
Stirring up the Dust: The Healing History of a *Curandera* in *La insólita historia de la Santa de Cabora*

ELISABETH GUERRERO
BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY

In the novel *La insólita historia de la Santa de Cabora* (*The Astonishing Story of the Saint of Cabora*, 1990) Mexican writer Brianda Domecq revisits the tale of Teresa Urrea, or Saint Teresa of Cabora (1873-1906), a Sonoran mystic and anti-Porfirian activist whose life ended in exile in the United States. Domecq revives Teresa Urrea, rewriting her in light of contemporary historiography and feminist theory to forge a new kind of protagonist who diverges from her depiction in the primary sources. The prerevolutionary novel which first inspired Domecq, *Tomochic* (1893, revised 1906) by Heriberto Frías, depicts Teresa as an exploited hysteric, but *La insólita historia* draws a more complex portrait of a rebel, a flawed human being, and most importantly a healer of both mystical and political wounds. Just as Teresa is a *curandera*, or healer, *La insólita historia* serves as what activist historian Aurora Levins Morales calls history as *curandera*, a healing history.

La insólita historia provides a fictitious rendering of Teresa's life; the novel begins by alternating between Teresa's experiences growing up and the adventures of a woman a century later who takes a trip to Cabora to research Teresa. Teresa's scruffy early childhood is transformed when she moves as a teenager to her biological father's ranch in Cabora, Sonora. Simultaneously, the researcher recalls fragments of data on Teresa from a research portfolio that she lost on the plane. A nameless figure, her identity gradually blends with Teresa's. This follows with "La caída" ("The Fall") in which the researcher has fallen down the sacred hill in Cabora and Teresa has fallen off of her horse. The researcher then disappears from the story. The second part of the novel tells of Teresa's three-month trance after the fall (her first "death") and her subsequent transformation into a popular healer on the ranch. At this time, hundreds of pilgrims come to see the young woman they call "Santa Teresa" and "La Santa de Cabora" and indigenous rebels battle in her name against the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship. The third section of the narrative tells of Teresa's life from her forced exile in Arizona and Texas until her "second" death. An epilogue concludes the novel with the apparent reappearance of the researcher, who has resuscitated from a coma and now claims to be Teresa.

Although critics have previously addressed Domecq's novel as part of the corpus of Mexican narrative, *La insólita historia* is also a novelistic critique of cultural issues of power and healing in the borderlands. Therefore, while the work of such scholarly Mexicanist sources as Jean Franco and Fernando Aínsa is useful, Aurora Levins Morales and other borderlands specialists provide a theoretical base for a study of the novel. Levins Morales advocates the role of historians as *curanderos*, healers who tell the tales of those who are most forgotten or most overlooked. She explains, "my interest in history lies in its medicinal uses, in the power of history to provide those healing stories that can restore the humanity of the traumatized" (25). In "The Historian as Curandera," Levins Morales describes the set of fifteen guidelines she followed in her recent *Remedios* (1998), a history of Puerto Rican women. Although she designed these specifications for historical research and writing, most of them are applicable to Domecq's fictionalized account of Urrea's life. *La insólita historia* carries out a number of Levins Morales' suggestions, such as telling untold or undertold stories, centering women to change the landscape, identifying and contradicting strategic pieces of misinformation, showing agency rather than passive victimization, and embracing complexity and ambiguity.

Domecq's narrative follows closely Levins Morales' first instruction to tell untold or undertold histories such as those of women of color, rural women, or emigrant women. As a rural mestiza who emigrated from Mexico to the United States, Teresa Urrea fits this paradigm; her story has been undertold until recently. While she appeared briefly a century ago as a sick, exploited victim in Heriberto Frías' *Tomochic*, today the desert mystic is undergoing a revival. During key years of the civil rights movement in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s, Teresa's story reappeared briefly as that of a vital Chicana predecessor. Richard and Gloria Rodríguez published an article in *El Grito* providing background on her life and her influence on the U.S.-Mexico frontier; they describe her not as a revolutionary but as a healer whose "part in the history of Aztlán should be known" (179). While in contrast Alfredo Mirandé and Evangelina Enríquez view Urrea as a revolutionary advocate for indigenous groups, they agree with the Rodríguezes in claiming her as a significant Chicana forerunner: "Teresa Urrea served as a precursor not only of the Mexican Revolution but of Chicano political movements and remains a symbol of resistance for contemporary Chicanos. She is thereby a Chicana counterpoint to La Virgen de Guadalupe, a symbol of warmth, succor, and hope for the poor, destitute, and exploited" (86).

More recently on both sides of the border, both Domecq's novel and recent historical studies have once again worked to rescue Teresa de Cabora's story and to give her due attention as a complex agent of history.¹ In *Tomochic*, Frías, a gov-

ernment soldier, gives an account of a series of three battles which took place in 1891 and 1892 in a small (population 300) Tarahumara town in the desert state of Chihuahua. In contrast with the revisionist histories written in the 1990s, in his 1890s account Frías also only briefly mentions the political motives of the rebels. These include obligatory and poorly paid labor in a nearby mine and other abuses by local authorities. Instead, in Frías' version, the people of Tomochic are ignorant messianists fighting under the banner of the illusory Saint Teresa of Cabora. In later editions of the novel, Frías further develops the mysticism of Teresa. She is a tragic figure, whose deluded followers have been mysteriously manipulated into believing that her hysteria is saintliness.

Despite this depiction of Teresa as a spellbound and spellbinding beauty exploited for profit and violence, the contradictory footnotes to the 1906 edition caught Domecq's attention. Perhaps because of the impending revolution, in contrast with Frías' text the editor's footnotes describe Teresa as a militant activist and leader of a resistance movement. These footnotes acknowledge that in addition to selling relics and earth with curative powers, Teresa militantly opposed the Porfirio Díaz regime, encouraging the uprisings of Tomochic and Tomosochic. The editor also observes that she continued her insurgent activities in exile, when she was directly implicated in the failed customs house attack in 1893 in Nogales, Arizona; the plan was to rob funds to finance the revolution. Domecq's novel responds to these contradictory versions in *Tomochic* and in newspaper accounts of the period, reviving Teresa Urrea de Cabora, a figure nearly lost to history and classified as deluded and hysterical.

Levins Morales explains that once a writer has decided to tell such undertold stories, this alters the questions she or he asks. For example, the tale of Teresa de Cabora raises questions about the predecessors of the Mexican Revolution. In addition to such well-known figures as the brothers Flores Magón, in Domecq's novel mystics and indigenous groups such as the Yaqui and Mayo also appear as important forerunners of the revolution. *La insólita historia* focuses not upon generals or presidents but rather upon a woman who works as a healer, a popular leader who has no corridos sung about her exploits and who does not appear in national history textbooks. Teresa de Cabora stands out particularly because of her epoch, a period of paternalism under the presidency of Porfirio Díaz. Jean Franco explains that "although traditionally strong in times of war and strife, [during the Porfiriato] Mexican women were slow to challenge the domestication of women and often fearful of taking a step into areas where their decency would be put into question" (93). The historical figure Teresa de Urrea is notable because she takes the risk of venturing into forbidden political territory and taking on a leadership role, thereby

transcending the paradigm of women's domestic passivity during Porfirio Díaz's rule.

The character in the novel who researches Teresa's life does so in part because she realizes that, unlike Teresa, the "great men" of history will not be forgotten: "A don Porfirio nadie lo olvidaría. Como fuera, estaba sólidamente instalado en la Historia y todavía su fantasma se cernía sobre el presente como una amenaza cíclica.... El milagro había sido Díaz; el milagro había sido Madero.... Inacabables en su permanencia, en su historia, en su recuerdo. Salvados para siempre del olvido" (29) ["Nobody would forget Don Porfirio. No matter what happened, he was firmly installed in history.... Miracles were never frequent, but there was Don Porfirio, mythic, eternal, invincible.... The miracle had been Díaz; the miracle had been Madero. Everlasting, with their permanent place in history" (24)]. The researcher hopes to restore Teresa de Cabora into the national memory, giving her a place of prominence alongside the figures that she thinks will never be forgotten. Likewise, Domecq centers Teresa Urrea in her novel. *La insólita historia* thereby changes the landscape of Mexican prerevolutionary and revolutionary studies, calling attention to previously neglected figures who shaped history along with the well-documented men in power such as Díaz and Madero.

In addition to re-centering women in the narrative, Levins Morales suggests pointing out inconsistencies in the historical record. An example of this strategy would be to note the erasure of a people from the annals of history, often due to ideas of national or cultural purity. As mentioned above, in *La insólita historia* indigenous rebels are given new importance as precursors of the Mexican Revolution. In addition, Teresa is neither nationally nor culturally "pure" as honorary "Queen of the Yaquis" and an expatriot in exile. She does not fit into any previous paradigm of a national hero.

Furthermore, Domecq juxtaposes conflicting news accounts to demonstrate the contrasting interpretations of Teresa Urrea's life and work.² For example, the investigator in the novel who is researching Teresa's life cites Frías and then explains that the incongruities in *Tomochic* inspire her to learn more about Teresa Urrea:

Una figura amorfa y fascinante surgió de las descripciones excelsas del libro: "¿No era acaso un instrumento finísimo, un cristal, manejado en la sombra por ocultas manos, para que a través de sus facetas y de sus aristas los hombres incultos y fuertes ... perpetuasen en los baluartes inexpugnables de sus montes una guerra horrenda de mexicanos contra mexicanos, en el santo nombre de Dios?" ¿Cómo compaginar esas descripciones excelsas con frases como 'aquella pobre muchacha histórica', 'epilepsia pacífica', 'aquella criatura toda nervios'? Desde ese momento se sintió poseída por una curiosidad que le comía las entrañas. (11)

[An amorphous and fascinating figure arose from the impassioned descriptions in the book: “Was she perhaps a fine instrument, a crystal controlled in the shadows by hidden hands so that, inspired by her facets and sparkling edges, strong, rough men would, from their impregnable mountain strongholds, perpetrate a horrendous war of Mexicans against Mexicans, in the sacred name of God?” How was it possible to reconcile such sublime descriptions with phrases such as ‘that poor hysterical girl,’ ‘a victim of passive epilepsy,’ and ‘that deluded, high-strung creature?’ From that moment on she felt possessed by a cantankerous curiosity that gnawed at her peace of mind. (5)]

While travelling to Urrea’s birthplace, the researcher recalls the documentation she had collected from Mexican and U.S. newspapers, from activist Lauro Aguirre’s publications, and from Porfirio Díaz’s letters. These citations demonstrate the inconsistencies in the many previous depictions of Teresa, contradictions that intrigue the researcher. For example, one account embellishes her: “la joven Teresa era de una belleza imponente, con largos cabellos negros que caían hasta la rodilla, ojos luminosos y claros y amplia sonrisa” (46) [“Young Teresa was of imposing beauty, with long black hair and clear, luminous eyes” (37)], while another account describes her as unappealing “illiterate, ignorant, and dirty” (40). Other documents quoted portray Teresa Urrea as a saintly pacifist on one hand or as a fanatical warrior on the other. In this example she incites violence against the government: “quienes la admiraron por sincera se decepcionaron: su tremendo orgullo y su deseo de venganza la llevaron a organizar rebeliones en toda la frontera, encubriéndolas con su santería” (49) [“Miss Urrea, with complete knowledge and malice, planned and led uprisings against the legitimate government” (36)]. And yet in another account she is a gentle figure who bears no responsibility for politics nor rebellion: “esta joven dulce, fina y hermosa predicaba sólo la paz, la meditación, la paciencia como forma de conquistar una mayor justicia; jamás enarboló bandera política ni promovió la lucha armada como forma de lograr el bien” (48) [“refined and beautiful, she preached only peace, meditation, and patience as a means to achieve justice” (38)]. Teresa Urrea appears alternatively as a heretic: “la joven fanática usurpa los derechos sacramentales de la verdadera religión en nombre de un poder supuestamente concedido a ella por Dios” (48) [“The young fanatic is usurping the sacramental rights of the true religion” (38)] or as a saint: “¿no era más satisfactorio recibir los sacramentos de manos de una virgen inspirada y no de las de un sacerdocio explotador, ambicioso y pérfido?” (49) [“Wasn’t it more rewarding to receive the sacraments from the hands of a lovely young virgin than from those of an exploitative, ambitious, and treacher-

ous priesthood?" (38)]. Additional fragments dispute such matters as whether she was clever or ignorant and whether she died old or young.

The novel sums up these contradictions in the historical record; once living in exile, Teresa notes that in U.S. newspapers they would print paradoxical and sensationalist news about her, marking a male-dominated society's inability to accept a female hero:

Un día la ensalzaban describiéndola como la joven valiente que se había enfrentado al ogro de México; otro, decían que era injustamente perseguida por el dictador, y, al siguiente, la acusaban de ser una mujer ignorante y analfabeta que no había asistido a la escuela, que carecía completamente de cultura y que todavía se daba el lujo de hablar sobre el bien y el mal y de fanatizar a lo ignorantes mexicanos con supersticiones absurdas. (295)

[One day they exalted her, describing her as the brave young woman who had stood up to the ogre of Mexico; the next day they said she was unjustly persecuted by the dictator, and on the following day they accused her of being an ignorant, illiterate woman who had never attended school, who lacked any sign of culture, and who still had the nerve to preach about good and evil and to fanatize the ignorant Mexicans with absurd superstitions. (280)]

She is one day a hero, one day a fool; one day a victim and the other a victimizer. Through juxtaposing these contradictions in the historical record, Domecq's novel suggests that Teresa's story deserves a sophisticated analysis that recognizes the complexities in the tale of the Saint of Cabora.

One method that the novel employs to challenge polarizing accounts and to reveal complexity is to show, as Levins Morales suggests, that rather than portraying oppressed communities only as victims, one must also demonstrate their strategies of resistance. In the novel, Teresa makes conscious decisions about her role as healer and leader; for example, when her father orders her to turn away the multitudes of impoverished and desperate patients who have come to seek her help, she refuses and instead arranges for a separate area of her father's property where she can receive them. Upon her exile in the United States, she becomes even more politically active, allowing her photograph to be sold to raise funds for the resistance movement and signing an anti-Porfirian constitution written by activist Lauro Aguirre. Not a deluded victim of ignorance and religious fanaticism, nor downtrodden by Porfirio Díaz, the character Teresa de Cabora acts to transform her historical circumstances. She sometimes succeeds and sometimes fails through the struggle of healing, surviving, and maintaining a career and a family.

Just as Teresa is not a hysteric nor a passive victim, neither are her followers; they have political motives for their rebellion. During the war for Mexican inde-

pendence, insurgents battled under the flag of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Similarly, the indigenous groups who rebel in Teresa de Cabora's name do so not because they are deluded by fanaticism. Rather, they employ her as a banner to support their political cause against Porfirio Díaz, a president who forced recalcitrant Yaquis and Mayos to work virtually as slaves in mines and remote plantations. Most of these workers died within a few years of being sent to such locations as the National Valley.

In exile in Nogales, Arizona, Teresa treats the most miserable indigenous people, the uprooted who search for a history, a remedy for the soul after they have left their homelands to escape from the Díaz government: "Sólo venían los más desahuciados, yaquis o mayos sucios, malolientes, con las ropas desgarradas, exudando miseria por cada poro" (294) ["Only the most destitute continued to arrive: foul-smelling Yaquis and Mayos covered with dirt, in ragged clothes, exuding misery through every pore" (278)]. They ask her to perform baptisms and other ceremonies because, uprooted, they lack elders to pass on their customs and rituals: "Teresa comprendió que la mayoría no necesitaba alivio de males físicos, sino espirituales: querían identidad de pueblo, querían renovados mitos, querían reinventar tradiciones perdidas para sentir que pertenecían a algún lado, a alguna historia" (295) [Teresa realized the majority didn't need relief from physical ailments but from spiritual ones; they wanted the identity of a community, they wanted renewed myths, they wanted to reinvent lost traditions in order to feel that they belonged to some place, to some history" (279)]. Teresa's work in healing is a social act; her attempt to serve the Yaqui and Mayo exiles is a peaceful strategy of resistance to the Díaz regime's persecution of the two groups.

In ministering to a people who suffer from the spiritual ill of a lack of cultural identity, Teresa attempts to treat what literary theorist Gay Wilentz calls "cultural illness." This cultural self-loathing is evidenced by symptoms of alienation and depression as well as physical manifestations. Wilentz explains, "there is a relationship between individual psychosis and ethnicity, particularly in a despised group whose history is full of suffering" (1). Wilentz describes a remedy in fiction writing that is similar to what Domecq has produced and what Levins Morales has outlined. The literary critic finds possibilities for a cure through "wellness narratives," novels by ethnic women writers which heal the culture as the protagonist moves from illness to wellness through reconnection with ethnic cultural traditions and healing practices. Wilentz explains,

These writers appear to be exploring a reexamination of women's traditional role of custodian of the culture in order to develop a community-based model for healing the culturally ill through their writings. They begin the process of a heal-

ing discourse to heal the culturally ill. For people from oppressed cultures, this means reclaiming personal wellness through self-esteem and the “discredited” (to quote Toni Morrison) knowledge of a culture’s healing practices (3).

The theorist claims that the novelistic genre, through its use of metaphorical language, displaces the polarities of binary opposition. This practice includes overcoming an essentialism that privileges traditional, pre-colonial practices over modern medicine. For example, in Clifton, Teresa and the local physician work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa emphasizes the importance of displacing binary paradigms by crossing borders and making cross-cultural connections: “At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes” (79). This is especially true for figures such as Teresa. As the daughter of a white landowner and an indigenous peasant girl, and with her frontier-crossing role as an Arizonian of Mexican origin, Teresa Urrea is a precursor for the “new mestiza.” Indeed, it is when working together with the local physician, who regards her as a normal human being and as a professional equal, that Teresa is most satisfied in her work. Here she is neither glorified nor denigrated for her healing powers. She is able to practice in peace and to work together with the physician as they raise funds for a community hospital. This practice of overcoming polar oppositions resembles that of the “wellness narratives” that Wilentz describes, as they also work to overcome the practice of fragmentation in contemporary medicine, a tradition that neglects the emotional, social and spiritual aspects of disease and wellness. *La insólita historia* also works toward this goal as Teresa devotes her work to healing not only physical ailments but also cultural or political wounds in her indigenous (and indigent) patients.

While Teresa is the hero of the novel, she appears as an individual with human frailties. Levins Morales writes that rather than simplifying historical figures into absolute heroes or absolute villains, “It is in many ways more empowering when we show our heroic figures as contradictory characters full of weaknesses and failures of insight. Looking at those contradictions enables us to see our own choices more clearly and to understand that imperfect people can have a powerful, liberating effect on the world” (31). A number of instances of ambiguity in the novel portray Teresa as a complex character; Domecq employs the genre of fiction to take the liberty of delving into the possibilities of Teresa’s inner vulnerabilities. For example, Teresa makes errors of judgment, initially glorifying her father be-

cause of his power and making poor choices of a mate (as historically documented, first a man who wants to kill her, then her best friend's son). Before awakening from the trance that precedes her rebirth as a healer, her process of recovery takes life from others, as all of the babies in the area die *in utero*. When she begins to cure clients, she neglects her own hygiene, disregarding bathing and clothing and occasionally urinating on herself. When Teresa first becomes fully conscious of her healing abilities, Domecq shows her as displaying an all too human weakness; she finds herself wishing calamities upon others in order to have more opportunities to feel the surge of power that comes with treating their illnesses. "Llegó a fastidiarse de lo rutinario y se sorprendía deseándoles enfermedades terribles a las personas para poder ejercer de nuevo el milagro y sentir aquello que la trascendía pero, también, la elevaba por encima de los demás" (185) ["She began to crave the miraculous experience and hunger for the high it gave her. Anything routine began to bore her, and she was surprised to find herself actually wishing that the people who came would be struck with terrible diseases so she could perform a miracle again and feel the force that transcended her but that also elevated her above the rest" (175)]. Moreover, at times Teresa's powers falter, and their nature is unclear. She often feels responsible for sending others to their death when rebellions or attacks fail.

In sum, Domecq has created a flawed character in Teresa Urrea; she is neither a saint nor a mysterious guru. Although the novel restores Teresa as a national hero, it does not magnify her to heroic proportions. As literary critic Fernando Aínsa indicates, this is a common trait in the new historical novel of Latin America, which "rehumaniza personajes históricos transformados en 'hombres de mármol'" [rehumanizes historical characters transformed into men of marble] (9). This rehumanization of historical figures makes them more relevant to the present, reducing the epic distance that usually separates the hero from the reader. Domecq's novel goes beyond this step; rather than deconstructing a mythic national hero, the work rebuilds, in human proportions, a new hero for today's audience. As Marina Pérez de Mendiola points out in her study of *La insólita historia*, the lengthy and detailed descriptions of Teresa's healings enable the reader to conceptualize and accept her ministrations as ordinary: "At first surprising and mysterious, they become natural; we are in the presence of Teresa no longer a mystic healer but rather a person who, like anyone else, uses her skill in the service of others" (64). Levins Morales would argue that, as a human who transcends her faults as she works hard to aid the community, Teresa becomes more inspiring to the reader through her earthly qualities and struggles. This is the liberating effect of Domecq's novel.

While Teresa Urrea is the primary character in the novel, *La insólita historia* also revives the character Huila, the practitioner of a vital indigenous healing tradition. To make absences visible, Levins Morales recommends attempting to trace those that are missing from the record, as historical evidence is sometimes incomplete in these areas. To personalize this missing information, the historian further suggests using the names of freed slave women or indigenous women whenever possible, writing a personal narrative of an individual life. In this case, Huila takes on a bigger role in the novel than in the historical record, in which she merits a scarce mention as María (a colonized name), the indigenous woman who dwelled on Teresa's father's property and who may have taught Teresa about herbal remedies. Levins Morales suggests that a fictional character can be created if necessary to highlight an absence, "as Virginia Woolf does in *A Room of One's Own* when she speaks of Shakespeare's talented and fictitious sister, for whom no opportunities were open" (28). The genre of fiction provides Domecq with the opportunity to fill in the scarce tracings of Teresa's mentor that she found in the historical record.

Huila is an indispensable figure in Teresa's formation, as she teaches the young woman a new way of approaching life and healing. In contrast with the patriarchal law of Porfirio Díaz's modernizing State which sacrifices the poor, Huila's law rejects both weapons and words to serve and heal the poor by means of senses and perceptions that precede the word. As Aralia López González affirms in her study of Domecq's novel, Huila "organiza la conciencia de Teresa dentro de una lógica de servicio comunitario en contraste con la lógica de poder patriarcal de don Tomás, revinculándola así con su cultura de origen" ["organizes Teresa's consciousness within a logic of community service in contrast with don Tomas' logic of patriarchal power, thereby reconnecting her with her culture of origin"] (502). Like a master of mysticism, Huila teaches beyond the logic of language. She explains to her pupil that words fragment the world, negating its continuous, dynamic flow; naming separates that which was unified: "—El problema, Niña, son las palabras: el lenguaje no nos acerca a la realidad sino que la esconde. Fíjate: tomamos el 'maíz' y el 'metate' y el 'agua' y la 'cal' y los juntamos bien mezcladitos. ¿Tenemos maizmetatemanoaguacal? No. Tenemos 'tortilla,' otro pedacito huérfano, desprendido de su origen" (133) ["The problem, child, is words: language doesn't bring us nearer to reality, it hides it. Just look: we take 'corn' and 'grinding stone' and 'hand' and 'water' and 'limestone' and we mix them all up. Do we have corngrindingstonehandwaterlimestone? No. We have 'tortilla,' another little orphaned piece detached from its origin" (124)]. Teresa applies this lesson in her practice, in which she achieves a wordless trance and heals through touch, earth

and saliva. She proceeds to reach beyond language to comprehend and to heal: “Aprendió a mirar detrás de los nombres de las cosas, buscarles los hilos que las unían con el resto de la vida, descubrir sentidos ocultos para darle la vuelta al intelecto, esquivar la razón, liberarse del lenguaje y ver aquel indivisible fluir que era, según la maestra, la verdadera realidad” (134) [“she learned to look behind the names of things, to look for the threads that joined them with the rest of life, and to discover hidden meanings in order to turn around the intellect, evade reason, free herself from language, and see that indivisible flowing” (134)]. Despite her initial mystical rejection of language, Teresa does not weaken her position as Jean Franco warns:

By subordinating women on the grounds of their lesser rationality and relegating them to the domains of feeling, the clergy unwittingly created a space for female empowerment.... [However,] in accepting silence and self-obliteration, the mystics legitimized the institution’s separation of male rationality from female feeling and the exclusion of women from the public domains of discourse. (xiv-xv)

While the label of irrationality provided mystics with a powerful space of their own, it also denied them the possibility of alternative forms of reason and access to public discourse. Teresa, however, breaks the binary oppositions of reason versus mysticism; her alternative epistemology includes transcending language to heal but also using words to foment revolution and to sign a constitution that challenges the Porfiriato.³

In addition to making the hero more accessible to the public by pointing out her contradictions and complexities, Levins Morales also suggests using familiar language and easily obtainable media. This technique makes the work available not only to other scholars but also to the communities involved. The historian also advises delving into a variety of disciplines and geographical spaces in order to see connections as Domecq did, crossing the borders of her training as novelist and essayist to devote years to historical investigation and crossing the U.S.–Mexico border to complete research for her novel. A further suggestion for accessibility that Levins Morales makes is to share work through “theater, murals, historical novels, posters, films, children’s books or a hundred other art forms” (37). Domecq’s novel also fulfills that proposal; though not a bestseller, the work has been widely read in both Spanish and English, thereby making Urrea’s tale accessible to people on both sides of the border who would not have otherwise become familiar with her story. Indeed, it was the reading of the novel that inspired a citizen of Clifton, Arizona to organize a public history project in the town to commemorate Teresa Urrea (Vanderwood 323-329).

Levins Morales' theory is fruitful in approaching Domecq's novel because it not only crosses disciplinary boundaries between history and literature; it also escapes nihilistic paradigms of postmodernism. Going beyond the now common practice of denying historiography by deconstructing what is already written, Domecq's novel aims to create what was missing from the historical record. Her work implies that history and story can jointly have a potential effect on the world. The project of works such as Domecq's is to promote cultural healing through the creative renewal of a lost history.

Aguirre's constitutional plan attempted to create new political options for women in Mexico. Likewise, writers such as Domecq today are producing new possibilities. Forging an identity as mother, healer and insurgent, Teresa of Cabora stirs up the dust, asserting her presence in a desert parched for women of resistance. Domecq's novel has told an undertold story, centering women to change the landscape of history and making absences visible through the development of characters such as Huila. Domecq's tale of Teresa of Cabora has identified and contradicted strategic information in the conflicting accounts of Teresa's life. *La insólita historia* has worked to overcome binary thinking by showing agency and embracing complexity and ambiguity through an imperfect yet inspiring hero. Finally, the novel has crossed borders, making the tale of the desert healer more accessible to the public and thereby reviving Teresa de Cabora as a vital figure in the history of Mexico and the Mexico-U.S. border. It is thus that *La insólita historia de la Santa de Cabora* offers a healing contribution to Mexican letters.

Notes

¹ In 1994, the two-volume series *Tomochic: la revolución adelantada* appeared in Chihuahua. The historiographic essays included therein provide an alternative to previously available depictions of the Tomochic people as barbarous fanatics and disturbers of the public peace. Here the people of Tomochic are local heroes with strong political motives who dared to face the Díaz government and who won the first two battles despite overwhelming odds. Their use of religious rhetoric in the name of the Saint of Cabora appears not as a blind obsession but rather as a symbol and driving force of resistance. In this historical revision, the *tomochitecos* and Teresa are the true predecessors of the Mexican revolution which officially began in 1910. Historian Rubén Osorio proclaims, "en Estados Unidos, Teresa Urrea, después de los acontecimientos de Tomóchic, va a convertirse en una auténtica revolucionaria mucho antes de que los hermanos Flores Magón y Francisco J. Madero sueñen con derrotar a Porfirio Díaz" (100). See also Paul Vanderwood's carefully researched 1998 study, *The Power of God Against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*.

²This technique of juxtaposing conflicting reports illuminates multiple perspectives, a common technique in what postmodernist critics such as Linda Hutcheon have described as the new historical novel. Linda Hutcheon's term "historiographic metafiction" refers to fictional narrative that "refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity" (93). To give an example of how historiographic metafiction draws attention to the artifice of creating nonfictional as well as fictional accounts, *La insólita historia* calls attention to the irony of newspaper articles which claim objectivity yet paint irreconcilably different pictures. For analyses of the new historical novel in Latin America, see, for example, Aínsa and Menton.

³Teresa the historical figure challenged not only the Church but also the State. Daring to be a thorn in Porfirio Díaz's side, she signed an editorial published in Lauro Aguirre's newspaper *El independiente* on August 21, 1896 titled "Mis ideas sobre las revoluciones." In it she disputes accounts that attribute the resistance movement to her role as a mystic leader rather than to well-founded political motivations: "esos movimientos revolucionarios obedecen a un profundo descontento público contra el despotismo del gobierno" (qtd. in Illades 82). Domecq affirms that after Díaz exiled Urrea in 1892, she became an aware and active participant in Lauro Aguirre's resistance movement. Just as she resists her own father's paternalism, so she resists the command of Díaz in favor of a more democratic system. Historian Enrique Krauze confirms that Díaz's rule in Mexico was based upon a paternalistic model: "Quizá la clave del enigma está en una palabra: paternidad. Porfirio se veía en la figura de un padre inmenso, padre de una grey de niños ambiciosos, dependientes e irresponsables" (80). Díaz governed Mexico for more than three decades; although his first presidency lasted only from 1876 to 1880, his second presidency endured from 1884 to 1911. He justified this extensive rule by affirming that the Mexican people were not yet ready for democratic elections. First they needed a strong figure to lead them to order, peace and progress. Teresa de Cabora rejects such a "father of the nation." The historical figure endorsed Lauro Aguirre's constitutional reform plan (1896) which denounces Díaz and includes surprisingly feminist elements such as granting women the right to vote and to become president. ✽

Works Cited

- Aínsa, Fernando. "La reescritura de la historia en la nueva narrativa latinoamericana." *Cuadernos americanos* 4.28 (1991): 13-31.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Press, 1987.
- De Beer, Gabriella. *Contemporary Mexican Woman Writers: Five Voices*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.
- Domecq, Brianda. *The Astonishing Story of the Saint of Cabora*. Trans. Kay S. García. Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press, 1998.
- . *La historia insólita de la Santa de Cabora*. México: Planeta, 1990.
- . *Mujer que publica ... mujer pública*. México: Editorial Diana, 1994.
- . "Teresa Urrea: La Santa de Cabora." *Tomóchic: La revolución adelantada: Resistencia y lucha de un pueblo de Chihuahua contra el sistema porfirista (1891-1892)*. Vol. 2. Ed. Jesús Vargas Valdez. Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua: Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 1994. 11-65.
- Franco, Jean. *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*. NY: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- Frías, Heriberto. *Tomochic*. 3rd ed. by James W. Brown. México: Porrúa, 1976.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. NY: Routledge, 1988.
- Illades, Lilián. "Teresa Urrea y Lauro Aguirre." *Tomóchic: La revolución adelantada: Resistencia y lucha de un pueblo de Chihuahua contra el sistema porfirista (1891-1892)*. Vol. 2. Ed. Jesús Vargas Valdez. Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua: Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 1994. 69-90.
- Krauze, Enrique. *Porfirio Díaz: Místico de la autoridad*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987.
- Levins Morales, Aurora. *Medicine Stories: History, Culture and the Politics of Integrity*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998.
- López González, Aralia. "La memoria del olvido: ética y estética del indicio y del zurcido." *Sin imágenes falsas, sin falsos espejos: Narradoras mexicanas del siglo XX*. Ed. Aralia López González. México: Colegio de México, 1990. 499-507.
- Menton, Seymour. *Latin America's New Historical Novel*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.

- Mirandé, Alfred and Evangelina Enríquez. *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Osorio, Rubén, "Cruz Chávez: Los tomoche en armas." *Tomóchic: La revolución adelantada: Resistencia y lucha de un pueblo de Chihuahua contra el sistema porfirista (1891-1892)*. Vol. 1. Ed. Jesús Vargas Valdez. Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua: Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 1994. 77-126.
- Pérez de Mendiola, Marina. *Gender and Identity Formation in Contemporary Mexican Literature*. New York: Garland, 1998.
- Rodríguez, Richard and Gloria. "Teresa Urrea: Her Life, As It Affected the Mexican-U.S. Frontier." *Voices: Readings from El Grito 1967-1973*. Ed. Octavio Romero. Berkeley: Quinto Sol, 1973.
- Vanderwood, Paul. *The Power of God Against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Wilentz, Gay. *Binding Cultures*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.