



## **LINKING THE AMERICAS**

**RACE, HYBRID DISCOURSES, AND THE  
REFORMULATION OF FEMINE IDENTITY**

**LESLEY FERACHO**

# **Linking the Americas**

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Lesley Feracho

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# Introduction

## Women and Individual and Communal Identities

An understanding of any socially and historically gendered subject must take into account definitions of the individual along with the complex interactions of peoples that form a collective. It is the interaction of the two that defines us and against which we define ourselves. In the end, one consequence of this process of mutual influences of individual and community is a greater understanding of the ways in which identity is formed and redefined.

In defining the representation of identity there are issues that are an integral part of the approaches to each self-definition—whether subjective or objective. Among these are questions of power and its effect on the development of individual agency. This inquiry in its various forms has centered on themes of entitlement to power and its uses, abuses, and levels of engagement. Because it is at the root of human interaction the dynamics of power is displayed in a wide range of arenas, among them social relations, economics, politics, science, history, and literature.

In particular, the ability to exercise power in the construction or reconstruction of identity (whether individual or communal) has been sought after throughout history, since before the written word. As critics like Debra Castillo and Trinh Minh-ha have explored in their works, who has the power to write, and consequently, who is excluded from this activity, are two important questions to be considered in studying the history of writing as a tool of yielding power.<sup>1</sup> Their studies have shown that the answers to these questions are different when exploring men's access to writing versus women's because of women's disenfranchisement and restricted access to instruments of empowerment. In addition, a complex web of factors ranging from race and class to historical context, sexuality, and religion mediates each woman's access to these tools. These factors when considered together contribute to a subject who is defined not only as an individual entity but also in relation to a collective—be it as part of a majority or belonging to a marginalized group. For the marginalized in particular, the process of self-definition includes a search for tools of empowerment. Among the

tools at their disposal, writing serves as a means of reconstructing an identity in which women are subjects, navigating sociocultural and economic forces that objectify them.

In analyzing women's literature of the Americas and especially self-representational and autobiographical texts it is important to recognize not just the sociocultural and historical differences that distinguish the experiences represented textually, but also the commonalities that can be used as a bridge between them. This book will explore how four specific works by writers Carolina Maria de Jesus, Clarice Lispector, Julieta Campos, and Zora Neale Hurston demonstrate common methodology that women of the Americas use in exploring and exercising their power of self-definition through writing.

The category "women of the Americas" in itself is an all encompassing term that is not only made up of commonalities of regional histories and social categories but is also importantly separated by specific political systems, different paths of sociocultural development, and histories of migration that in turn affect the conditions under which each woman lives—from North America to the Caribbean to the Southern Cone. An understanding of these differences and similarities is key to a greater awareness of the ways in which autobiographical and self-representational texts in particular have been used to reconstruct identities where women are subjects. For women of African descent this process has included the reevaluation of the concepts of race, diaspora, and dominant versus marginal subject positions. As an African American scholar and second-generation Caribbean woman, these issues of migration and the navigation of different cultural and historical codes have influenced the formation of my personal and professional identity. As I navigate the spaces that constitute my subjectivity, the lens through which I reconstruct an identity linked to the communities to which I belong are consequently in a constant state of adjustment and readjustment. The definition of "community" in itself is as multiple as the identities which can be used to define me. The communities of the Caribbean and African Americans and the discourses of representation at work in each context are as important factors in my self-definition as any biological familial unit.

Similarly, in this book each subject's navigation of subjectivity and community extends far beyond the family to encompass the complex historical, social, and political contexts of each region, ranging from the United States in the 1940s through Brazil of the 1960s and 1970s to Cuba of the 1980s. In an age that some define using the terms "global," "post modern," "syncretic," or "diasporic" in specific cases, the impact of hybridity and cross-cultural connections in particular is critical in understanding current redefinitions of the self. For this reason, I have chosen

contemporary texts from three countries—Brazil, Cuba, and the United States—whose sociocultural and historic contexts embody notions of hybridity, especially in terms of the postcolonial racial history of Cuba and Brazil compared to the United States. As Michael Dash observes in *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (1998), the migrations and intersections of social, political, and historical factors that affect this process can especially be examined in the literature of the “heteroglossic” Americas, a region uniting sometimes complementary, sometimes originally antagonistic forces. Consequently, in a region with a history as complex as the Americas these dialogues are necessarily fluid and exemplary of the concept of hybridity that I will discuss here.

One important link between the various feminine voices in this region is the process of what I term the reformulation of identity that each author undertakes in her work. As part of this process each subject (re)creates not a static product but rather a fluid exchange between the author, protagonist, text, and sociocultural factors that influence her. The prefix *re* indicates that a self-definition is already present at the time the subject chooses to express herself in the written medium. However, as a result of social or ontological forces, this individual exercises agency in redefining herself in a way that promotes empowerment. As Neuman observes, this project is especially important for people who have been prohibited from exercising full subjectivity:

At the same time they have refused to relinquish the possibility of a unified self: why give up a visibility and a position from which to act, a visibility and a position only just beginning to become available in either social praxis or literary theory to those who are not Euro-American, white, middle-class and male. Moreover, for women, people of colour, colonial peoples, the poor, and non-heterosexuals . . . the understanding of the material as well as the discursive circumstances of their oppression is a primary step towards freedom from that oppression through self-possession. (217)

By rejecting the universal self as a model this theorization opens up spaces for marginalized identities to assert their subjectivity.

While the concept of a unified subject is one strategic site of social and literary empowerment, my analysis of the four texts from the United States, Cuba, and Brazil will center on three key questions about women’s redefinition of selfhood that challenge this representation as the only source of power from which to contest oppressive discourses:

How is the reformulation of identity a hybrid process that connects social, historical, political, and discursive or textual factors?

How is hybridity represented in contemporary women's texts across the multilingual Americas that specifically deal with the ramifications of writing and self-representation?

What do these different representations of hybridity imply for future conceptions of feminine writing?

There is ultimately a common link in the reformulative processes of identity experienced in the four texts I will analyze. Despite the markedly varied consciousness of historical positioning displayed by the protagonists, the differences in their ontological beliefs and the discursive frameworks used, all four authors exhibit three interwoven conditions of self-reflexivity, displacement, and hybridity.

### Autobiography and the Self-Reflexive Text

Regardless of their focus, what these texts share is a varying degree of self-representation that defines them as autobiography or self-reflexive. As Laura Marcus notes in her study *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, studies of autobiography historically began with the assumption of a unified self that used the genre to represent itself textually—whether it be for confessional purposes or to serve as an exemplary text for others to follow. As autobiographical criticism developed, the focus on the self was achieved through the emphasis on categories of presence/absence, unity/alienation, and self/text that would fall into one of two possible approaches: (1) the emphasis on subjectivity and the essential self or, (2) the impossibility of self-representation and the only certainty being the existence of a self divided between the subject that writes and the subject that is written (Marcus 183).

As de Man states, there is a mutual influence in the autobiographical text that also breaks boundaries of reality and fiction. As part of each individual re-creation of identity through writing, the discursive framework chosen to facilitate this reformative process significantly influences the subject's textual articulation so "that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture" (69). This cycle of influence is, however, limited by the inevitable instability of the autobiography because of its inability to provide a total

revelation of the author or subject through the textual subject. The gap between the author and second subject is further complicated by the lack of an essentialized, unified being. It is a multifaceted constructed self, created by the interaction of social, political, and ideological factors. Ultimately, therefore, what defines the autobiographical act and, consequently, the autobiographical subject, is the exploration of the possibility of representing the historically positioned subject through language and in accordance with the parameters of the specific discourse used.

In the context of women's autobiographical narratives these questions of the possibility of representing the self through written discourse become even more complex. When women's historical silencing—social, economic, and artistic—is placed alongside these theories of subjectivity, the question of the effect of the possible death of the subject on women's writing as empowerment becomes especially important. Marcus notes that in general, debates about the death of the subject brought about a change in the terms used: "What seems to have emerged from this process is a stronger sense of the plurality and the social construction of subjectivities and, possibly, a shift from concepts of "subjectivity" to those of "identity" and "difference," concepts less philosophically burdened and more overtly attuned to culture and history" (201). I have chosen to include fiction, diaries, journals, letters, memoirs, and testimonials in the genre of autobiographical narrative and in a larger scope, as self-referential texts. The foundation for this framework is based on definitions of metafiction that explore the blurring of boundaries in the literary text and beyond. Linda Hutcheon points out the breaking down of boundaries in metafiction, particularly between the reader and the act itself, leading to its incorporation as "thematized parts of the narrative situation, *acknowledged* as having a co-producing function" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 37). However, as Patricia Waugh points out, the crossing of boundaries goes beyond the reader's relationship with the text and extends into the role between the characters themselves and the concepts of reality and history: "If, as individuals, we now occupy 'roles' rather than 'selves,' then the study of characters in novels may provide a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside the novels. . . . Literary fiction . . . becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself" (3). As this wall is broken down, metafictional writing turns on itself and "consistently displays its conventionality, which explicitly and overtly lays bare its condition of artifice, and which thereby explores the problematic relationship between life and fiction (Waugh 4). As such, the very concept of history is challenged, as metafiction serves as "both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of

eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures" (Waugh 7). Hutcheon agrees that such concepts are undone by metafiction, and by postmodern fiction in particular:

Historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and falsity may indeed not be the right terms in which to discuss fiction. . . . The interaction of the historiographic and the metafictional foregrounds the rejection of the claims of both 'authentic' representation and 'inauthentic' copy alike, and the very meaning of artistic originality is as forcefully challenged as is the transparency of historical referentiality. (76–77)

Of particular relevance to my readings of these four women's texts is Hutcheon's situation of historiographic metafiction in the postmodern context because of its representation of unstable narrative voices "that use memory to try to make sense of the past. It both installs and then subverts traditional concepts of subjectivity; it both asserts and is capable of shattering 'the unity of man's being'" (85).

Based on these designations, I define this discourse that connects all four writers, as one which attempts some degree of representation of the reality of the writing subject as the written subject. While I use an umbrella term of self-referential texts to connect the four writers, all in one sense or another represent different types and levels of metafiction in accordance with some of the guidelines I have established. While *Quarto de despejo* and *Dust Tracks on a Road*, for example, are autobiographies in the strictest sense (diary and autobiography or even memoir respectively), *A hora da estrela* and *Tiene los cabellos rojizos y se llama Sabina* are more representative of metafiction because of the incorporation of the author into the text.<sup>2</sup> Both texts exemplify what Raymond Federman calls 'surfiction' while *Sabina* in particular could also be seen as a 'self-begetting novel' where the character develops into the author of the very text being read (Waugh 14).

### Subject Position and the Impact of Race

In this study of self-representational texts one significant component of the approach used to assess each woman's reformulation of identity is a consideration of subject position. In particular I explore the ways in which the complexities of race (as a historical, social, and political construct) as a framework for understanding each subject's dialogue with the discourses of marginality and centrality affect identity development. Two theories in particular will orient this discussion of the movement between external and internal structures. The first theory is Barbara Johnson's analysis of

Hurston's textual manipulations of her identity as representative of the movement between inside and outside discourses: "I soon came to see however, not only that the insider becomes an outsider the minute she steps out of the inside but also that Hurston's work itself was constantly dramatizing and undercutting just such inside/outside opposition, transforming the plane geometry of physical space into the complex transactions of discursive exchange" (130). What Johnson highlights is a dialogue (or "discursive exchange") that takes place on the level of the individual's sociohistoric position and the textual plane. When the inside/outside opposition is erased, Hurston, as subject, navigates these levels to the extent that the distinctions are blurred: the discourses operating on each level interact with, sometimes collide with, and ultimately redefine each other and the very meanings of inside/outside as points of origin.

The second theoretical framework for my analysis is based on the internal/external-insider/outsider dialectic as articulated by Nelson Vieira in his study *Jewish Voices in Brazilian Literature*. The foundation for this dialectic is the social marginalization of immigrant Jewish families in Brazil who were redefined as Other yet resident and their attempts to come to terms with such a unique categorization. Vieira's reworking of these terms seeks to understand the workings of a society that tries to impose national unity and homogeneity at the cost of difference:

Nevertheless, the insider-outsider optic is useful as a starting point because it allows us to see the contrast between Brazil's pervasive nationalist ideology of cultural assimilation or cohesiveness and its muted expression of cultural differences. . . . In addition, we learn to question how writers express themselves when their ethnicity is overshadowed by the dominant culture. (N. Vieira 6, 16)

While Vieira's application of the insider/outsider perspective is used here to represent the sociocultural, political, and economic situation of Jews as a community throughout the Jewish Diaspora, it is a dialogical relationship that can be applied on an individual level within similarly structured sociocultural, political, and economic frameworks.

### Displacement and Negotiations of Identity

The insider/outsider perspective as a process brought about in part by migrations of the subject is a significant link in the reformulation of identity of the four protagonists I discuss. As subjects having to experience



the destabilization of displacement and marginalization, their navigation of inside/outside subject positions in their new cultural and political contexts is very much influenced by their dislocation. This crossing of experiences through migration, as Boyce Davies points out, is a unifying factor in Black women's experiences: "It is the convergence of multiple places and cultures that renegotiates the terms of Black women's experiences that in turn negotiates and renegotiates their identities" (3). As a result, their experience can be seen as: "a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing," (4). While these boundary crossings are specifically relevant here to Jesus's and Hurston's experience, as a journey marked by dislocation and multiple encounters I contend that this dynamic is relevant in all four women's texts, from Jesus to Lispector and Campos.

Historically, particularly since the 1920s, Brazil has seen large migration patterns of rural citizens of the northeast territories moving to the more industrialized south (especially cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) in search of work and ultimately a better life. Despite their desires for the Brazilian dream, many faced obstacles of unemployment (in part because of too few jobs for such a great demand), lack of any or adequate housing, and experiences of discrimination. This continuous pattern has been documented by not only historians and sociologists alike but by writers, as seen in texts like Graciliano Ramos's *Vidas secas*, (*Barren Lives*) Gomez Dias' *O pagador de promessas*, (*The Payer of Promises*) and Clarice Lispector's *A hora da estrela*. By contrast, Jesus's story began in rural Minas Gerais, in the town of Sacramento. She was only able to finish two years of formal schooling, during which time a mysterious illness in her legs forced her to leave home in search of medical attention. This odyssey and the people she met during her travels are documented in her third text, posthumously titled *Diário de Bitita* (*Bitita's Diary*). In a style reminiscent of a Bildungsroman, Jesus learns important lessons about human nature and the impact knowledge can have on other's perception of one's identity. After leaving in order to find work with her mother, she is forced to migrate years later with her own family. This time she moves to São Paulo, becoming one of thousands of Brazilians who have traveled similar routes before her.<sup>3</sup> This journey is marked not just by physical change but also by emotional adaptation. As a result, her diary chronicles her daily routines and incorporates the underlying theme of knowledge and the definitions of the self in her new urban setting. From her early interactions with the residents of Sacramento to her relationships with the other inhabitants of the *favela* (slums) of São Paulo, Jesus had to navigate the dynamics of her education versus societal limitations (Levine and Meihy 18–21).<sup>4</sup> The continuous clashes

between these two factors have been especially heightened by the instability of displacement. One effect is that Jesus is compelled to utilize different types of insider/outsider discourses in order to develop an empowering self-definition.

A careful analysis of the insider/outsider interaction as presented by Nelson Vieira clarifies its importance in understanding Lispector's positioning and definition in Brazilian society. As Gotlib records in her biography *Clarice*, Lispector was born to Jewish parents in the Ukraine in December 1920, though she spent no more than two months in that region before finally settling with her parents in February 1921 in Alagoas, Brazil. As a result of a politically motivated exile Lispector had to face her unique position as Other in Brazilian society yet also resident. Vieira's insider/outsider dialectic helps us comprehend the tension that exists between national enforcement of homogeneity and individual difference that is often suppressed, as well as the ways in which cultural assimilation is promoted at the expense of cultural differences. For the writer of ethnic descent like Lispector, this relationship of insider/outsider is often represented on a personal level: "Studying this phenomenon lets us view the Brazilian inside from the Jewish outside and vice versa. . . . In addition, we learn to question how writers express themselves when their ethnicity is overshadowed by the dominant culture" (N. Vieira 16). Equally as important is the sense of displacement that marks Lispector's dual identity and is in turn reflected in her writing. As a writer caught between Judaic heritage (historically and culturally) and a Brazilian tradition (with its Portuguese, African, and indigenous influences), both her nonfictional and fictional texts like *A hora da estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*) chart her navigation of belonging and dislocation in her search for understanding of the self and its relationship to another being. For Lispector, this maneuvering of boundaries is represented in her investigation of the nature of the self, gender, and genre. Because of the influence of her family's migration to Brazil, this process results in the creation of concepts of identity and genre that are marked by displacement and movement between poles of marginal and central positions.

In the case of Julieta Campos, the theme of migration, adaptation, and belonging that are part of the experience of displacement is evident on both a personal and textual level. As a writer who has lived in both the Caribbean as a Cuban citizen and in Latin America as a Mexican resident, Campos's personal identity has been marked by fluid identities of citizenship and Otherness. Her story of departures and arrivals through the Americas is in fact representative of the migrations and interconnections that have historically, socially, and politically characterized the region. Campos's literary works reveal the strong links that exist between her

literary vision and her philosophies of life. As Leland Chambers states in his introduction to the English version of *Tiene los cabellos rojizos y se llana Sabina*:

It is a novel about writing a novel; it is about the subject-object relationship; it is metafictional and intertextual; it is a feminist work that attempts to dislodge the prevailing masculine logocentrism of our culture; it is a Latin American representative of the *nouveau roman*; it explores one means by which the narrator of the work can be drawn into the narrative and thus it demonstrates that writers cannot truly stand outside their work; it is a triumph of the intellect, aided by the unconscious. (xv–xvi)

The metafictional approach to identity evident here is one that Campos has developed throughout her career. In her three books of criticism—*La imagen en el espejo* (The Image in the Mirror, 1965), *Oficio de leer* (The Role of Reading, 1971), and *Función de la novela* (Function of the Novel 1973) Campos develops a theory of creative production akin to the theories of Natalie Sarraute and Claude Simon (Campos Sabina xiii). In *La imagen en el espejo* she summarizes the relationship of the artist with his or her creation and the world which and in which the artist creates by stressing,

The painter, the writer, is not at the outer margins of the world as a spectator with a singular capacity for establishing other universes within that world. He is one more object within the world, and he can be observed from the outside by a spectator capable of observing his work, observing him creating his work, observing the world that he has created within the world. (98)

These structural and ideological migrations have enabled Campos to create texts that defy strict categorizations as exemplary of Cuban writing or Latin American writing in general, as part of a Modernist tradition or the new Latin American narrative in particular. As such, critics like Chambers consider Campos's blurring of nonfictional and gendered boundaries as postmodernist works because of its questioning and destabilization of ideas of center and periphery:

This restless narrative continually introduces new elements, some historical, some geographical, and a great many of them literary—for this novelist, Juliet Campos, is quite aware of her position within a sophisticated, post-modern literary tradition

that is fundamentally European in origin. She refers with complete familiarity to many of the most noted exemplars of Modernist Aesthetics—starting with Proust on page 1—and as often as not she rejects their hegemony over Sabina. Campos rejects as firmly the values of the only distinctive voice invented by Sabina, the threatening masculine voice that is so eager to produce hackneyed and sensationalist works intended to become instantaneous Best Sellers. (Campos, *Sabina* 17–18)

Ultimately, the source of the text's structure is the unconscious. Nonetheless, the ordered world of the novel is inscribed within "the chaotic universe of reality" while the fictional and nonfictional stories proceed on parallel paths. In the end, "the extent to which the work 'configures' a new reality capable of being perceived by others allows for this new, more significant and revelatory vision of reality to join with and begin to alter the old" (Campos, *La imagen* 15). These ideological, structural, and visionary movements are what constitute the hybridity of Campos's text as a challenge to the negative ramifications of displacement.

The last text, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, is an autobiography written by the African American anthropologist, novelist, and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston. While *Dust Tracks* stands in contrast to the works of Lispector and Campos that move outside of the markers of historical and sociocultural contexts to define their female protagonists, it also exemplifies the effects of the author's displacement on the structure of the text.

Similar to Jesus, Zora Neale Hurston occupied different subject positions as a result of her travels from Alabama to Florida and later to other countries around the world as anthropologist and writer. As a young girl from Alabama who grew up in Florida and later received her education at Barnard College, Hurston crossed class lines, from the rural, working-class South to the heart of the privilege of academic life. In the process her self-definition also underwent changes, demonstrating the complex interaction of class, race, gender, and religion in the subject's navigation of individual and societal identity. As Johnson's insider/outsider theory attests, Hurston moved between different physical and discursive sites, from outsider to participant and back. These transitions were difficult, leaving her constantly faced with the challenge of balancing multiple discourses, drawing on each to redefine herself in a new sociocultural and political context.

One result was a sense of displacement that manifested itself on an individual, thematic, and discursive level. The stories of *Dust Tracks* trace Hurston's southern roots and northern development, charting the precarious bridging of the distance between the two. The linguistic registers

in which Hurston relates her life experiences between the South and the North also exemplify this uneasy tension: at times colloquial and at times formal, implicitly questioning and challenging the concept of belonging for herself and the collectives (Black, female, southern, working class, and academic) which she to a degree represents. Hurston's combination of anthropology and fiction creates a work that demonstrates that esthetic and social concerns are not mutually exclusive and can be present in one work. As she states, "When I began to make up stories I cannot say. Just from one fancy to another, adding more and more detail until they seemed real" (52–53). The result of this hybridity, blending truth and fiction, is a problematization of and displacement from both. This movement between both approaches reveals the spaces where they intersect to create a product which reflects as much on the process of creating a hybrid text to perform a "statue of the self" as on the product itself.

### Hybridity and the Feminine Subject

For all four women, one strategic result of and reaction to the projects of self-representation given positions of marginality and conditions of displacement is hybridity on various levels. My application of the concept of hybridity is informed by theories of difference, destabilization, margin, and center in a postcolonial and in some cases, specifically postmodern context. In particular, I turn to the work of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, the extension of their argument in the work of Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, Stuart Hall's work titled "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," and bell hooks's "Postmodern Blackness."

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin as well as Mishra and Hodge, the unfixed state of discourses in nonsettler colonies leads to an inability to fix meaning: "[M]eaning grows out of a dialectical process of a relationship between the margins and the center (meaning arises out of a discourse of marginality); meanings are not culture-specific" (Mishra and Hodge 286). Consequently, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin conclude, the postcolonial representation of such displacement is always characterized by "a complex and hybridized formation" (10).

Stuart Hall's literary and cinematic interrogation of the cohesiveness and yet fractured state of cultural identity and its implications for representation and power of the Black subject also reveal important ideas about multiple subject positions. His sense of difference as British and Caribbean subject and his observations of the postcolonial Caribbean illustrate that in one sense: "This second sense of difference challenges the fixed binaries which stabilize meaning and representation and show

how meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings" (397).

Given these conditions, identity goes beyond permanent positionings of the subject to something " 'strategic' and arbitrary. . . . [M]eaning continues to unfold, so to speak, beyond the arbitrary closure which makes it, at any moment, possible" (Hall 397).

Nonetheless, when speaking of the impact of these theories of difference on postcolonial subjects of color, the ramifications of such a destabilizing process threaten to weaken the acquired social and political power of these groups. As a response to these fears, hooks states that:

Postmodern culture with its decentered subject can be the space where ties are severed or it can provide the occasion for new and varied forms of bonding. To some extent, ruptures, surfaces, contextuality, and a host of other happenings create gaps that make space for oppositional practices which no longer require intellectuals to be confined by narrow separate spheres with no meaningful connection to the world of the everyday. (427)

My definition of hybridity draws on the theories of difference presented here, incorporating the strategic positionings and relationship between margin and center emphasized as a major characteristic of the postcolonial experience. Nonetheless, it parallels hooks's assessment that such a project does not mean the end of cohesive identities based on race and culture, as in the African American experience and by careful extension, in the experience of other marginalized groups, like women (of color, and so on).

Hybridity as I will use the term is therefore the process whereby authors combine extratextual and textual subjects in a way that highlights the movement between positions of marginality and positions of centrality. This interaction occurs on a metatextual and textual level and encompasses sociocultural, racial, textual, gendered, and linguistic structures. One reason for hybridity in women's texts stems from the sociocultural, economic, and political marginalization that has historically been commonplace. Despite significant advances, on some levels this marginalization continues to occur. When engaging in the project of literary self-representation many writers use all the discursive strategies available and occupy various sites in order to subvert male-centered modes of communication. One strategy employed is the use of marginalized discourses, inspired in part by the condition of Other out of which they have historically had to fight, alongside the deconstruction of male-centered discourses. The result is an expanded definition of what

constitutes feminine writing that is chiefly characterized by the dialogic relationship of marginal and central discourses.

My analysis of Jesus, Lispector, Campos, and Hurston's self-representational texts demonstrates how their creation of "statues of the self" is informed by experiences of marginalization, movement inside and outside of sociocultural, historical, and racial discourses, displacement, and desires to redefine their subject positions. All four authors utilize multiple narrative discourses in an interaction of extratextual and textual subjects to explore hybrid representations of the individual. The result is writing that provides a forum for the discussion of women's strategies for obtaining and keeping their agency despite society's attempts to marginalize them while exploring the contributions of these critiques to reshaping and expanding what we define as feminine writing.



## *Chapter One*

# **The Radicalization of Marginality in Jesus's *Quarto de despejo*: *Diário de uma favelada***

### Autobiographical Writing and Women's Agency

In establishing their subjectivity women have used writing as a means of chronicling personal growth and actively redefining themselves in a society that oftentimes had already established categories of identification for them. This has not proven easy because of societal restrictions, whether it be in North America or Latin America. As Debra Castillo notes, "Women in Latin America are consciously involved in a practice that has long been recognized in their male counterparts. To play on a famous structuralist formulation, to write in Latin America is for them more than a verb, transitive or intransitive—it is a revolutionary act" (20). The principal reason for the revolutionary nature of this act is its transgression of historically traditional established norms governing gender roles, especially in the area of literary production. One of the most important difficulties women writers face is lack of opportunity and agency. For lower-income women in particular, denied access to continued formal education to develop reading and writing skills, as well as women financially unable to pursue a career in writing, the only outlet for their life stories is through the mediation of others. However, by telling their stories to others what is affected and compromised are individual agency and the development of a voice as subject. In cases where women have had to tell their stories to mediators of disparate socioeconomic backgrounds, one challenge has been the navigation of differences of privilege and hierarchy between the subject and the collaborative voice (Castillo 29).



There has been not only limited access to literary production for women but also a difference in the terms used to classify men and women's application of knowledge. Men are oftentimes categorized as lucid beings while women are seen as purely intuitive. As Castillo observes:

This explains the different status given the representative man's self-reflection which is seen as a self-construction which can represent the terms of identity of his culture and epoch and women's self-writings which are seen as 'merely' autobiographical, subjective and personal, failing to ramify beyond their immediate context, other than to confirm women's narrow self regard for their inchoate natures. (28–29)

Women, however, have found ways of breaking the silence and participating in literary activities that allow for self-expression. Diaries, letters, testimonials, and memoirs proved especially open to personal expression when other forms of writing were prohibited, allowing women, especially in the case of the first two categories, to record private thoughts without fear of public criticism.

The struggle then became the legitimization of these personal writings as important texts in understanding feminine subjects. As Laura Marcus points out in *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, women have historically been situated outside the laws of genre and selfhood within which the 'pacts' of fiction and of history operate (230). However, progressive feminist studies of the autobiographical genre have recognized its ever-expanding parameters and consequently, the importance of these literary categories in tracing the development of the feminine subject in a particular socioeconomic, historical, and political environment, and as texts in their own right that provide more than just biographical knowledge. In *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith presents an inclusive definition of autobiography that opens up a space for these forms of writing:

Since all gesture and rhetoric is revealing of the subject, autobiography can be defined as any written or verbal communication. More narrowly it can be defined as written or verbal communication that takes the speaking "I" as the subject of the narrative, rendering the "I" both subject and object. From that operational vantage point, autobiography includes letters, journals, diaries, and oral histories. (19)

The construction of this self is an aspect that is especially exposed in autobiographical writings, represented not only in terms of women's so-