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#### Notes on a Queer (Mexican) Literature: The Case of Ana Clavel

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**Abstract:** The present essay examines the place of Ana Clavel in critical studies on contemporary Mexican fiction. Instead of situating her production vis-à-vis female contemporaries in what has been labeled the *Boom Femenino*, I argue that Clavel's novels embody the ethos of a queer literature. A queer literature unpacks, decenters, and disobeys norms of gender, sex, and sexuality, and favors the posing of questions versus the providing of neatly packaged answers. Moving away from the subject, it mobilizes these same actions towards the communal and the national. Queer literature moves against the conventions of narrative; it breaks through the limits of the textual to render insufficient the power of the word. By reading the author's meditation on sex, gender, and sexuality (especially as they relate to the urban space in *Cuerpo naufrago*), the essay furthers that Clavel's fiction may best be understood within a genealogy of queer Mexican texts.

**Keywords:** Ana Clavel, *Cuerpo naufrago*, Queer, Queer Literature, *Los deseos y su sombra*



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## Notes on a Queer (Mexican) Literature: The Case of Ana Clavel

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The presence and proliferation of women writers in the Mexican literary scene has been the source of much research and –to some extent– debate within the field. While writers such as Rosario Castellanos, Elena Garro, and Elena Poniatowska were central in cementing a place for the feminine in the afterburners of the continental (and male) Boom, others such as Ángeles Mastretta and Laura Esquivel inaugurated in the early 1980s what Nuala Finnegan, Jane Lavery, and others have termed the *boom femenino* in Mexico.<sup>1</sup> These authors, in addition to others such as Carmen Boullosa, Nellie Campobello, and Guadalupe Loaeza have been canonized in critical studies by Emily Hind and Oswaldo Estrada in what we may term a *canon de escritoras*. In *Femmenism and the Mexican Woman Intellectual* (2010), Hind studies female production from the twentieth century, whereas Estrada in *Ser mujer y estar presente* (2014) broaches authors who continue to write in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Divided into three parts, *Ser mujer*'s final section covers Rosa Beltrán, Cristina Rivera Garza, and Guadalupe Nettel, representative writers of the second generation of the *boom femenino*.

The debate around this canon is largely centered on two issues. First, writers such as Esquivel and Mastretta were initially dismissed as light literature, written for entertainment and not as 'serious' as texts by their male counterparts. The boom in female writers, critical interest in the shape of articles, dissertations, and monographs, and the many awards won by their novels, however, has quickly put this issue to rest. Second, critics including Finnegan and Lavery pose whether the cordoning off of writers to this canon or under the umbrella term of the *boom femenino* may bolster the ghettoization of women writers to a discrete grouping of literature. While this debate is not at the core of the present essay, its overtones, however, are relevant in situating certain writers.

Ana Clavel, for instance, shares many of the characteristics of the second generation of the *boom femenino* and is best known for *Cuerpo naufrago* (2005) and *Las Violetas son flores del deseo* (2007), which won the 2013 Premio Iberoamericano de Novela Elena Poniatowska. Clavel for the large part, however, is absent from Hind and Estrada's seminal works, not because the critics do not value her production, but due to the author's active questioning of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Finnegan and Lavery's *The Boom Femenino in Mexico* (2010). Lavery goes on to note that the *boom femenino* "is largely not perceived as a cohesive or unified literary movement" (2010: 313).

label of female writer.<sup>2</sup> Estrada observes that Clavel, Ana García Bergua, Patricia Laurent Kullick, and Susana Pagano "no siempre reflexionan sobre su posición como mujeres en el mundo literario" (Estrada 2014: 23). Clavel has even gone on to say: "el asunto de lo femenino siempre me produce reticencia y lo toco con sumo cuidado porque creo que muchas veces se vuelve una excusa para escribir de una manera deshilvanada y poco rigurosa" (Clavel in Hind 2003: 40).<sup>3</sup>

My interest in Clavel stems from her self-exclusion from a literary canon that would otherwise benefit her stature in the field. The Latin American Boom –and even more contemporary groupings such as the Crack and McOndo– cleanly illustrate how associations amongst writers benefit the group and the individual within the literary, commercial, and academic market. Instead of encouraging lines of contact between her work and such luminaries as Rivera Garza, Clavel instead seems to disassociate herself. Given the academy's propensity for tidily grouping together authors in generations and movements, my purpose then is to situate Clavel, to collocate her novels within a broader gesture that is neither self-contained or disparate from contemporary Mexican literature.

Clavel first accrues critical interest in the 1980s and 90s with the publication of two collections of short stories. She followed up this success with the novels *Los deseos y su sombra* (1999), *Cuerpo náufrago* (2005), *Las Violetas son flores del deseo* (2007; with its controversial cover image),<sup>4</sup> *El dibujante de sombras* (2009), *Las ninfas a veces sonríen* (2013), and *El amor es hambre* (2015), in addition to several collections of stories. Characterized by the fantastic, with suggestions of magical realism, Ana Rosa Domenella has placed Clavel amongst a group of "autoras neofantásticas" (1999: 353) –which includes García Bergua, Adriana González Mateos and Cecilia Eudave– that write the body as a fantastical construct open to change.

The malleability of the body and its constant state of flux are characteristics (amongst others) that support Jane Lavery's assertion that Clavel "queers the more conventional narrative themes and genres associated with some of the more 'canonical' writers of the *boom femenino*" (Lavery 2015: 1). Lavery's analysis posits a line of entry into Clavel that is not so much defined by her condition of *escritora* but by her "queer aesthetics" (Lavery 2015: 6). Similarly, in "Por una literatura queer", Sergio Téllez-Pon features Clavel in a distinction between queer and gay literature. Without devaluing important contributions by the likes of Luis Zapata and José

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<sup>2</sup> Estrada, in fact, has authored an essential article in understanding Clavel in relation to her contemporaries (see Estrada 2009: 63-78).

<sup>3</sup> A similar phenomenon occurs with the reception of García Bergua (see Thornton 2010: 217-240).

<sup>4</sup> The cover of *Las Violetas son flores del deseo* depicts the opened legs of a pre-pubescent girl seated in a flowerbed. Taken in black and white, her face is hidden while her white-laced underpants are the focus of the image.

Rafael Calva, Téllez-Pon underscores the value in Clavel's texts as they move beyond constructed identities and discrete social types.

I find Lavery's and Téllez-Pon's studies indispensable in any framing of Clavel because they move her work from a strictly feminine genealogy to a queer trajectory. To note in this gesture, however, is that a queer lineage in Mexican letters is largely untraced, since the bulk of criticism to date has focused on a gay literature. Víctor Federico Torres's "Del escarnio a la celebración: prosa mexicana del siglo XX," in Michael K. Schuessler and Miguel Capistrán's *Mexico se escribe con J: una historia de la cultura gay* (2010), is a useful text in understanding this phenomenon. Torres establishes a gay cannon beginning in the early twentieth century, moving into stereotypes, missteps, and minor texts of the mid century. He argues that a substantial gay literature in Mexico only begins with Zapata's *El vampiro de la colonia Roma* (1979), and is strengthened in the 1980s with texts by Calva, José Joaquín Blanco, and Luis Montaña. Clavel is, of course, excluded from this discussion because her novels do not strictly explore gay themes and issues, or star gay protagonists. Instead, she traces through her fictions an exploration of sex, sexuality, and gender, that does not focus on a particular identity, practice, or community. In other words, and as Téllez-Pon notes, Clavel is best considered within a queer genealogy of Mexican literature.

What is queer literature? Thematically, it follows David William Foster's understanding of "todo aquello que instaure una postura desafiante a la heteronormatividad patriarcal. Puede ceñirse, primordialmente, a la legitimación del deseo homoerótico [...] pero no se limita solamente a esta cuestión, sino que lo *queer* puede representar la legitimación de [...] toda una gama de prácticas del amor entre seres humanos" that transgress social norms and codes of the Law (Foester 2009: 197). In this line of thought, Amy Kaminsky argues that queer studies, in opposition to gay and lesbian studies, "has been marked by a move away from studying an already available body of work by homosexual writers toward producing theory in an open field" (2001: 210). She furthers that the shift to the queer moves us "away from questions of identity [...] to questions of subjectivity [...]; away from community [...] to the relation of the queer subject to the body politic and to the nation; from representation of preexisting and retrievable gay themes to the performance of transgressive behavior as constitutive of categories like sexuality and gender" (Kaminsky 2001: 210). A queer gesture ultimately questions the structural and epistemological bases of heteronormativity; it is not simply a transgression, but rather, a perpetual (dis/re)configuration of social systems.

Queer literature operates on multiple levels of narrative scaffolding. On an intimate and subjective level, it unpacks, decenters, and disobeys norms of gender, sex, and sexuality; queer

literature favors the posing of questions versus the providing of neatly packaged answers. Moving away from the subject, it mobilizes these same actions towards the communal and the national. It is similar to yet more radical than Lee Edelman's notions of homographesis, or "the cultural mechanism by which writing is brought into relation to the question of sexual difference in order to conceive the gay body as text, thereby effecting a far-reaching intervention in the political regulation of social identities" (1994: 10). Queer literature is a centrifugal gesture, unlike the centripetal nature of narratives that reify a particular gender position (both hetero and homo), social strata, or political systems; it questions the frontiers of the self and the community. Queer literature moves against the conventions of narrative; it breaks through the limits of the textual to render insufficient the power of the word. Queer literature embodies José Esteban Muñoz's description of queerness as a "not yet here [...] an ideality" (2009: 1). Queer literature is not congruent or synonymous with a queer reading or theory, which juxtaposes a methodology to a given text. Instead, queer literature is an ontology in itself, *avant la théorie*.<sup>5</sup> It occupies an in-between space between Edelman's thesis of queerness as a death drive (in *No Future*) and Muñoz's counter position of queerness as a futuristic utopia. A queer literature is equally a gesture towards the horizon as it is a conflation with the finiteness of the now. It may be historic and ahistoric, local and foreign, real and fantastic, and any other combination of paradoxes. Queer literature, counterintuitively, moves against categorization (though it is not always successful). It is an open-ended literature, not necessarily written by self-identified queers, or solely about queer characters, but rather is queer due to its politico-ethical intervention in the relationship between the subject and broader matrices.

Queer literature also maintains the potential of creating queer readers, as reading becomes a process that forces questions, unhinges identitarian positions, and provokes polydirectional libidinal urges and drives that may not necessarily coincide with the reader's self-identified gender and/or sexuality. Queer literature produces –even ephemerally– queer readers who must reorient themselves in the face of the text.

Let us now return to Clavel. To note in any approximation to her work is the crosscutting nature of her novels. They are not situated within a narrative universe where characters and events from one novel may reappear in others –as is the case with writers such as Carlos Fuentes, Cristina Rivera Garza, or Horacio Castellanos Moya– but rather meditate on similar themes. Dafna Hornike underlines that common in all texts is an "exploration of less familiar territories of subjective gendered experience while using recurring motifs such as shadows

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<sup>5</sup> Very much in the way that queerness, or "those deviant bodily practices were there, *avant la lettre*, before queer theory came to academia" (Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2016: 2).

(usually metaphors for desire), and the usage of sudden transformation as a trope that opens a vast array of possibilities for exploring her topics from another angle" (2013: 8). Taking this observation into consideration, I want to suggest that Clavel's work may be read vertically and horizontally; that is, we may fruitfully analyze in depth a single work and/or trace a particular trope across novels.

The novel that sticks out in this horizontal reading is her second, *Cuerpo náufrago*. It is the novel that Téllez-Pon underlines in his thesis of a queer genealogy, and links her first, *Los deseos y su sombra* with the novels that follow. Situating *Cuerpo náufrago* within Clavel's production first requires a contextualization of *Los deseos y su sombra*. In *Los deseos*, Clavel narrates the life of Soledad García in the Mexico City of the 1950s-80s. Juxtaposed in the text is the development of Soledad and Mexico itself –in multiple instances, the protagonist is interpellated with historical and political sites and events that can be read against her own body. This narrative strategy, where the individual is super-imposed onto the national and vice versa in a body-city dialectic, is nothing new, and is prevalent in any sort of nation-building literature. The novelty in *Los deseos*, however, resides in the second half of the text, when Soledad, who undergoes a series of sexual and emotional travails, spirals into a life-or-death existence as she walks the city in an aimless trajectory.<sup>6</sup>

Luzma Becerra proposes that the novel undertakes a "desprendimiento de la realidad, sin que llegue a desaparecer un 'estar ahí'" (2004: 370), noting that "la historia de *Los deseos y su sombra* reelabora un contexto cultural, que es el de un imaginario femenino con su educación tradicional en lo referente al registro genérico" (Becerra 2004: 372). In other words, *Los deseos* reconfigures an already-in-place male script, this time through the lens of the female body. But this is not a closed ending, where the reader may glean a didactic or symbolic treaty; rather, Clavel gestures towards a queerness in the text as Soledad "comes to embody the abject itself, oscillating ambiguously between life and death [...] between the fully and partially formed subject, the semiotic and symbolic" (Lavery 2007: 1060). *Los deseos* is perhaps the least transgressive novel in terms of sex and desire, but is the only text that situates its narrative in relation to an explicit discussion of Mexican space (and, by extension, -ness). It is transgressive, however, in terms of decentering the narrative strategy of heterosexual male-city, which was at the core of Zapata's *El vampiro*.

*Cuerpo náufrago*, in turn, references several buildings and neighborhoods of the Mexican capital, but ends with a "complete deterritorialization of the diegesis" (Venkatesh 2015: 159).

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<sup>6</sup> I have analyzed the relationship between the body, the city, and *mexicanidad* in 'The Ends of Masculinity in the Urban Space' (see Venkatesh 2015: 158-170).

Importantly, the novels that follow in Clavel's trajectory in this horizontal tracing after *Cuerpo náufrago* are all set in at-times anonymous and at-times ephemeral spaces, suggesting a centrifugal continuity between her first novel and those that come later. What makes the novel an example of queer literature is not only its unpacking of sex, gender, and sexuality, but the expanding nature of this action towards other more expansive tropes.

*Cuerpo náufrago* undertakes an *écriture hermaphrodite* that recounts the life of Antonia, a woman who unexplainably wakes up one morning as a man, Antón, and who must then reconcile her gender expression with her physical sex. In other words, the protagonist undertakes what Nigel Thrift and Steve Pile (2005) call the "mapping of the subject" within the urban terrain, as her first step after waking up from this magical realist transformation is to "enfrentar la ciudad y la gente con sus propios pasos" (Clavel 2005: 15). When the protagonist proceeds to engage the city (as a matrix in which to explore her/his own gender), the text emphasizes that space, as a lived experience, privileges masculinities. As Antonia recalls: "recordaba perfectamente de niña envidiando a sus hermanos y a los amigos de sus hermanos, esa manera de apoderarse de una calle para jugar fútbol, para salir solos por la ciudad sin correr tanto peligro" (Clavel 2005: 13). The mapping of the gendered subject is congruent with the larger project of identity, as her brothers' identities are based on their performance. They are allowed to "engrasarse las manos y los pantalones al enderezar la cadena de una bicicleta o ponerse un traje y sentirse importantes" (Clavel 2005: 14). In other words, our performance, within a defined stage, is essential to the construct of gender. She prepares herself for this dialectic by putting on male clothing, and collecting her hair in "una coleta como las que la moda y los tiempos se lo permitían a los hombres que se animaban a dejárselo crecer" (Clavel 2005: 15). Note here a reference to the idea that gender is socially constructed and historically sensitive.

In essence, the novel begins with Antonia seeking to understand how to play the part of Antón in a wider social milieu. In coming into contact with the city, Antonia evokes Deborah Parsons's notes that in literature, characters are "not only a figure within a city; he/she is also the producer of a city, one that is related to but distinct from the city of asphalt, brick, and stone, one that results from the interconnection of body, mind, and space, one that reveals the interplay of self/city identity" (Parson 2000: 1). To become Antón is to not solely have grown a penis through a swift act of fantasy, but to interact as a male within the public matrix of identity.

In a swift contradiction, however, the protagonist linguistically reaffirms her female identity, stressing the third person, singular feminine pronoun and adding: "[n]o cabía duda sobre su sexo, aunque las presiones de la época contribuyeran a que asumiera otros roles" (Clavel 2005:

11). The emphasis on the pronoun "ella" underscores a textual preoccupation with the signifiers of gender, re-elaborating Judith Butler's quandary at the end of *Gender Trouble* that serves as an epigraph: "¿Cómo figura un cuerpo en su superficie la invisibilidad misma de su profundidad escondida?" (Butler in Clavel 2005: 9). Starting with this thought, we can note that, in *Cuerpo náufrago*, Clavel seeks to question the ontological integrity of the gendered-subject.

The protagonist meditates on issues of subjectivity and identity, posing whether "¿[l]a identidad empieza por lo que vemos?" (Clavel 2005: 12). She is quick to suggest an alternative to the performativity of identity, suggesting that "la identidad empieza por lo que deseamos" (Clavel 2005: 13), thereby posing a dialogic that structures the pages of *Cuerpo náufrago*. It is the physical body, its performative behavior, and something more intimate, innate, "secret[o], persistente" (ibid) that defines the subject. Herein we find the first queer gesture in the novel, as the text poses an unknown over a definite; a horizon over a present relation to subjectivity; a blending of corporal, psychoanalytic and performative schools of thought. The novel does not privilege one theory of gender/sex/sexuality over another, preferring instead to enter many into a metaphysical conversation that builds around Antonia's interior monologue. Hornike addresses this apparent contradiction when she comments that the novel proposes a "puzzling approach to gender" (2013: 10). The contradiction, however, does not arise out of ignorance or a poor handling of theory, rather I believe the author intentionally queers theory itself; it is, after all, evident that Clavel is a scholar in addition to a writer, as evidenced by the extensive footnotes in *Cuerpo náufrago* and in academic studies she has authored on gender and literature.<sup>7</sup> Instead, the novel fulfills the definition of a queer literature as it deconstructs gender, sex, and sexuality in its first pages, leaving the reader with questions and uncertainty over any clear thesis or theory.

This action is expanded upon in a centrifugal sweep as the text projects the protagonist's subjective quandary onto a wider sphere. The character must confront and negotiate itself vis-à-vis the social space of the city, thereby calling into question the axioms of the latter in a queering narrative that decenters the referentiality and specificity of the urban that was at the core of mapping Soledad in *Los deseos*. Hornike notes the dialectic between space and the subject, posing that "the novel's [...] approach to gender [is] linked with directionality and consequently can be articulated through spatial concepts" (Hornike 2013: 10).

Unlike *Los deseos* that mapped the subject while mapping the city through ekphrastic passages of Soledad walking through buildings and monuments in Mexico City –in the classic

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, 'Hombres narrados por mujeres', a study of Josefina Vicens, Sylvia Molloy, Cristina Peri Rossi and Rivera Garza that appeared in the *Revista de la Universidad de México* (see Clavel 2001).



dialectic of body-city—, Antonia engages the spatial through a different strategy. Antonia walks a few blocks from her apartment and finds herself at the entrance to the metro system. As the character goes underground the narrative leaves behind the streets, buildings and spaces of Mexico City. They do not cease to exist, but are instead left unmapped by the narrative and by the body. As Antonia descends into the underground world of the metro, the narrative carries out an inferential mapping of the subterranean non-city —she describes how "en el piso del corredor se extendían puestos con mercancías diversas como en muchos de los accesos a la red de transporte subterráneo de la ciudad de México" (Clavel 2005: 21). Clavel's placing of the subject in a terminus of the underground space effectively creates a parallel, multidimensional schema of the city-space that is reflective of the 280 miles of rail that run across the metro system. Mexico City—as space, sign, and coda of the communal, national, and structured—exists in the novel not as a city-text; instead, it is a queer space, unpacked, unhinged, unmapped by the body, a "not yet here [...] an ideality" (Muñoz 2009: 1).<sup>8</sup> Mexico City, like Antonia/Antón, is a body in constant (de/re)construction, in a queer flux that resists complete identification.

This queering of the city portends a virtualization that differs from the depiction of Mexico City as an actual space (as was the case in *Los deseos* and a plethora of fictions from the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries). Space in *Cuerpo naufrago* is not a text that allows for the reading —if we are to follow the ideas of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja of social, communal, and national ideologies, but a virtual construct.<sup>9</sup> It leaves bare and is open to the intensive morphogenetic processes that sustain and form such assemblages, by "placing the variables themselves in a state of continuous variation" (Deleuze / Guattari 1998: 369). The city (and the spatial throughout the novel, for that matter) is queered, open to renegotiation and reconstitution. The multiplicity of the virtual, especially as it relates to the subject, is where Clavel directs the protagonist, as she/he negotiates subjectivity in relation to assemblages that are, in themselves, in flux. In other words, by going down into the metro and away from the socio-historic referents of Mexico City aboveground, Antonia/Antón, in a centrifugal tour de force, moves the spatial into an already-in-place process of flux, where the queered subject-in-process queers the city (and all that it codes for).

This fairly innocuous plot point that occurs at the very beginning of the novel underlines the disjunction between *Los deseos y su sombra* and *Cuerpo naufrago*. The shift in *Cuerpo*

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<sup>8</sup> Discussing queer theory in Latin America, Domínguez Ruvalcaba furthers that "its meaning is enriched through a complex intersectionality in which sexuality and gender expressions cannot be detached from economic determinants, religious and legal constraints; racial, class, and nationality exclusions; or political conjectures" (2016: 5).

<sup>9</sup> Reflective of Mark Bonta and John Protevi's idea that "spaces are NOT constructed by discourse alone, and thus are not configured solely to be read" (2004: 40).

*náufrago* to a virtual and not real cartography of the city foreshadows a mapping of the subject and spaces that resists the socio-cultural specificity of the city-text. In fact, much of the novel takes place in closed, undifferentiated spaces that are iterations of the relationship between space and subject. Antonia moves from the metro to a series of bars and bathrooms. Both spatial types demonstrate how the subject is constructed through everyday practice. In the bar, for example, Antón is allowed to drink straight from a bottle; the urinals in the bathrooms pose a plural interpretation of the morphology of the porcelain, as it can symbolize a mouth, womb, or flower. While initially described as inherently feminine, visually evoking "las caderas de una mujer" (Clavel 2005: 27), the urinal also undergoes a questioning. In a later scene, for example, the protagonist now views it "como una enorme boca abierta, una gruta insondable" (Clavel 2005: 68); towards the end, Antonia becomes obsessed with the *mingitauro*, a defunct urinal in a renovated women's bathroom. Covered in a black plastic bag held in place by black tape that evokes horns, it is a queered urinal, with female and male parts, its absence (in terms of utility) emphasized by its presence. It is a paradox, a here and a horizon, that revolutionizes the bathroom space in the novel.

The queering of the bathroom space sets in motion a complex psychological break from the initial intention of exploring how masculinity and maleness is constituted through lived social experience in the city. The first step in this break is described in a nightclub where Antonia and some friends –Carlos, Francisco and Raimundo–, who throughout the text instruct him on the ways of men, engage in the services of a prostitute in a private room. The novel queers the trope of the prostibule as a space to *hacerse hombre*, as in this scene, Antón instead disengages from the rules of heteronormativity. The narrative delves into aquatic metaphors as the inebriated protagonist begins to feel her/himself slip into the blue depths of the ocean, away from the city and away from the theatricality of gender, as Carlos and Francisco indulge in the body of the prostitute. Raimundo, however, mysteriously and silently observes the orgy and does not participate as Antonia slips into unconsciousness. It is here that she remembers kissing someone, though the text is unclear, imprecise, and throbbing in its alcoholic amnesia. The brothel, like the bathroom with the *mingitauro*, is moved into a queer centrifuge, slowly delinking itself from narratives of normativity. Importantly, the ocean –a decidedly non-urban space– becomes a suggested space to *hacerse queer*.<sup>10</sup>

The novel uses a metaphor from nature to illustrate the queering drive begun in the nightclub. Antonia discusses the biology of migratory eels that are sexually undifferentiated when young,

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<sup>10</sup> See my discussion throughout *New Maricón Cinema* of the aquatic as a metaphor, site, and potentiality for the queer in Latin American cultural production (see Venkatesh 2016).

but change as adults according to the "dictados del medio ambiente: condiciones de salinidad, índices de la tabla periódica de la pasión" (Clavel 2005: 114). From this biological metaphor, Clavel suggests that human bodies are also cultured and differentiated by environmental factors, though ours tend to be historical and cultural, internal and external processes of gender formation. Again we see a "puzzling approach to gender" (Hornike 2013: 10), as performativity is meshed with corporality and the environment. The novel further notes that the eels are able to migrate without any navigational referents as they undergo sexuation. Antonia mimics this performance as she approaches Raimundo's apartment; though initially holding onto the walls of his building to guide her, she lets go and drifts like an eel towards a critical moment that will define her sexuality. The use of the life history of eels in combination with Antonia's slippage into the waters of inebriation depict the underlying shift in the telos of her identity as she engages in carnal relations with Raimundo where both are penetrated and penetrating. Antonia describes male homosexual sex like "un salto al océano" (Clavel 2005: 119), underscoring the cartographic shift from city (even a virtual one) to non-city that defines queerness in *Cuerpo náufrago*. The penetration of Raimundo is significant because it underscores the queer drive in the novel to decenter identitarian positions. Antonia does not identify as a heterosexual male in the body of Antón, nor as a male-desiring female in the position of Antonia; instead, she/he is open to varying libidinal flows and desires that are as fluid as the waters that carry the migratory eels. The queering of Antonia as she sleeps with Raimundo emanates outwards in a centrifugal queering of the spatial.

The novel concludes with Antonio falling in love with Paula, a researcher who studies biodiversity in the Grecian isles. Paula is first described as "ella – porque no cabía duda sobre su sexo" (Clavel 2005: 127), though this description is also queered. Clavel carefully evades an explicit description of Paula's genitalia, though she is described to have a bulge in between her legs that is sexually reactive and sovereign, though it is never specified to be the penis that befuddles Antonia the morning of her own transformation. But by alluding to a bulge –in combination with the emphasis on the gender pronoun– the text suggests that Paula, like Antonia, is also queer.

The process of mapping the subject in *Cuerpo náufrago* comes full circle as Antonia, described as "él o ella – porque cabía la duda sobre su género" (Clavel 2005: 181) arrives at the Aeolian isles, far removed from Mexico City. In this space disconnected from the coordinates of the City, Antonia becomes an "organism moved from 'equilibrium', that is, out of a stable state or 'comfort zone' [...], to an intensive crisis realm (producing changeable, 'metastable' habits)" (Bonta / Protevi 2004: 63). Separated from the social structures and systems (that were

pervasive in *Los Deseos*) she is liberated from the obsession with chivalric performativity and the physiology and physiognomy of the urinals that map the city.

Regarding a poetics of the city, *Cuerpo náufrago* is minimalist in its naming of the spaces, buildings, and routes of the megalopolis. This, however, does not render Clavel's text impotent in defining the connection between city and self. By moving towards the virtual, *Cuerpo náufrago* encourages a reconsideration of how we conceive, imagine, and represent the spatial vis-à-vis subjectivity. The transformations, movements, and thoughts of Antonia as the novel progresses evoke Elizabeth Grosz's thinking of the city

not as megalithic total entities, distinct identities, but as assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or microgroupings [...] the city in its particular geographical, architectural, and municipal arrangements is one particular ingredient in the social constitution of the body (Grosz 1999: 385).

As she is queered, so is space. She fully submerges herself in the water, "ni cielo por encima de su cabeza, ni fondo marino por debajo de sus pies" (Clavel 2005: 185), contemplating for a moment "abandonarse a la tentadora certeza de este instante" (ibid). But Antonia does not give in to the death drive, emerging from the waters "a pesar de los laberintos, las dudas, la incertidumbre" as a "minotauro superviviente" (ibid). The novel concludes with a description of the protagonist as a "cuerpo náufrago, una sombra iluminada al fin" (ibid); a queer subject open to interpretation.

The dislocation of the subject from the spatial –that is, Mexico City and its role in defining *mexicanidad*– that occurs at the very end of *Cuerpo náufrago* is continued in Clavel's subsequent novels. In *Las Violetas son flores del deseo* and *El dibujante de sombras*, Clavel's narrative is relocated fantastical and undefined space. It is not till *Las ninfas a veces sonríen* that we evidence an allusion to Mexico City, although this fantastical text evades explicitly naming its buildings, statues, and monuments that were at the core of Soledad's subject-formation in *Los deseos*. The lack of spatial specificity is at the core of Clavel's queer literature, as it is inherently linked to the narratives' exploration of queer bodies, desires, and urges. It is, like the subjects that populate her novels, a Muñozian futurity, in constant instability yet posing a potential future moment of wholeness. Clavel's literature is also queer in that it breaches the limits of narrative. In *Cuerpo náufrago*, the uses of varied intertexts, footnotes, and even paratexts (the book cover features Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres's painting *La Source* from 1856) signal the insufficiency of the text to fully capture Antonia's process of subjectification.<sup>11</sup> The front cover of *Las Violetas son flores del deseo*, for example, centers the viewer's gaze on

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<sup>11</sup> See Lavery's analysis of the cover (2015: 110-120).

the thin laced fabric covering the genitals of the anonymous young girl splayed out on the ground, inviting us into the book. The flimsiness of the material is deployed as an interplay between the seen and unseen, the taboo and the innocent, to affectively provoke a queer literature.

With these examples, I believe Téllez-Pon's and Lavery's use of the term "queer" to define Clavel is entirely validated. When asked how she defines herself as a writer, Clavel answers:

Sin habérmelo propuesto de una forma deliberada, mi literatura es muy original y transgrede ciertos cánones. Subvierto nociones convencionales de la escritura misma; a veces a través del uso de la metáfora o con propuestas más transgresoras. Temáticamente, los canales más importantes que se me han ido abriendo son la indagación del deseo y su relación con el mundo de las sombras. No fue algo planeado. Soy una escritora que de una manera providencial siempre ha sido guiada por sus sombras. Como digo en *Cuerpo náufrago*, se trata de dejarse ser una sombra en las manos de las sombras de uno mismo. Me definiría como una escritora de deseos y sombras (Clavel in Herrera 2006: 76s.).

These desires and shadows are at the core of her thesis on queerness, as neither are easily quantified, represented, or even defined. They are a here and there, a now and later, a dynamic that resists a stationary subject position.

Returning to the question of a genealogy, *Cuerpo náufrago* and Clavel's novels that come after are very much part of a queer Mexican landscape. Many novels that dot the lineage of gay literature may also occupy this space, as do texts from those authors that Estrada and Hind study. Returning to Torres's overview of gay Mexican literature, and its contemporary starting point of *El vampiro*, I believe the queer canon begins with a little-commented text published in 1977: Armando Ramírez's *Pu*, which was later renamed as *Violación en Polanco*. Published before *El vampiro*, *Pu* demonstrates a similar textual interpellation between the (de)construction of the subject and the community, the body and the city. The novel chronicles the kidnapping of an upper-class woman in Polanco by a trio of men who frequent a seedy movie theater. They kidnap her after her husband kills their two friends (and at times, objects of desire), one of whom is described as a very much queer subject. The trio exact their revenge through a violent rape of the woman in a commandeered bus through the streets of the city. Like *Cuerpo náufrago*, the text explores their sexuality and gender, transgressing stereotyped norms of the *macho* and heterosexism in favor of a fluidity that underscores their seeking of revenge. (Like *Cuerpo náufrago*, it presents a "puzzling approach to gender"; Hornike2013: 10). Like Clavel's novel, *Pu* evidences the inability of the text to set strict limits to representation, demonstrating the incapacity of the written word to fully encapsulate the queer gesture contained within. Ramírez's original title, in fact, alludes to this: *Pu* is the sound made in coitus (whether vaginal, anal, oral, manual, etc.), an onomatopoeic substitute for the

irrepresentable. The novel concludes with the violent murder of the woman and the dissolution of the men into a canal in the outskirts of the city, a return to the mythic waters of Tenochtitlan lost in a confusion of blood, urine, feces, and semen. The conclusion of *Pu* highlights what is at the core of a queer literature, that is, a literature that is by nature unfinished, decentered, and provocative.

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