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Paisajes terapéuticos en las novelas de Marcela Serrano

Therapeutic landscapes in Marcela Serrano's novels

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Abstract

This doctoral dissertation analyses the function of *therapeutic landscapes* in the structure of space in three novels by Marcela Serrano published between 1995 and 1999: *Antigua vida mía* (1995), *El albergue de las mujeres tristes* (1998) and *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad* (1999).

Marcela Serrano is a contemporary Chilean writer, known both in her homeland and beyond, winner of prestigious prizes in the field of literature. Her work so far mainly includes novels, although the writer has also published, among other things, two collections of short stories. Her work is classified as part of the so-called *Nueva Narrativa Chilena* (New Chilean Narrative). The authors who are part of this group, mostly published their first texts in the mid-1980s. A common feature of their works is the theme of an orphan -a hero lost in reality marked by the memory of the bloody dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and sometimes mired

in nostalgia for the utopian vision of socialist society, which was abruptly interrupted by the coup of 11 September 1973. Serrano's work seems to revolve around two thematic axes: Chile's socio-political context and women's issues, both of which fit into the tendencies of the writers belonging to *Nueva Narrativa Chilena* (New Chilean Narrative). Serrano's works were the subject of many analyses, including in the field of spatial poetics, but none of them concerned therapeutic landscapes.

Although the content of the novels constituting the research corpus varies, their main thread is based on a scheme that can be characterized by three elements: the heroine's health/emotional/existential crisis, the permanent or temporary change of her whereabouts, and the positive transformation. The space in these novels seems to be the essence of the healing process of the heroines. Their problems, on the other hand, reflect the condition of women

and social sentiment in Chile during the democratic transition of the 1990s, which is the backdrop to the events in the works under consideration and synonymous with the country's rapid economic development towards modernity and values such as individualism and competitiveness.

The methodology for space analysis in novels belonging to the research corps is based on the concept of therapeutic landscapes created by Wilbert Gesler, an American geographer. The term, traditionally used in health geography to study the healing properties of space, has also penetrated many other fields of science. Although the bibliography on therapeutic landscapes is extensive and diverse, there are only a few examples of analyses of literary works, none of which concern the work of Hispano-American authors.

The practical part of this work is divided into two parts. The first examines the *defects* of the heroines of the novels constituting the research corps, a term coined by Iwona Boruszkowska to denote various types of diseases and symptoms described in literary works. The health and emotional problems of the characters were presented in the light of women's issues and socio-political changes in Chile. Studies have shown that Serrano's heroines suffer from diseases and ailments, which are caused by the somatization of conflicts arising from their roles in the private and professional spheres, emotional deficiencies in affective relationships, and sometimes traumatic events.

The second part of the work explores the space in Serrano's novels from the perspective of Gesler's distinguished environments -physical, social and symbolic/spiritual - and their elements, the co-influence of which affects the therapeutic effect of the place. The analysis showed that the environments created by Serrano heal because their location allows the heroines to distance themselves from the roles that define them on a daily basis. They also provide an atmosphere of tranquillity due to the beauty of the landscape and remoteness from the hustle and bustle of the city, and the symbolic nature of their décor emphasizes that they provide the figure with a private, independent space to reconstruct their disturbed identity. The places depicted in the novels are also a remedy for those heroines whose psychosomatic symptoms reflect their sense of lack of roots and identification with the values of modern Chile. Relationships in the environments created by Serrano also turn out to be an extremely important healing element, in particular the protagonists' ties with other women, which turn out to be a path to healing, allowing the characters to verify their identity in the 'reflection' of another woman.

Using the recurring disease-therapy scheme by Marcela Serrano, she presents an image of an orphan woman whose disease reflects the most important feminist issues and a sense

of orphanhood resulting from a lack of identification with sudden political, social and economic changes in Chile. Therapeutic landscapes are the author's response to the existing reality. From this perspective, the space described by the author does not appear to be a utopian dream, but a process of in-depth healing, so needed by the unfortunate individual whom she presents in her novels.

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