

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Swarms of bees are generally docile phenomena. Traveling in great numbers to follow their queen to a new home, the bees do not pose a threat to the animals or people they encounter. People have been known to walk alongside a swarm for miles. (Kelly 148-9).

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## Care for a Drink?: Representational Discourse of Desire in the Works of Sabina Berman

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One of the subtle but meaningful common threads that runs through Mexican writer Sabina Berman's numerous works is the use of coffee, tea, and alcohol as part of a symbolic act of non-verbal communication between friends and lovers. Although Berman inscribes the drinks as part of the background or setting, she employs them in many major, meaningful moments that appear in her works. This has not gone unnoticed. Sharon Magnarelli has analyzed the use of tea in *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* as a performance of desire in terms of traditional vs. contemporary gender roles in Mexico, and Stuart A. Day has studied the use of food, such as ice cream, in *La grieta* as part of the drama's parody of the inefficiency of Mexican government officials.

My study adds to this examination of use of beverages in Berman's texts by expanding the analysis to some of her other works. The aim of this study is not to contrast the use of drinks between works, but to offer a view of how the use of drinks is a recurring theme and part of a figurative discourse that Berman constantly uses when she empowers her characters with drinks as a tool of manipulation or expression of emotion. In *Lunas*, *El suplicio del placer*, *Muerte súbita*, *Yankee*, *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*, and *Amante de lo ajeno*, the protagonists utilize beverages as representations of a wide-array of emotions, such as pleasure, love, anger, confusion, dissatisfaction, and sadness. The drinks serve as either non-verbal cues or as complimentary support to the protagonists' spoken speech and express to the protagonists' companions what words alone cannot convey.

While it is implied that the act of sharing drinks and conversation is an intimate, non-threatening, friendly gesture in which a person enjoys the company of another and in which communication is positive, reciprocal and productive, in many of Berman's works this act almost always stems from the protagonists' ulterior motives, is tense in nature, and oftentimes ends in dire disappointment. It is representative of how humans attempt, but fail to communicate in many types and various levels of interpersonal relationships. Critic Ronald Burgess has observed that many of Berman's works show us the complexities of life, our constant search for answers, and our failure to find them, since even

when we believe we have pieced it all together, the threads somehow come undone (Burgess 145-146). My study demonstrates how that is also achieved and exemplified via the manipulation of verbal and non-verbal symbolic discourse revolving around the act of sharing drinks. It is representative of attempted and failed communication between the sexes, within the sexes, and within the Mexican nation. This study complements Roland Barthes's theory that people do not manipulate food as a "simple object in a purely transitive fashion; this item of food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies. That is to say that it is not just an indication of a set of more or less conscious motivations, but that it is a real sign, perhaps the functional unit of a system of communication" (Barthes 21).

Berman's long poem *Lunas* (Moons, 1988) traces the relationship between two lesbian lovers in Mexico. The use of drinks is rich and appears throughout the text at key moments to parallel the lovers' emotions. At the beginning of the work, the poetic "I," an artist, lives in an apartment and feels attracted to a female guest who is visiting her. The protagonist finds it awkward to express her feelings of attraction to her guest, perhaps since lesbianism up until recently has not been widely accepted in traditional Mexican society, or perhaps it merely reflects the insecurities regarding the reciprocity of the other person's feelings at the beginning of a relationship. In order to establish an intimate setting of sharing, she invites her guest to drink tea, a beverage which in this work is symbolic of the protagonist's desire to enamor her female friend:

Y no me atrevo / a que se me ocurra qué decir / hasta que por fin me sale un suspiro / ¿quieres un té? / y me dices: admiro / sus dibujos y admiro/su/ sí digo interrumpiéndote / y voy a la cocina / y desde allí oigo que en el estudio / te ríes / Y me encanta porque te ríes / Pero probablemente hubieras hecho lo que hubieras hecho / me hubieras terminado de encantar / en el preciso instante en que abrí la lata de té / oloroso a / azahares. (*Lunas* 11)

[And I don't dare / know what to say / until at last I sigh / Do you want some tea? / and you say: I admire / your drawings and I admire / your / yes, I say, interrupting you and I go to the kitchen / and from there I hear that in the study / you are laughing / And I love that you're laughing / But you probably would have done what you had done / you ended up enamoring me / at the exact moment that I opened the jar of tea / smelling of / citrus blossoms.]<sup>1</sup>

In that passage it is obvious that the initial intention of serving the beverage to enamor the guest has the reverse reaction, it is the poetic "I" who falls in love

with the guest upon opening the jar of tea. It is as if the tea was magical in power, that it cast a spell on the protagonist who had no option but to fall hopelessly in love with her guest at the exact moment she opened the jar. The particular scent of the leaves is citrus and coincides with the positive, upbeat, sunny, lively, blossoming feeling of falling in love, as it also does with the guest's happy laughter.

Shortly after serving the drink, the hostess invites the guest to a second cup during their conversation. It is as if she wishes to prolong the happy, loving sensation she is feeling. It will also prolong the visit, as she does not wish her guest to depart:

¿Más té? / de lirio agrego, / ¿de qué carajos te sonríes?, / de que no me acuerdo, dices, / de la última vez que estuve tan feliz, / ah, / digo, / voy a la cocina, destapo la lata de té / de azahares, si fuera bruja / te envenenaría el té / con una gota de algo / que te hiciera nunca olvidar / lo que acabas de decirme. / . . . / ¿Está bueno el té?, / de lirio, (delirio), / sí: es té de lirio. (*Lunas* 14-15)

[More tea?, / citrus, I add, / And why the hell are you smiling?, / You reply, because I don't remember / the last time that I was so happy, / Ah, / I say / and I go to the kitchen, open the lid of tea, / of iris, and if I were a witch / I would poison the tea / with a drop of something / that would make you never forget / what you have just said to me. / . . . / Is the tea good?, / citrus, (delirious) / yes: the tea is citrus.]

This passage shows that the guest is reciprocating the feeling of happiness. The warm beverage coincides with the warm feelings flowing between the artist and her guest. Once again, the protagonist goes to the kitchen and opens the lid of tea. This time she states it is "de lirio," iris, and wishes she could put something magical in the tea that would cast a spell over her guest and preserve this moment forever in her memory. Flowers have been known to have altering effects on people when ingested. This may be why she says the tea is "iris," although she later states that it is the same citrus tea as before. Berman's play on words is also important in this passage, as "de lirio" as two words means "of iris," but the two words together "delirio" mean "delirious." Tea of "azahares," "citron blossoms," is a traditional drink symbolic of matrimony in Mexico, hence here it expresses the intense sense of everlasting love the protagonist feels. She does not want her guest to share affection with anyone else, she wants a serious commitment. "Azahares," "citron blossoms," is similar to the Spanish word "azar," meaning "chance." These two women shared an afternoon by "chance" over tea and as a result the protagonist now is "deliriously" in love with her guest. The notion of feeling delirious clearly alludes to the power

of emotion over reason, and the heightened sense of feeling something so intensely that one feels out of control.

The amorous "magic" of that day's tea is not everlasting. Although the two women become close lovers, discord arises between them. The artist feels abandoned when her partner spends time or has relationships with others. When the poetic "I" is upset, she no longer drinks tea in the company of her lover, but alcohol while she is alone:

Me acuclillo en el centro de los dibujos / Bebo, fumo, los miro detenidamente / Bueno, pienso / a continuación trato de pensar algo, / algo más, cualquier cosa, / . . . / Todo se ilumina de improviso: un relámpago / Luego la remota explosión del trueno / El cielo me ha sacado una fotografía, pienso – sonsa y / triste de mí – / A la retratista por fin alguien le ha hecho un retrato, / así me lo digo mientras alargo la mano para tomar el vaso / de mezcal / Doy un largo sorbo. (*Lunas* 39-40)

[I stoop to the center of the drawings / I drink, smoke, and slowly look at them / I think, O.K., / and then try to think of something, / about something else, about anything, / . . . / Everything suddenly lights up: a streak of lightning / Then the remote explosion of thunder / The sky has taken my photograph, I think – fool and / poor me – / Finally someone has taken a portrait of the portrait artist, / that's what I tell myself while extending my hand to pick up the glass / of mezcal / I take a long sip.]

Here alcohol appears not in a moment of celebration, but in a moment of desperation. The sadness and despair brought about by the pain of abandonment leads the protagonist to drink alcohol in an attempt to drown her sorrows. As she drinks, the artist tries to forget her lover and think of anything else but her. We see her as drunk, literally from alcohol and figuratively from love. The "portrait" taken of her is of an emotionally stormy, as paralleled by the thunderstorm, and tormented woman. The alcohol she is drinking is a specialty product of Mexico. Mezcal is hard liquor that is produced in Mexico and it originates as far back as the time of the Aztecs and the arrival of the Spaniards. Tequila is an example of a mezcal, but all mezcal is not tequila. The base of mezcal is derived from the fermented juice of agave plants, a spike-leafed lily, found in various regions of Mexico. Hence, the mezcal is a typical national drink and Berman uses it in this passage to show that the protagonist resorts to strong alcohol to help ease her pain. While the flowers found in the tea represent positive and delicate feelings earlier in the work, as traditional images of beautiful and delicate flowers, here the flower used to make alcohol is "spike-leafed," and it conveys a sense of hurt or negative feelings, as if the protagonist's

lover has figuratively "wounded" her with her sharp, threatening spikes. The Aztec civilization was conquered and destroyed by the Spaniards, as in Berman's poem the protagonist's heart is conquered and destroyed by love.

Although the emotional connotations of the mezcal are negative in the previous passage, alcohol reappears soon after. Here, the poetic "I" remembers an enjoyable night that she had spent with her lover, just the two of them sharing alcohol in the moonlight:

Bebemos licor de ciruelo oscuro / en el centro de la uva de la noche / Toda la noche licor de ciruelo negro / bajo el hueso blanco de la luna / Toda la noche morada bebemos / en dos copitas de plata: / tu sonrisa, una, / la luna la otra / Toda la u / va, la lu / na toda, tu / y yo titu / beando entre tú / y yo y la lu / na y las tres / empolvadas de nácar / serenamente borrachas. (*Lunas* 47)

[We drink dark plum liquor / in the center of the grape of the night / Dark plum liquor all night long / Under the white bone of the moon / We drink all through the purple night / from two silver cups: / your smile, one, / The moon the other / All the g / rape, all the mo / on, you / and I wai / vering between you / and I and the mo / on and the three of us / covered in nacre / serenely drunk]

The romantic setting of sharing dark plum wine all night long in the moonlight here parallels the sexual relationship of the lovers. The allusions to the color purple, the "dark plum," the "purple night" can be sexual references to the female body, as also can be the allusions to the color white of the "moon" and the "nacre." During the drinking, there is no evidence of conversation, the communion between the two lovers is purely liquid and flowing, representative of sexual juices and desire, as they are serenely drunk. The division of words between verses also adds to the sense of drunkenness, as it represents an effect of stuttering or wavering. The promise of this love that begins with emotional enamoring over tea, and that further develops into physical love over wine, has failed to meet the expectations of the protagonist, as expressed when drinking the mezcal. She wishes for a monogamous, steady relationship with her lover, but in the end has to settle for a sporadic, sometimes rocky, and non-monogamous relationship with her if she wishes to retain her at all in her life.

Alcohol and tea also make appearances in Berman's play *El suplicio del placer* (*The Punishment of Pleasure*, 1994). The two main characters are generically named "El," "He," and "Ella," "She." They share living quarters and it is through their conversations that we learn about their lives. The two characters are not married, they are not monogamous, nor are they bound to traditional gender roles, as themes of cross-dressing and androgyny emerge. He shows

effeminate characteristics at times, and She sometimes dresses as a man and dons an artificial mustache in order to avoid unwanted advances from men while out in public. While in the apartment alone, the two characters share their experiences, but oftentimes do not agree and do not live in peace. Tea and alcohol are representative of this discord.

When the play begins, the scenery is already set to include tea, as two tea-cups are already in place. She is drinking tea quietly alone, while He is still sleeping from a late night out. When he finally emerges from the bedroom, the conversation between them begins and quickly turns to the topic of tea:

Ella: Tómate tu té. Está servido.  
 El: (Luego de probarlo.) Está frío.  
 El se levanta con la taza va hacia una maceta y allí vierte el té.  
 Regresa a sentarse, empina la tetera: ya no hay té. La mira con rencor. Observa que el té de su taza aún humea. Ella da un sorbo. (*El suplicio de placer* 162)

[She: Drink your tea. It's served.  
 He: (After trying it.) It's cold.  
 He gets up with the cup and goes to a flowerpot and pours the tea into it. He returns to his chair, tips the teapot: there's no more tea. He looks at her with hatred. He notices that the tea in her cup is still steaming. She takes a sip.]

The fact that She tells him to drink the tea puts her in a favorable light to spectators, as she has apparently carried out a normal, caring act traditionally ascribed to women in patriarchal Mexican society. It is as if she has routinely prepared nice hot tea for him in the morning so that he can relax and so that the two of them can converse. She is seen in the traditional female role of being the "server" or "care giver," as she tells him "It is served," meaning she prepared and served the tea. After tasting it, however, he discovers the tea is cold. The frigidity of the tea foreshadows the lack of warmth or change in temperature in their relationship. Although He is angry, he does not verbally say anything to her. Instead, he uses the tea to express his displeasure with her, when he carries the tea to a flowerpot where he inappropriately empties it. He attempts to serve himself tea, but discovers there is no more in the teapot. Again, he says nothing to her, but glances at her with hatred. She pretends not to notice, as she takes a sip of her still steaming hot tea. Here Berman alters the previous impression of the character "She." No longer a dutiful caretaker, "She" has purposely deceived the man into thinking she had done something nice for him and that she cared about him. Her silence regarding his cold tea and her flaunting of her drinking hot tea reinforce the idea that her actions were purposely calculated. She does not offer to prepare him new tea, nor

does she offer to share hers, and she does not apologize. She breaks the traditional stereotype of woman as dutiful caregiver by her refusal to serve him proper tea.

The motive of the cold tea is discovered as conversation resumes. He had been out late drinking and looking for women, but does not remember the details of the evening. She has to remind him of what had happened, that he had ordered champagne for a lady to whom he would later make love. "She" criticizes him for sleeping with a woman and not even remembering the details. This is criticism specific to a traditional male attitude of machismo in Mexico, where it has been traditionally socially encouraged and acceptable for males to use numerous women to satisfy their own sexual desires. He has a hangover and she tells him to "Sírvenle otro whisky," "Serve yourself another whisky" (*El suplicio del placer* 163). She tells him to serve it to himself, as she will not serve him. She then adds "Sí, quédate amnésico y luego hazme el favor de fenecer de cirrosis hepática," "Yes, be an amnesiac and then do me the favor of dying from cirrhosis of the liver" (*El suplicio del placer* 163). As with the serving of cold tea, her comments are meant to provoke and wound him, perhaps because she herself feels hurt that he had slept with another. An argument ensues about if romantic attraction and fidelity really exist between "He" and "She." The confusion of identities arises and it is only when she puts on the mustache, an indication of bisexuality within a conservative society, that he kisses her and this act of the drama ends. Tea and alcohol, therefore, serve as negative mechanisms that symbolize the lack of harmony between the two partners and they serve to express hatred and deceit that result from betrayal, traditional societal expectations placed on men and women, and lack of communication. Two people who seem modern, independent, and in control of their lives have discovered that perhaps they really are not.

A similar pair of lovers is seen in Berman's drama *Muerte súbita* (*Sudden Death*, 1989). Andrés is a writer who shares his life with his girlfriend Gloria. One day a mysterious old friend of his, Odiseo, enters the home and destroys Andrés's manuscript, their friendship, and Andrés's relationship with Gloria. Odiseo creates a violent love triangle. The serving of drinks, in this case coffee and alcohol, is once again crucial to the idea of manipulation, miscommunication and failure, as they are involved in this love triangle. Coffee appears early in the drama, when Andrés tells Gloria to prepare coffee and meets with Gloria's resistance to fulfill his request. She ignores him the first two times he asks her. The third time he asks, she finally responds "Que te lo traiga tu madre," "Let your mother bring it to you" (*Muerte súbita* 93). This is reminiscent of the refusal to serve proper tea in *El suplicio del placer*. Once again, the woman defies traditional patriarchal expectations that she be caregiver to her man. Moreover, Gloria's response comes in the form of an offensive insult. The insult includes reference to the "mother," a traditionally revered figure, the cult of devotion to "mothers" has been an essential to stability

and tradition in patriarchal Mexican society. Much like the male character in *El suplicio del placer*, Andrés decides to prepare his own beverage when the woman fails to do so. Comedy emerges as Andrés even fails at heating the water for coffee and does not even notice it. It is Gloria who brings the over-boiled water to his attention (*Muerte súbita* 101). This demonstrates that Andrés, a grown man, is not fully capable of carrying out a simple routine task. It indicates that Gloria perhaps normally prepares the coffee, but now she is expressing her growing dissatisfaction with him via her refusal to cater to him. Instead of providing him warmth and comfort with coffee, she provides him with coldness, indifference, and eventually nothing. This episode of "over-boiled water" foreshadows the bubbling anger between Andrés and Odiseo, and how Andrés will be "burned" by Odiseo who ruins his manuscript and his relationship with Gloria.

It is interesting to note that after Odiseo enters their lives, Gloria is willing to prepare coffee for everyone. Andrés offers to prepare it, but Gloria responds with "yo pongo el café, mi vida," "I'll put the coffee on, my love" (*Muerte súbita* 122). Why is she now so polite and loving now that Odiseo is a guest? Perhaps she wishes Odiseo to see her as a loving, traditional care-giving woman, either out of politeness or out of attraction. During conversation between Odiseo and Gloria, it emerges that he is physically attracted to her, and she is interested in spending time with Odiseo, since Andrés usually neglects her needs in favor of dedicating all his time and energies to writing his novel. After sharing cognacs with Odiseo, Gloria decidedly avoids his sexual advances, but eventually gives in to them. Alcohol perhaps played a part in freeing emotions and producing the urge to follow their impulses. Andrés finds them in bed and reproaches Gloria for the betrayal. She blames Andrés for not being attentive to her needs and begs for forgiveness, but is unforgiven. She moves from the apartment to start a new life.

Odiseo refuses to leave the apartment, since he is out to destroy Andrés's life completely. The two of them converse and argue, and Odiseo wants the two of them to share a few beers. Odiseo is causing a scene because he cannot find any limes for the beer, as it is Mexican custom for limes to go with beer. Andrés tells him to take the beer and leave, but Odiseo is insistent upon staying. He tries to force Andrés to drink beer, but Andrés refuses. Odiseo threatens: "Si no la tomas, me la tomo. Caso Gloria," "If you don't take it, I will. Like I did with Gloria" (*Muerte súbita* 151). Drinking beer together can be considered a friendly gesture, as perhaps it will help Andrés temporarily forget about Gloria. However, drinking beer to the point of drunkenness can also lead to violence, especially in a situation that is already hostile. Being under the influence of alcohol also sometimes leads to one being easily manipulated, as Odiseo could manipulate Andrés's life and actions. In any case, Odiseo's attempt to force Andrés to drink beer parallels Odiseo's attempt to force himself upon Andrés's life in order to destroy it. In the end, Odiseo succeeds and burns the most

important thing in Andrés's life, his novel. The story perhaps is not hopeless, as Andrés at the end of the drama begins to write another manuscript. It is unclear, however, as to whether or not Andrés learned anything from the failed relationships, manipulations, and miscommunications in his life, as his life appears to be going in the same direction as before, dedicating life to writing a novel.

Similar to *Muerte súbita*, Berman's drama *Yankee* (1979) also features a male character, Alberto, who devotes his life to penning a novel. Alberto and his wife Rosa live with their baby in a beach house in Mexico, where Alberto writes novels while Rosa cares for the family. Alberto needs Rosa to listen to him read and speak about his chapters. When Rosa listens to his work, it gives Alberto a boost in ego and confirmation that his creation is valid. As in *Muerte Súbita*, another man imposes himself as a guest at the home and destroys the lives of the couple. This time, the man is an ex-Vietnam war veteran, Bill, from the United States. He insists on staying with the couple as a repairman for their beach house, and gives them the excuse that living with them will help him find his true identity. Alberto's jealousy of Bill escalates throughout the work, as he must increasingly vie for Rosa's attention.

Seen as a traditional motherly figure at the beginning of the drama, taking care of her family and nurturing her husband, Rosa abandons that image as she takes an interest in Bill. Alberto craves communication with her because he depends on her to bolster his self esteem when she listens to him read his work. As a way to entice Rosa into listening to him, or at least into being comfortable while doing so, Alberto prepares coffee for the two of them.

Me voy a preparar un café. ¿Quieres una taza? Va regular el capítulo. . . Ya está tu café, Rosa. ¿Dos de azúcar?. . . Cuando salgas del dormitorio tómallo. Lo dejo sobre mi escritorio. ¿Rosa? . . . ¡Me dejaste hablando sólo! . . . Me pudre hablar sólo! . . . (*Yankee* 49-50)

[I'm going to prepare some coffee. Would you like a cup? The chapter is going fine . . . Your coffee is ready, Rosa. Two sugars? . . . Drink it when you come out of the bedroom. I'll leave it on my desk. Rosa? . . . You left me talking to myself! . . . I hate talking to myself!]

It appears as if he is trying to be nice to his wife by preparing her a cup of coffee, even though the motive for the coffee is to have her as a captive audience. He even tries to add "sweetness," the sugar to the coffee, or symbolically to their relationship. Rosa's absence reflects the abandonment of her traditional role and the escalation of her husband's anger. In a rage, he goes downstairs and bumps into a piece of furniture. He punches the desk and the coffee spills. He runs to save his manuscript, sits down, and resumes writing, claiming the sheet

of paper will listen to him, word for word (*Yankee* 50). The spilled coffee due to Alberto's jealousy foreshadows the breaking or knocking down of his and Rosa's relationship. In the end, the couple fails to communicate effectively through words, even Bill does not manage to find a steady identity, and their lives come undone when the three characters end up ruining each other's creations and desires.

As coffee would be the link or prop that Alberto needed to help him obtain Rosa's presence and listening ear, in Berman's drama *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* (*Between Villa and a Naked Woman*, 1993), tea plays a similar role. Gina, a divorced and financially independent business woman, lives alone in an apartment to which her married lover Adrián comes to visit her. Adrián's visits are sporadic and he controls when and how often he visits. Gina worries that the only reason he comes over is to make love. She wants more from him, a genuine conversation, a connection on a spiritual level. When Adrián arrives at the apartment, Gina insists on preparing tea, since it will delay their usual routine of making love immediately after his arrival. Adrián is confused and does not comprehend why tea is so important to her. After a few lines of conversation are exchanged, Adrián impatiently asks if the tea is ready, and she tells him water takes time to boil and that the tea needs time to "infuse." The "infusion" of tea is symbolic of the fusion of the lovers, physically and spiritually. They achieve physical union, but not spiritual union. It is as if tea and conversation are foreign to Adrián, that nobody has ever had this ritual with him. This again is criticism of the machista attitude that has traditionally existed within patriarchal Mexican society, men are encouraged to establish physical relationships with many women while not being encouraged to establish emotional or intellectual relationships with them. They converse awkwardly and every time the conversation begins to die down and physical advances begin, Gina quickly checks on the status of the tea. We see that Adrián and Gina are incompatible aside from their physical relationship, and that he does not fulfill her communicative desire for normal conversation, represented by his failure to take tea with her.

This desire to create intimacy and communication by offering coffee or tea also appears in Berman's novel *Amante de lo ajeno* (*Lover of the Foreign*, 1997). Here the setting for drinks is not a home, as it was in Berman's other works, it is a university cafeteria. Three female students studying psychology routinely sit down and share coffee and pastry as they would casually talk to or observe strangers. The habitual routine, the commonplace act of sharing coffee, sweet food, and conversation serves as a manner of the three girls to obtain their goal of psychoanalyzing the people they speak to. They create a sense of false security in a relaxed atmosphere:

Nueve de cada diez veces la persona aludida aceptaba y se lanzaba a contar una historia protagonizada nada menos que por

ella misma. Las Tres Gracias tomaban café, comían pastel, escuchaban con ojos fascinados, era mejor que ir al cine. Hacían preguntas que animaban al hablador, intervenían para confesar alguna anécdota personal muy íntima, de alguna manera paralela al monólogo del entrevistado, que usualmente correspondía con un aumento de sinceridad y emotividad. (*Amante de lo ajeno* 24)

[Nine times out of ten the selected person accepted and automatically launched into telling a story about him/herself. The Three Graces drank coffee, ate pastry, listened with fascinated eyes, it was better than going to the movies. They asked questions that animated the speaker, they intervened to confess some intimate personal anecdote, somewhat parallel to the interviewee's monologue, that usually corresponded to a rise in sincerity and emotion.]

They eat pastry, a sweet comfort food. This lures their guests into feeling comfortable and the "sweetness" of the food is meant to create the image of them as "sweet" girls. The fact that the girls are called the three "graces" is ironic, since they are not nice or innocent. They are clever and manipulative and use food and drink to disguise it. The guests leave animated, content, and full of hot coffee and sweet pastry, unaware that they have been manipulated and analyzed.

Drinks play a crucial role in the works of Sabina Berman, one of contemporary Mexico's most popular authors. It is important to observe food and drink as, according to Roland Barthes, ". . . a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior. Information about food must be gathered wherever it can be found: by direct observation in the economy, in techniques, usages, and advertising; and by indirect observation in the mental life of a given society" (Barthes 21). The analysis of Berman's use of drinks in her texts reflects the beverages as the functioning system of communication and body of images that Barthes referred to. In her works, Berman shows the traditional social protocol of drinks, and then shows how this protocol is rejected. It is a sign of a changing Mexican society in which gender roles are changing, where machismo is becoming antiquated and both sexes seek companionship yet independence. Berman indicates in her texts that modern Mexicans have yet to fully achieve independence and security within relationships, and they symbolically rely on drinks to express their dependence to or on others, or to express their desire for independence and new identities. Berman has created a representational discourse of desire via the depiction of drinks as a decisive turning point in many types and levels of interpersonal relationships that have failed due to manipulation and failed

communication. She will make readers think twice when someone offers us a drink, as it may not be only a polite social protocol after all.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All translations into English are my own.

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## En los márgenes de la Historia: El desplazamiento del archivo en *Los pañamanes* de Fanny Buitrago<sup>1</sup>

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Heterogeneity of cultures, languages, sources, beginnings, is at the core of the Archive's founding negativity, a pluralism that is a sub-version or sub-version of the masterstory.

Roberto González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive*

Los habitantes de El Arenal eran los hijos de aquellos pañamanes que años atrás, invadieron los terrenos de la Intendencia, arrebatando a la Nación sus sagradas propiedades [. . .] para obtener un lugar bajo el sol y dejar de ser parias entre los parias. La mitad de ellos difuntos al terminar la empresa. Todavía. En las noches de intenso verano [. . .] se escuchaba a las hembras hablar de la invasión [. . .]. Sin desespero ni añoranza. Como se recita el credo o el avemaría. No para diversión de narradores o escuchas. Sino para impedir que degeneraran en el olvido.

Fanny Buitrago, *Los pañamanes*

De la extensa producción literaria de la escritora Fanny Buitrago, sólo su novela *Los pañamanes* (1979) ha recibido cierta atención por parte de críticos y estudiosos, gracias al capítulo que Antonio Benítez Rojo le dedica en su libro *La isla que se repite* (1989).<sup>2</sup> En los últimos años, sin embargo, se ha manifestado un renovado interés por la obra de la escritora colombiana, el cual se aprecia en la aparición de dos disertaciones concentradas en el análisis de su narrativa: *El cuestionamiento de los mecanismos de representación en la novelística de Fanny Buitrago* de Elizabeth Montes Garcés, publicada en 1997, y "Permanencia y transgresión en la narrativa de Fanny Buitrago: de la tradición oral al posmodernismo" (1997) de Silvana Tanzi.

Como bien señala Montes Garcés en su capítulo "*Los pañamanes*; una visión posmoderna de la historia", esta obra de Fanny Buitrago puede situarse en la tradición de novela-archivo identificada por Roberto González Echevarría en *Myth and Archive* (1990). El crítico y teórico cubano menciona novelas como *Cien años de soledad* (1967) y *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* (1981) de Gabriel García Márquez, y *El arpa y la sombra* (1979) de Alejo