "I am not going to have a baby, really?" (152). The imaginary doctors subsequently reply, "The birth of history can't wait, and if we arrive late you won't see anything, only ruins and smoke, and empty landscape, and you'll be alone again forever even if you go out and get drunk with your poet friends every night" (152). The ruins of the past emerge as a means of redeeming that, which has been lost, yet persists.

Recalling the aesthetic of the Chilean writer Diamela Eltit, moreover, Bolaño distances his novel from the mimeticism of more conventional *testimonios* such as *La noche de Tlatelolco*<sup>5</sup> (1971) by Elena Poniatowska. What emerges from this untranslatable reality is the impossibility of conceiving literature as the stage of resistance, since that the problem is to be found in literature itself, which, composed by a language that reproduces ideologies that are not easily avoided. Any dystopian aspect as such is disregarded in Fuentes' novel, which persists in images of global resistance that defined his '68. Bolaño's dystopian conception of the literary is a mainstay of his work, and this is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Bolaño's *Nocturno de Chile* (2000) and its attention to the problem of conceiving literature as a site of resistance. As Jean Franco suggests in her reading of Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes* (1998), "It is not so much that literature can do anything but rather that, in Bolaño's canon, there is not much left for it to do. Given that politics and religion are dead....Destitute of belief after the disasters of the twentieth century, Bolaño's characters have little left to amuse themselves besides occasional friendship and trivial pursuits including literature. Survivors of a great disaster, they are left chasing an elusive real" ("Questions" 208).

5. In the first part of the book *Ganar la calle*, Poniatowska transcribes the testimony of Carolina Pérez Cicero, a student at the UNAM where she tells the story of Alcira, the inspiration for Bolaño's Auxilio Lacouture. "Durante los quince días de ocupación de CU por el ejército se quedó encerrada en un baño de la Universidad una muchacha: Alcira. Se aterró" (71).

Thus, it is perhaps no surprise that, as Jean Franco also notes, Bolaño's *Nocturno de Chile* presents its protagonist as the anti-hero of literary criticism who forms part of a "decidedly unheroic literary community, one of whose prominent members blithely ignores the fact that the tertulia he attends is positioned over a torture chamber. To become a literary critic, for Bolaño is to enter the zone of the irrelevant, of the perverse and of sanctioned ignorance" ("Globalization" 442). In *Amuleto*, literature remains incapable of escaping canonic notions of the literary and of avoiding institutionalized language. For this reason, Bolaño suggests, literature remains an accomplice of literature that cannot change the outcome of history. In her study of *Nocturno de Chile*, Susana Draper examines what she describes as a "co-belonging" of literature and horror. Originally articulated by the cultural theorist Sergio Villalobos, this "co-belonging" signals an exhaustion of literature, a theme found in several of Bolaño's texts that marks an end to the high modernist belief in the power of literature to illuminate, represent or de-familiarize everyday life. For Draper, this theory "must be interrupted-complemented" precisely because "the exhaustion hypothesis leaves out the material conditions in which the questioning of literature takes place" (144)<sup>6</sup>. Draper subsequently raises the question of what the difference is between "literature, as a practice denounced in the text, and the literary practice in which such critique takes place" (144) and argues that perhaps the latter should be considered a defamiliarization of the literary that allows for the possibility of a certain historicity. Following Alberto Moreiras, Draper further explains, "In its more radical Benjaminian sense, historicity is that which the oppressed try to save and what the oppressors erase" (9).

The pessimism that follows from an awareness of this exhaustion of literature is represented in *Amuleto* as a kind of "eternal return" of stories that are contrasted with historicity itself, and particularly in the description of a sky that reflects a Mexico City through which characters move through the margins of a desperate literature of a younger generation, within an urban framework. This younger generation of writers—marginalized by the Mexican literary system—will inevitably succumb to an existential desperation, suggesting the elimination of any possibility of social, political or aesthetic change.

It is this Mexico City, moreover, through which Arturo Belano, the author's alter-ego, moves. Soon after Allende's defeat in 1973, the Chilean returns to Mexico, joining a new, even younger generation of marginalized poets that Auxilio calls, "the children of the sewers" (78). As one of these "children" explains, "We're not from this part of Mexico City, we come from the subway, the underworld, the sewers, we live

6. Draper uses the Freudian notion of the uncanny in the study of the postdictatorship period as in *Nocturno de Chile* in relation of the house to the notion of immunity.

in the darkest, dirtiest places, where the toughest of the young poets would be reduced to retching" (78). While the previous generation of poets could be found in the university and in bars, the lives of these younger poets revolve around degradation, prostitution, and drugs.

These are the children of the struggles and upheavals of 1968, the product of the horror entailed in the tragedy of history. Alluding to Eduardo Galeano's *La venas abiertas de América Latina*, Auxilio compares these children to the "pus" of "the open wound of Tlatelolco" (77). Among the poets of this younger generation, the older Arturo Belano is regarded as a Chilean hero, whose voyage to Chile constitutes an initiation into the horror, a rite of passage that renders him immune to fear. Yet, not unlike Bolaño's narrator, this epic hero also bears witness to the crimes of history—crimes that seem like hallucinatory nightmares—left without the possibility of social change. Poetry becomes an empty testament to the potential for change that lies beyond the social spheres of narrative itself, rendered into a form of literature that directs itself toward the abyss.

Yet, rather than represent some nihilistic act of self-destruction, this drive toward the abyss stems from a history composed largely of crimes and tragedies. If, as Fredric Jameson argues, the 1960s constituted a period of utopias that ended at the beginning of the 1970s, the persistence of any utopian possibility emerges from the most dystopian margins of abjection in the work of Bolaño<sup>7</sup>. In *Amuleto*, the names of streets, of neighborhoods, of bars and of buildings provide the city and the characters that move through it a definitive quality. At the same time, however, the figurative language used to describe the sky, the nights, the *pampa* and the valley all tend toward the abstract. In this way, the urban spaces of Mexico City become a lost ideal within the allegorical register of the novel. Indeed, what Auxilio Lacouture describes as "the dust cloud" (13) that disperses and scatters everything, becomes an agent capable of trapping objects within a kind of oblivion. All lost objects, Bolaño's protagonist explains, are transformed into a cloud that covers the city from North to South and from East to West, leaving and returning in a kind of "eternal return," whereby the "dust cloud reduces everything to dust. First the poets, then love, then, when it seems to be sated and about to disperse, the cloud returns to hang high over your city" (13). While objects that are lost turn to dust,

7. As Jameson argues in the aforementioned text, the sixties gives rise to socio-political possibilities, whereby, "The simplest yet most universal formulation surely remains the widely shared feeling that in the 60s, for a time, everything was possible: that this period, in other words, was a moment of a universal liberation, a global unbinding of energies" (207). Written thirty years later, Bolaño's text seeks to portray the failure of these same liberation movements as the legacy of a dystopian present bequeathed to a younger generation.



this maintains the essence of an evil that Bolaño's protagonist had foretold: "I began to wonder and even went to look at the vase in question or the aforementioned books and came to the conclusion (a conclusion which, I hasten to add, I promptly rejected) that Hell or one of its secret doors was hidden there in those seemingly inoffensive objects" (6). Melancholy, despair, and dystopia are manifest in the novel from beginning to end as the image of a death that looms above all of the characters save for Auxilio. This death, moreover, is a symbol of a forgetfulness that is rendered evil. This abject atmosphere is contrasted with the subject position of an allegoric mother that dissolves biology and nationality alike, and who seeks to protect and resist this oblivion.

In Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes* (1998)—which includes part of *Amuleto*—the character Manuel Maples Arce already grasps the orphan state of these poets: "All poets, even the most avant-garde, need a father. But these poets were meant to be orphans" (181). In *Amuleto*, the failure of Oedipal relations between writers and so-called literary ancestors gives rise to a narrator, who, bearing witness to a historical trauma, becomes the allegorical mother of an entire generation of poets lost in Mexico City. It is in these poets—living and dead—that Lacouture sees the phantasmagoric mark of those millions who have suffered a preponderant misery—the mark of a history whose birth she attends. With Lacouture's narration, Bolaño presents history in the form of a dystopian prosopopeia, as a stillbirth that marks the dissolution of struggles and utopias that had begun with Tlatelolco in 1968 and had been rendered undeniable following the death of Salvador Allende. The death of these poets, the ones with no future, symbolizes a minor literature that lies beyond the canon and is, therefore, ephemeral. Thus, Auxilio tells us, "I will say that some nights my friends even seemed, for a second, to be the incarnations of those who had never come into existence: the Latin American poets who died in childhood, at the age of five or ten, or just a few months after they were born" (63). Those deaths, which she announces and reveals at the end of the narrative, suggest a conception of literature as a receptacle, not a simulacrum, but reflections of a reality that asserts itself against what Jean Baudrillard has described as history in the time of postmodernity: "The fact that we are leaving history to move into the realm of simulation is merely a consequence of the fact that history itself has always, deep down, been an immense simulation model" (43).

Further, Bolaño's text suggests that the historical trauma experienced and narrator's *testimonio* are, in fact, equivalent, despite the neurosis that undoes the coherence of Lacouture's narrative. Revolving around a "crime," the novel's plot is presented in the form of a monologue in which personal testimony and collective history are intertwined. The subjective aspects of this narrative allow for neither a lineal presentation

of events nor the revelation of the "criminal"—a revelation that is characteristic of all detective fiction. The enigma here lies in the future of the new poets who Auxilio imagines as her children. From a point in time that has been closed-off—encapsulated in 1968—emerge the countless displacements of the historical possibilities that have defined an entire generation of Latin Americans.

Historicity, however, can only be understood as a simulacrum in the sense that it is never available in its totality and must remain circumscribed within the realm of the allegorical. In his account of post-dictatorial literature, *The Untimely Present*, Idelber Avelar conceives the Freudian conception of melancholy and Walter Benjamin's notion of allegory as the petrified face of history as the primordial passage of mourning. Citing the work of Diamela Eltit as the example *par excellence* of post-dictatorial fiction, Avelar reads her novel, *Los vigilantes*, like a marker of memory: "Eltit's wager is that writing, no longer able to affirm any oppositional principle, can at least, by virtue of its mere existence, remain as bearer of an irreducible trace of memory and experience" (185). In *Amuleto*, allegory is similarly presented as the mark of a future collective memory, and at the same time as the only viable position that the narrator can occupy. This, then, is an allegory of human history and decay, which emerges at the end of *Amuleto*, like the enigma of the title, the sacrifice of a generation of young poets whose amulet—the heroic attempt to create a new art and society—ends in death. Blending an elegiac tone and surrealist imagery, Auxilio sees the future of those "children of the sewers" who are found throughout all of Latin America, singing heroic songs<sup>8</sup> as they move across a valley toward the abyss of death. She continues, "And although the song that I heard was about war, about the heroic deeds of a whole generation of young Latin Americans led to sacrifice, I knew that above and beyond all, it was about courage and mirrors, desire and pleasure" (184). The amulet paradoxically symbolizes a kind of ominous luck, while the song at the end of the novel becomes a reminder of the valor and hope in which we might find protection and comfort. If it seems that this *testimonio* idealizes the image of the martyred revolutionary, what is, in fact, idealized is a desire and pleasure that mirror a political and social reality, and which are suppressed by that same reality, laying the groundwork for what Michel Foucault might have described as a heterotopia, a space

8. At the end of *Amuleto*, Auxilio Lacouture imagines seeing a legion of youths singing and walking toward an abyss. She ponders, "Quiso mi mente, dice Auxilio, recordar un texto que hablaba de niños que marchaban a la guerra entonando canciones, pero no pudo" (152). Chris Andrews argues that the text that Bolaño's narrator refers to is *La Cruzada de los niños*, by Marcel Schwob, the French author who was all but forgotten until the somewhat recent republication of his works, due in large part to Jorge Luis Borges's influence.

where the real and mythical and dissidence take place<sup>9</sup>. In Bolaño's novel, nonetheless, the heterotopia ends in dystopian tones.

To stress the moralizing aspects of a novel that remains so absolutely open can lead to gross oversimplifications. And yet, it is this aspect that should be underlined with regard to the figure of the mother, who must not only recount, but also mourn this dystopian history. Indeed, we might imagine this mother as the image of the intellectual described by Julia Kristeva. Reflecting on the intellectual's relationship to society, Kristeva insists, "Writing is impossible without some kind of exile. Exile is already in itself a form of dissidence, since it involves uprooting oneself from a family, a country or a language" (298). If neurosis allegorically disperses language and events, Auxilio Lacouture's voice approximates one of the several intellectual dissidents that Kristeva evokes in stating, "Precisely through the excesses of the languages whose very multitude is the only sign of life, one can attempt to bring about multiple sublations of the unnamable, the unrepresentable, the void. This is the real cutting edge of dissidence" (300). The emptiness that is presumed incapable of giving birth to history is articulated as the allegory of the trauma that persists in melancholy. This melancholy emerges in Bolaño's text as the only position from where one might read the marks of collective memory.

These novels, then, are regarded best as comprising narratives that point to the mourning for a lost generation. As Jean Franco notes, "Political rethinking in the dictatorship regime is done in the condition of mourning" (*The Decline* 259). Pointing to a meaningless mystery that is revealed only in the loss of an entire generation of Latin Americans at the hands of brutal dictatorships, *Amuleto*, too, is a work of mourning. Hence, the prostitution and drugs that form part of the marginal spaces throughout Mexico City—spaces which Auxilio, the symbolic mother of an entire generation of orphaned poets, attempts to reveal. The possibility of a modernist conception of literature conceived as a means of perceiving and transforming reality remains unfulfilled. As Avelar notes, the imperative to mourn contrasts the modernist commitment to "the imagination of an otherwise, the redemption of the poetic within the prosaism of daily alienated life, and the envisioning of a redemptive epiphany" (232). In *Amuleto*, and

9. Foucault explains, "There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias." This text, originally entitled "Des Espace Autres," and published by the French journal *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* in October, 1984, was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967.

in Bolaño's work in general, writing and literature remain allegorically marked by the failure to achieve any form of social or political change. Trauma does not point to the possibility of change, even as it attempts to enact a form of resistance against forgetting, leaving the novel's protagonist in a state of melancholy. For this reason, the novel published three decades after the massacres of 1968 becomes for Bolaño a "*love letter*: to his generation, specifically to the political activists wiped out by the coup" (219).

In contrast, Fuentes imbues what happened in Tlatelolco as an historical watershed. In the introduction to *Los 68* he asks, "¿Hubiese transitado México del sistema autoritario monopartidista a un sistema democrático pluralista sin el sacrificio terrible del 68 en Tlatelolco?" (20). Fuentes recounts the events of the past from the perspective of progress, transforming this defeat into the seed of the socio-political possibilities of the present. At the same time, insofar as the fictionalized account of Tlatelolco insists not only on the need to acknowledge the singularity of every person killed during the massacre, *Los 68* does not question the status of literature or the (im)possibilities constitutive of fiction.

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