

7-2008

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Olga Grosh
College of William and Mary

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**DISCURSIVE OPPOSITION TO SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE
IN THE NOBEL LECTURES OF LATIN AMERICAN LAUREATES**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts with Honors in Hispanic Studies from
The College of William and Mary

by

Olga Grosh

Accepted for _____
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Teresa V. Longo, Director

Anne Marie Stock

Betsy O. Konefal

Williamsburg, VA
April 29, 2008

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Nobel lectures of Peace and Literature Prize laureates Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez and Rigoberta Menchú. I argue that the lectures oppose Western and Latin American symbolic violence against Latin America's attempts at social change. Moreover, I propose that the lectures' power comes from the very fact that they are important cultural products that provide a space within which social relations may be presented and negotiated. These Nobel lectures oppose symbolic violence against Latin America as they expand literary and political discourses to include the continent's subaltern voice.

INTRODUCTION

Alfred Bernhard Nobel, the Swedish millionaire who invented dynamite, specified in his 1895 will that the majority of his estate shall be invested in a fund. The interest from the fund would be distributed annually to those who “have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind” (1). Nobel charged the Swedish Academy to award prizes in physics, chemistry, medicine, and literature and a committee of Norwegian members to award the peace prize.¹ The Nobel Foundation granted the first awards in 1901. Although Nobel specified that “no consideration shall be given to the nationality of the candidate,” not until the middle of the 20th century did either of the committees recognize the first Latin American laureate (1-2).

In 1945, the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral became the first Latin American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. The Nobel honor bestowed upon Mistral turned Europe’s eyes toward Latin America as a potential source of future candidates. The Swedish and Norwegian Nobel Committees began to reward praiseworthy Latin Americans for their accomplishments in the literary and political spheres. The Literature Prize laureates who followed Mistral are Pablo Neruda (1971), Gabriel García Márquez (1982), and Octavio Paz (1990). Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (1980), Alfonso García Robles (1982), Oscar Arias Sánchez (1987), and Rigoberta Menchú Tum (1992) are the Latin Americans who won the Peace Prize. This list of eight Latin American laureates is not long, but it is certainly

¹ In 1968, the Sveriges Riksbank established a prize in economics in honor of Alfred Nobel. The Swedish Academy selects the Economic Prize Laureate. The Nobel Foundation’s website at <http://nobelprize.org> provides information about the history of the Nobel Prize, the list of laureates, as well as presentation speeches and Nobel lectures.

not insignificant. All the laureates have touched the lives of people in their own countries hoping to improve social and political situations within their homelands and throughout Latin America. Moreover, the words and actions of these individuals have reached across international borders in search of support, solidarity, and understanding from other nations and cultures. Likewise, the laureates' lectures contain significant underlying themes. Writers, historians, and students of cultural studies often quote the eloquent lectures of García Márquez, Octavio Paz, and others, yet I have found no evidence of scholarly examination of the meaningful words spoken in Stockholm and Oslo.² The laureates' lectures have been overlooked and their power has gone unexplored.

In this paper, I review the Nobel lectures as cultural products no less important than the laureates' novels, poems, and policies for which they win the Nobel Prize. I use sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory on power to propose that the lectures are instruments through which Latin American laureates oppose internal and external symbolic violence against Latin America.³ According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence occurs when

² The material I have come across while searching through libraries and databases (JSTOR, Arts and Humanities Search, The Library of Congress's Handbook of American Studies, Literature Resource Center, etc.) all refer to the laureates as winners of the Nobel Prize, quote their Nobel lectures, but focus on their poems, novels, or in case of Menchú, the controversy surrounding *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. I have not been able to find scholarly works that particularly focus on the Latin American Nobel lectures and its significance.

³ Bourdieu extensively discusses the function of power in society in his 1991 book *Language and Symbolic Power* and in the 1993 publication *The Field of Cultural Productions: Essays on Art and Literature*.

dominant actors in a cultural field deny recognition and access to resources to those they consider inferior, thus socially re-enforcing inferiority (“Symbolic Power” 114-115).

While Bourdieu’s theory helps me to demonstrate *what* the laureates are able to achieve with their lectures, Michel Foucault’s discourse theory explains *how* the lectures oppose symbolic violence.⁴ I propose that in their lectures, the laureates expand discourse that imposes an inferior status on Latin America by adding statements that include the continent’s perspectives. The first chapter of this thesis explains this theoretical framework in greater detail through examples from García Márquez’s lecture. I propose that through the Nobel lectures, the laureates insert Latin America into Western and elitist discourse and in this manner oppose symbolic violence against the continent and its people.

Although Mistral was the first Latin American laureate, she did not give a lecture when she received the prize. For that reason, Pablo Neruda’s 1971 lecture functions in my thesis as the thematic foundation for analysis of the Latin Americans’ lectures. My analysis is not an extensive overview, but rather two case studies chosen to initiate an investigation of Latin American Literature and Peace Prize lectures. I particularly chose

⁴According to Foucault, knowledge and truth are not absolute. Ideas, whether true or not, that become accepted within discourse are protected as “truth” (Strozier 57-58; Rabinow 131). Particular social groups create discourse in order to support and assert their power (“Power/Knowledge” 142). In Foucault’s theory, a statement is the basic unit of discourse that shares space with other statements. Although an infinite number of statements can form a discourse, discourse usually consists of certain repeated statements (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 35).

to explore Gabriel García Márquez's and Rigoberta Menchú's lectures because I had previously studied each of these two laureates' work and I find their speeches particularly compelling in terms of the issue of symbolic power.

Neruda's first words proclaim, "My speech is going to be a long journey, a trip that I have taken through regions that are distant and antipodean" (55). Indeed, the first part of his speech recounts a demanding journey that the laureate took more than twenty years before he stood on the prestigious Nobel stage in Sweden. Neruda briefly mentions that his perilous journey was forced by "events which have already fallen into oblivion" (55). He does not further address the exile that resulted from his opposition to President González Videla who in 1947 threw striking miners into prisons and concentration camps ("Memoirs" 171-175).⁵ Instead, the poet recreates the difficulty of his mission to reach safety and freedom. In my opinion, this narrative establishes his personal exile as a metaphor for Chile's and Latin America's journey through a modern history of corruption, repression, and violence.

Neruda poetically narrates the struggles and revelations of his voyage across the Andes Mountains to Chile's border with Argentina. "Great forests make these

⁵ Neruda reflects in *Memoirs* that González Videla "swore to see that justice was carried out," but "the new chief of state quickly changed his friends...and was gradually transformed from a mere demagogue into a potentate" (171-172). "The Chilean Judas," as Neruda refers to González Videla, "was just an amateur tyrant and on the saurian scale would never be anything but a poisonous lizard" (172). Nonetheless, Neruda recognizes that his former comrade "did enough damage to seriously scar Chile, setting the country back hundreds of years" (172).

inaccessible areas like a tunnel through which our journey was secret and forbidden, with only the faintest signs to show us the way” (55). Here, the laureate reflects on the difficulty of his flight. The path was not marked and the obstacles were treacherous, but Neruda and his guides overcame the impediments. Neruda delivers his lecture in 1971, the year that marked Chilean socialist Salvador Allende’s first year as president. I view his Nobel lecture as a celebration of socialism’s success in Chile. Furthermore, the poet’s personal journey appears to serve as a metaphor for Chile’s and Latin America’s struggle for social and political justice. In the midst of the Cold War, Neruda, an ardent communist activist, praises Chile because despite many historic and modern obstacles it found its path to socialism on the “journey secret and forbidden, with only the faintest signs to show us the way” (55). From the darkest days of his exile⁶ to the 1970 election of Allende to the presidency, the Chilean people were able to overcome the local and global obstacles to a socialist leader.⁷ Neruda, an internationally acclaimed poet, certainly recognizes the power of the words articulated in a Nobel lecture. I believe that Neruda,

⁶ Matilde Urrutia, Neruda’s love of many years and his wife who was with him from the time of his exile to his death, writes from her perspective about Neruda in *My Life with Pablo Neruda*.

⁷ Hudson’s 1994 country study on Chile and Kinsbruner’s 1973 *Chile: A Historical Interpretation* show that even before the 1973 coup against Salvador Allende, Chile’s 20th century was filled with clashes between people and the government over meat prices and working rights, at least two massive massacres, economic deterioration after the stock market crashed in 1929, a series of coups, and a U.S.-demanded countrywide repression that forced Neruda into exile.

the first Latin American laureate to give a lecture, strategically employs the Nobel lecture as a tool to discuss and elevate the status of his homeland.

Nature, a central element in Neruda's poetry, plays an integral role in the laureate's account of his and Chile's journey. The poet recalls, "There were no tracks and no paths, and I and my four companions, riding on horseback, pressed forward our tortuous way, avoiding the obstacles set by huge trees, impassable rivers, immense cliffs and desolate expanses of snow, blindly seeking the quarter in which my own liberty lay" (55). Nature blocked the poet's path to Argentina as if to prevent him from leaving Chile, even if it meant taking his life in the tumultuous torrents of the Curringue River. Once more, Neruda mentions that there was no path to follow and the fleeing party had to carve its own trail through the jungle. Again, I interpret Neruda's focus on the obstacles that sprung before him on his journey as a metaphor that applauds Chile's triumph over difficulties in its path to socialism. Similar to the poet's "wanderings," Chile did not have a prescribed and widely recognized ideological path to follow and did not know what obstacles would impede its movement toward the Left. Part of the beauty of Neruda's "huge trees, impassable rivers, immense cliffs and desolate expanses of snow" lies in the strength they project. The implication here is that, like Neruda, Chilean mineworkers, farmers, truckers, and students also had to confront strong opposition in order to reach the freedom they saw in socialism. Both the poet and his country successfully resist opposition forces. Their struggle represented in Neruda's speech is a rite of passage to safety and freedom.

I interpret Neruda's poetic emphasis on nature as a kind of metaphor for resistance to injustice and inequality. Just as humans cannot foretell the force of nature,

neither could the Chilean people predict a century of coups and repression. Nor could Neruda foresee that comrade Videla for whom he campaigned would turn his back on his promises, throw mine workers into concentration camps, and put a prize on the poet's head. However, as the 1970 election showed, it is not impossible to oust anti-worker governments or to bring forward a leader who seeks to establish social justice. It seems that this lesson is meant to encourage Chilean workers to continue their journey for their rights, and at the same time it serves to inform the audience in Stockholm of Chile's difficult path to freedom. In his memoirs, Neruda tells of a meeting in Paris or in Prague with writers and students with an "encyclopedic knowledge" of Chile: "'We are talking a lot about Chile,' I said to them, 'and it's probably because I am Chilean. But do any of you know anything about my country, which is so far away? For example, what vehicle do we use for locomotion? Elephant, car, train, airplane, bicycle, camel, or sleigh? Most of them replied earnestly: 'elephant'" ("Memoirs" 167). Even after many years of international travel, it seems the laureate feels the need to inform his audience about what constitutes Chilean reality. The political and social obstacles in Chile's journey highlight Neruda's position that the election of a socialist president is not a new radical craze, but an achievement decades in the making. On this point, the poet metaphorically enlightens his Stockholm audience: "My horse was bleeding from its muzzle and from its legs, but we persevered and continued on the long and difficult, but magnificent path" (56). Neruda poeticizes Chile's "long and difficult, but magnificent path," as the language of poetry allows him to cross national and cultural borders.⁸ Natives of cold, wintry Sweden

⁸ That is not to say that Neruda thought that the obstacles before him and his country were natural. Rather, as Greg Dawes who published *Verses Against the Darkness: Pablo*

and many other members of the audience who come from similar terrains undoubtedly understand the overwhelming, helpless feeling one feels before “huge trees, impassable rivers, immense cliffs and desolate expanses of snow.” It appears that through poetic description of his and Chile’s struggles Neruda wants his audience to acknowledge on intellectual and emotional levels the significance of his country’s journey toward social justice.

In the narrative about his and Chile’s voyage, Neruda contributes a significant amount of attention to the theme of solitude. “Each of us made his way filled with limitless solitude, with the green and white silence of trees and huge trailing plants and layers of soil laid down over centuries” (55). Clearly, the poet experienced the feeling of loneliness on his journey through the isolated terrain of the Andes. The implication is that the Chilean people have also felt lonely and abandoned in their struggle against corruption and massacres in their country. Neruda recalls his participation in a ritual ceremony while passing through the mountains: “Dimly I understood there by the side of my inscrutable companions, that there was a kind of link between unknown people, a care, an appeal and an answer even in the most distant and isolated places of this world” (57). For Neruda, this episode opens up the possibility that while solitude is difficult, it is not impossible to overcome. Although the poet moved further and further away from his

Neruda’s Poetry and Politics notes, Neruda “understood that the suffering he was undergoing was not a natural or healthy condition: it was a social ‘illness’ (alienation). Neruda’s poetry then became a diary in which he documented subjectively the effects of this solitude on his life...Neruda used the suffering to create a better life for himself in particular and humanity in general” (17).

home and the people of his country, he realized that “in this taciturn ‘nothing,’ there were hidden things that were understood, perhaps a recognition, perhaps the same kind of dreams” (57). According to Neruda, the journey actually presented an opportunity to forge a connection with his guides, the people living in the mountainous seclusion along their path, and the Chileans whom he was forced to leave behind. On December 13, 1971, Neruda is in the distant country of Sweden and is once more away from home, but much has changed. In the twenty years since exile, it must seem to the famous poet that solitude on the national level is no longer unmanageable. On the international level, the Nobel Prize and at least Sweden’s recognition of Neruda’s work and the plight of the Chileans is also a sign of decreasing solitude. Despite the obstacles, “There is no such thing as a lone struggle, no such thing as a lone hope” (60).

The second part of Neruda’s lecture concentrates on his poetic duty to alleviate solitude. If solitude is the affliction, then solidarity is the cure, and solidarity according to Neruda is best expressed through poetry. The laureate explains that poetry works to diminish solitude in the following manner:

Each and every one of my verses has chosen to take its place as a tangible object, each and every one of my poems has claimed to be a useful working instrument, each and every one of my songs has endeavored to serve as a sign in space for a meeting between paths which cross one another, or as a piece of stone or wood on which someone, some others, those who follow after, will be able to carve new signs. (60)

Neruda considers poetry a tangible tool with which Chileans and other Latin Americans can build solidarity. Wherever injustice isolates people who run out of civil and political

means to rally for higher wages and an end to government corruption and repression, Neruda believes that poetic verses unite those in despair. The laureate maintains that the “best poet is he who prepares our daily bread; the nearest baker... [who hands] us our daily bread as a duty of fellowship” (59). I suppose that Neruda presents poetry as bread in order to assert the anti-elitist power of poetry. Bakers’ bread fills empty stomachs; likewise, “We [the poets] are conscious of our duty as fulfillers... We must fill with words the most distant places in a dumb continent” (59). This metaphor of fulfillment indicates the poet’s role as the one who fills the empty spaces and articulates the society’s concerns.⁹ For Neruda, these concerns are associated with class struggle, repression and corruption. He continues: “In the midst of America’s struggles, I saw that my human task was none other than to join the extensive forces of the organized masses of the people, to join with life and soul, with suffering and hope, because it is only from this great popular stream that the necessary changes can arise for the authors and for the nations” (60). Unmistakably, Neruda positions himself and his poetry as the voice of the organized masses, a voice that can bring about change. “Despite the horrors and grand struggles of his century, Neruda found hope still in his own poetic labor and worldview, thanks in no small measure to his involvement in egalitarian struggles against injustice” (Dawes 290). It seems to me that as poetry fills the empty spaces, it simultaneously creates new spaces within the poetic discourse for the people who have no voice in social and political

⁹ In “The Hour of Poetry” John Berger writes: “Poetry can repair no loss, but it defies the space that separates. And it does this by its continual labour of reassembling what has been scattered” (249). Neruda’s poetry and poetic lecture reassemble the scattered Chilean workers to overcome the working class’s solitude.

spheres. Or at least, this is Neruda's intention. Of course, Neruda's assertion that he, a world-renowned elite who socializes with the most well-connected people, speaks for the masses is a problematic claim, one that reappears in the lectures of Latin American laureates who follow him.¹⁰ However, Neruda nonetheless believes that he carves a space within poetic discourse for voiceless people. In his memoirs Neruda declares, "The poet who writes is the one who determines what's what. He determines it with his breadth and his blood, with his wisdom and his ignorance, because all this goes into the making of the bread of poetry" ("Memoirs" 265). Likewise, a laureate, like Neruda, García Márquez or Rigoberta Menchú, who delivers his or her lecture determines its message. I posit that via the discourse of the Nobel lectures, Neruda and those who follow him contest the solitude implicit in symbolic violence.

¹⁰ Neruda appears to believe more than the other two laureates that he speaks for an inordinate number of people. He did serve his country for many years as a consul and an ambassador. Reflecting on his years as an elected senator of the Republic, Neruda extols: "Thousands of people from Chile's most inhospitable region, the great mining region of copper and nitrate, gave me their voice" ("Memoirs" 166). On the other hand, the poet also appears to speak for an ancient empire voiceless for centuries. Observing Neruda's poem "The Heights of Machu Picchu" biographer Volodia Teitelboim notes: "Neruda discovers in Machu Picchu's silence the world that was not spoken and not recorded by anyone. He struggles to reconstruct the lost expression written on the stone's message. The poet sees himself as the spokesman and rescuer of collective memory and speech" (260).

Neruda, the first Latin American laureate to give a lecture, establishes the motif of the journey. I integrate this notion into my thesis as I track three decades in the development of the Latin American Nobel lectures. Whereas Neruda speaks in 1971 of people's progress toward a just society, García Márquez presents his lecture in 1982 under severely violent circumstances that devastate the whole continent. Despite the fact that a decade separates Neruda's and García Márquez's lectures, both laureates focus on solitude. While Neruda discusses the solitude of the masses and upholds poetic solidarity, García Márquez concentrates on asserting and shaping Latin America's place in world politics and literature. His speech counters the continent's solitude within the international arena, and in this way, it counters symbolic violence. Menchú addresses her audience in 1992 during the transformation of international agenda at the end of the Cold War. While García Márquez returns to Neruda's theme of solitude, Menchú echoes Neruda's references to nature. According to Neruda, nature metaphorically represents political obstacles. Twenty years later, Menchú, a Quiché Maya, indigenizes that nature-based discourse. My position regarding her speech is that her insertion of the indigenous is also a form of resistance to symbolic violence. Ultimately, I find that although neither of the laureates is a perfect spokesperson for the people he or she claims to represent, their speeches take important steps toward the legitimation of Latin American voices.

**“REVISE YOUR WAY OF SEEING US”: OPPOSITION TO SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE IN
GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ’S NOBEL LECTURE**

*Why is the originality so readily granted us in literature so mistrustfully
denied us in our difficult attempts at social change?*
– Gabriel García Márquez, “The Solitude of Latin America”

I. Introduction: Gabriel García Márquez and the History of Latin America

Gabriel García Márquez’s words have captivated the world. “El maestro,” as he is referred to in his native Colombia, is a pioneer of the Latin American “Boom,” the winner of the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature, and believed by many to be one of the world’s greatest writers. García Márquez became internationally renowned with the publication of his 1967 masterpiece, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a twentieth century literary classic about the tribulations of the Buendías, the founding family of the fictional town Macondo. Objective reality and dreams are blurred in García Márquez’s literary world which curiously resembles our own. The maestro’s short stories, novels, and nonfiction journalism are all evidence of brilliant storytelling that at once capture and defy humanity’s imaginative and physical boundaries.¹¹ Both elite and popular audiences applaud García Márquez’s work. Forty years after the publication of *One Hundred Years*

¹¹ Rubén Pelayo’s 2001 critical companion to García Márquez presents the laureate’s biography and major works. Harold Bloom’s 2006 edition on García Márquez also offers biographical information along with critical essays on the themes in García Márquez’s writing.

of Solitude, Oprah Winfrey's Book Club website enthusiastically recommends the novel because, "It's a wildly passionate book that brings to life mythical and colorful characters. In Macondo, wonderful, magical, fantastical, unreal things happen every day. And through this fantastic town and its fantastic people, you will come to appreciate the magic of your own life" (1). Oprah praises García Márquez for the exquisite use of magical realism, the literary technique that incorporates myths and miracles into everyday life. But is magic the focus of the novel or is it just a tool to transmit the inconceivable reality of the life of the Latin American people? This chapter takes as its most basic point of departure the position that the kind of discourse used on Oprah's website is a problem precisely because it ignores the political messages in García Márquez's literary work. In contrast, my work emphasizes and develops a more politicized perspective on Latin America via the words of the laureate.

Similar to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez's Nobel lecture provides a clue to the social and political messages of the maestro's famous novel and his other works. "The Solitude of Latin America," his Nobel lecture, traces the history of the continent from the time of the first contact with Spanish and Portuguese navigators, through the conquest and the independence movements, to the vicious dictatorships and dirty wars of the 1980s. The laureate, delivering his address in 1982, speaks during a time of political and economic chaos when the effects of authoritative repression ravaged the continent.¹² Historian Marguerite Feitlowitz observes: "The Dirty War, though

¹² Chasteen's chapter "Reaction" from his book *Born in Blood & Fire* provides an overview of the continental span of violence and the military authoritarian rule that enforced disappearances, torture, and massacres in the 1970s and 1980s.

unprecedented in its extent and cruelty, did not erupt from a vacuum. Rather, it drew on a reservoir of beliefs, phobias, obsessions, and rhetoric that have filtered down through a variety of ultraconservative movements, tendencies, and regimes” (20).¹³ Military backlash against Latin American workers, students, union leaders, and other segments of society deemed subversive resulted in kidnappings, tortures, and murders of anyone who openly or secretly disobeyed the military. In reality, the problem centered on the “disregard for law and politics [that] was a way for countries marked by enormous social contrasts to solve their problems” (Rosenberg 82).¹⁴ Meanwhile, U.S. and European Cold War security tactics supported the military dictatorships that in their view were battling socialist and communist ideas.¹⁵ For example, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger felt justified that “human rights are not appropriate in the foreign policy context” during an era when Soviet nuclear arms were a grave threat to the survival of the United States

¹³ Although Feitlowitz’s quote comes from her book that specifically focuses on the dirty war in Argentina, she captures the essence of the violent wave that engulfed all Latin America.

¹⁴ Latin American Marxists sided with the “weak and impoverished masses against the rich minority and U.S. multinational corporations,” while the “upper class and most of the middle class were logically anticommunist because they feared losing their privileged status” (Chasteen 279-280).

¹⁵ The fight against communist takeover was the U.S.’s top Cold War priority as it trained officers from Latin American countries to view dissidents as terrorist who threatened their nations. Chasteen observes: “National security doctrine maintained the climate of emergency [in Latin America] used by torturers to justify their acts” (283).

(Kornbluh 119). So without hesitation he advised Presidents Nixon and Reagan to send arms and money to support the military regimes in Chile, Argentina, Nicaragua and other Latin American countries.¹⁶ Position such as Kissinger's resulted in destroyed democracies, weakened economies, terrible violations of human rights, and an atmosphere of fear that dominated the continent for many years even after the end of the dirty wars.¹⁷ The repression targeted, among others, leftists who likely shared García Márquez's ideology. In the midst of these problems, the Nobel Committee honored him.

In his Nobel lecture, García Márquez asks his audience, "Why is the originality so readily granted us in literature so mistrustfully denied us in our difficult attempts at social change?" (19). Why does the West¹⁸ support the literary descriptions of the political, social, and humanitarian problems that afflict the Latin Americans, but blocks the efforts of the continent to initiate the necessary reforms to improve the situation? "Why think that the social justice sought by progressive Europeans for their own countries cannot also be a goal for Latin America, with different methods for dissimilar conditions?" (19).

¹⁶ Peter Kornbluh's *The Pinochet File* contains released top secret documents that reveal that U.S. presidents, important cabinet members, and the CIA were extensively involved in funding and promoting violent policies in Latin America.

¹⁷ Unrest from the civil wars continued well into the 1990s in Guatemala, El Salvador and some other Latin American countries. However, although violence stopped elsewhere, both Feitlowitz's *A Lexicon of Terror* and Weschler's *A Miracle, A Universe* tell the stories of victims who would recognize their torturers on the street or hear their voices on the radio.

¹⁸ In this thesis, "West" refers to Europe and the United States.

In other words, García Márquez questions why there is a double standard for Latin America, why the Latin American people and their struggles are viewed as inferior. Hispanic cultural studies theorist Jean Franco addresses García Márquez's question by considering the Boom novels of the 1960s that preceded the awarding of the Nobel prize: "Many novels of the boom not only attack the power of certain fantasies (of liberation, of enterprise, of community) that politics and literature held in common but also come up against their limits" (8). According to Franco, "the always masculine protagonists of the boom novels, in their attempts to dream up an economically workable society freed from outside control, encounter the specter of the excluded" (8). The limits of the West upon Latin America exclude the continent from "the power of certain fantasies" and so foster its solitude. While I see the poetic discourse in Neruda's Nobel lecture unite the working masses and oppose the solitude of their class, I propose that in his lecture García Márquez seeks to resist the elitist exclusion of the entire continent.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, an occurrence during which dominant actors within a cultural field deny others resources, treat them as inferior, or limit their realistic aspirations constitutes "symbolic violence" ("Symbolic Power" 117). Symbolic violence functions "only through the complicity of those who do not want to know they are subject to it" (Bourdieu, "Language and Symbolic Power" 164). Working within Bourdieu's theoretical framework, I see the West's recognition of Latin America's literary originality but not the continent's originality in the solutions to political and social problems as a form of discrimination, a form of symbolic violence. García Márquez's recognition of Europe's and U.S.'s domination over Latin America is the first step to opposing symbolic violence against the continent. To eliminate Latin America's solitude the "clear sighted

Europeans...could help us far better if they reconsidered their way of seeing us” (García Márquez 19). The lecture appears to serve as an open forum for discussion about the lens through which Latin American literature and politics are perceived by actors outside the continent as well as by those within Latin America. I propose that García Márquez’s lecture resists the West’s symbolic violence against Latin America. More specifically, it resists violence against the continent’s attempts to define its own political identity and to enact social change.

II. Symbolic Violence and the Analysis of Culture

Bourdieu’s theory posits that society defines itself and its values according to the products of a cultural field (Swartz 83). Cultural products are instruments of knowledge that hold symbolic power to objectify the way the society sees itself. An artist produces cultural products not for purely aesthetic purposes, but rather to make a statement about his view of society (Webb 149). In order to understand how and why García Márquez’s speech works to reduce symbolic violence, his Nobel lecture must be analyzed as this kind of cultural product, as a statement about García Márquez’s vision. Clearly, the value of García Márquez’s words lies well beyond the function of a ceremonial oration. As I suggested earlier, the lecture is a critique of the perspective from which Latin America is viewed by the West. On a prominent world stage, García Márquez discusses Latin American history and politics from the perspective of a Latin American, an opportunity that does not often befall the continent’s activists. As García Márquez uses the lecture to resist Western symbolic violence against Latin America, his perspective matters. Much like Neruda had to tell foreign admirers that Chile does not rely on elephants for

transportation, so García Márquez speaks to inform his audience. His insider's perspective is a means to expand the way outsiders understand the Latin American society and its values. The lecture, a creative work, is crucial to developing a new perspective or amplifying the current one. The symbolic power of art is influential because creative works are "a site in which general social relations can be represented and negotiated" (Webb 155). The lecture, like much of García Márquez's work, therefore creates a forum for discussion about the relations between the West and Latin America and the perspectives from which the former views the latter.

In my contribution to this discussion, I focus on the connections between the overlapping fields of literature and politics. Literature serves as a lens that reflects the interactions between various parts of the society, specifically the distribution of power among its members. According to Bourdieu's theory, "Art is a social artifact, the product of a field, and it comes into existences through a process-specific competition. This, like any competition in any field, comes down to a question of power – who is authorized to speak for, or attribute value to, various positions in the field?" (Webb 152). Political and literary actors recognized within the fields of politics and literature are the ones who hold in their hands the power to realize shifts in perspective because they have the capacity to impose the "legitimate vision of the social world and its divisions" (Bourdieu, "Social Class" 13). Because García Márquez's novel sold millions of copies worldwide, by 1982 he was already one of the pertinent actors able to speak for the people of Latin America. Joseph Epstein, an acclaimed U.S. editor confirms, "None of this power would exist, of course, if García Márquez were not a considerable artist. Literary artists make us see things, and differently from the way we have ever seen them before; they make us see

things *their way*” (61). Like his best selling novel, García Márquez’s lecture also assists in the legitimation of Latin America. It promotes a shift that will ultimately allow social change in a continent that suffers from injustices and inequalities. In addition, Bourdieu claims that the work of an actor within society (like García Márquez) needs to be complemented by the participation of other political and literary actors if symbolic violence is to be opposed or initiated (Swartz 89).¹⁹ Certain “practices, products, or values... are made to seem universally significant because they are important to dominant people and institutions, and because they come to be...supported by the values and discourses of the general social field” (Webb 153). It is important to note that throughout the lecture, García Márquez distinguishes between the perspective of “us” and “them” identifying in such a way key political and literary actors from within and outside of

¹⁹ For an example of a U.S. literary actor who is not willing to change his perspective, please see “How Good is Gabriel García Márquez?” by Joseph Epstein. This critic cannot reconcile that literary power may transfer political status to a new entrant into the field and claims that the laureate’s stories “are passionate chiefly when they are political; and when they are political, so strong is the nature of their political bias that they are, however dazzling, flawed” (65). According to Epstein, a dominant writer who is defending the status quo of the literary field, the newcomer García Márquez’s works are flawed because of their politicization: “Gabriel García Márquez is in the strict sense of the word, marvelous. The pity is that he is not better” (65). It seems that Epstein contends that García Márquez is not a truly good author until his works have significance without the Latin American political edge that is so undesirable within the Eurocentric literary discourse.

Latin America. It appears to me that these are the actors who should participate in the construction of the new perspective of the continent by resisting acts of symbolic violence against Latin America.

III. Perspective and the Exercise of Symbolic Violence

The classifications, “us” and “them,” first appear in García Márquez’s lecture in the laureate’s discussion of the conquest of Latin America and they remain constant throughout the laureate’s chronological development of Latin American history to 1982. My analysis follows García Márquez’s chronology to observe his account of the symbolic violence against Latin America, an account which chronicles shifts in Western perspectives of the continent.²⁰ The opening lines of the lecture reference Spanish and Portuguese navigators who sailed into uncharted waters and came into contact with a new world previously unknown to Europeans. García Márquez recalls that when Antonia Pigafetta, a Florentine navigator who sailed with Magellan, wrote about “his passage through our southern lands of America,” he created “a strictly accurate account that nonetheless resembles a venture into fantasy” (17). The first contact between Latin America and the rest of the world provides the context for the first classification of who “we” and “they” are. Pigafetta, Magellan, and other navigators are the “they,” the

²⁰ Recall Epstein’s remark: “Literary artists make us see things, and differently from the way we have ever seen them before; they make us see things *their way*” (65). Epstein clearly separates “us” and “them” and actually places emphasis on “*their way*” as if to highlight how problematic and undesirable seeing “things *their way*” would be. This is one example of the West’s literary symbolic violence against Latin America.

representatives of the world outside of the continent. These strangers get a first glimpse of Latin America, a glimpse that from the onset “resembles a venture into fantasy.” García Márquez contemplates: “It is understandable that the rational talents on this side of the world, exalted in contemplation of their own cultures, should have found themselves without valid means to interpret us” (19). The navigators performed the first act of symbolic violence against Latin America because “they,” the first of many of Latin America’s outsiders, did not comprehend what they encountered as they observed the world new to them through an old and ill-fitting European perspective.

The first European contacts with the continent seemed unrealistic because the navigators did not know how to understand the indigenous way of life and its values. García Márquez tells that Pigafetta wrote of a “misbegotten creature with the head and ears of a mule, a camel’s body, the legs of a deer and the whinny of a horse” (17). A llama or an alpaca was rendered “misbegotten” because it had not been previously known or defined in the European world. Pigafetta also “described how the first native encountered in Patagonia was confronted with a mirror, whereupon that impassioned giant lost his senses to the terror of his own image” (17). It appears that the foreign “they” did not understand the native “us” because the lens through which the former observed the latter was a lens unfamiliar to both cultures. The reaction of a native who has never seen a reflection of himself in a mirror was considered insane by the European Pigafetta because Europeans had been looking at themselves in glass mirrors from the time of the Roman Empire. The laureate further explains: “The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own, serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary” (19). The misinterpretation of Latin America through the

Western lens underscores the continent's "deep sense of alienation that comes from being off-center" (Franco 9).

Carlos Fuentes, a prominent Mexican writer of the Boom claims, "No hacemos la historia, escrita para siempre en la epopeya. La revisamos, la interpretamos, la comentamos. Nos quedamos sin presente: todo es la elaboración del pasado épico" (29). García Márquez's lecture creates an elaboration of Latin American history through a Latin American perspective. As a cultural product, García Márquez's lecture is a lens that takes the audience back through time to show how perspectives are conceived and changed through contact between cultures. Although the lens through which the Western world perceived Latin America in the fifteenth century has changed and expanded to include some cultural differences, the modern Western perspective has yet to accept the continent's own current solutions to social and political change.

Since the point of first contact between the Western world and Latin America, Europe and later the United States have had enormous influence on the continent via economic and political pressure. Just as the fifteenth century conquistadors exploited Latin America for gold, modern foreign investors take advantage of the continent's natural resources and cheap labor. In her analysis of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Franco addresses García Márquez's position regarding outside intervention. "Macondo aspires to be a 'cold' society – to use Lévi-Strauss's term for societies whose mechanisms are conservationist rather than geared to change. The change that comes from the outside is a degeneration," she notes (8). This vicious cycle has perpetuated death, poverty, and corruption that cannot be broken by the application of old solutions that have already proven to be inefficient. However, when Latin America began to explore new avenues for

change in the 1970s, such as socialism and nationalization of the railroad and telephone lines, Europe and the United States barred the continent's path. "Because they tried to change this state of things, nearly two hundred thousand men and women have died throughout the continent," laments García Márquez as he rallies for change in Latin America (18). Although the West did not directly participate in massacres of suspected socialists, Europe and the United States sent arms and monetary aid to assist corrupt anti-Communist juntas. Marquez grieves about Latin America's current state:

Since 1979, the civil war in El Salvador has produced almost one refugee every twenty minutes. The country that could be formed of all exiles and forced emigrants of Latin America would have a population larger than that of Norway...I dare to think that it is this outsized reality, and not just its literary expression, that has deserved the attention of the Swedish Academy of Letters.
(18)

According to García Márquez, U.S. and Europe's neglect of human rights on the grounds of ideological homogeneity is the symbolic violence that needs to be eliminated from the Western perspective.

European and American politicians who send machine guns to Nicaragua or financially support cruel dictators are the "they" who exacerbate Latin America's reality. "It is only natural that they insist on measuring us with the yardstick that they use for themselves, forgetting that the ravages of life are not the same for all, and that the quest of our own identity is just as arduous and bloody for us as it was for them," notes García Márquez (19). Western recognition of the concept that a different "yardstick" works for "us" and "them" is the solidarity that García Márquez seeks in order to eradicate Latin

America's solitude.²¹ Latin America is neither the "same" nor the "other," it is simply different. García Márquez maintains, "Solidarity with our dreams will not make us feel less alone, as long as it is not translated into concrete acts of legitimate support for all the peoples that assume the illusion of having a life of their own in the distribution of the world" (19). The political and economic distribution is such that Latin American people often do not have "a life of their own" because the continent's fate is determined by the outsiders. Such politicization of García Márquez's message leads Epstein to realize that "along with magical realism, Gabriel García Márquez has given us another new literary-critical label, 'political realism,' which in its own way, is itself quite magical" (64). The politicized lecture points out to "them" that the West's symbolic violence actually brings about real violence that dominates the lives of Latin Americans. "I do not mean to embody the illusion...of uniting a chaste north to a passionate south," says the laureate as he asserts that Latin America has the sovereignty to formulate its own politics and economics without the intrusion of Europe and the United States (19). If the latter viewed Latin America as an emerging continent that has the right to determine its own policies, then the people of Latin America would be able to carry out experiments in order to find the best solutions to facilitate social change.

Although García Márquez speaks of the human rights violations in 1982, it seems that his lecture predicts and counters the symbolic violence of the twenty-first century as well. Oprah's statement regarding "wonderful, magical, fantastical, unreal things happen every day" in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* that will make a U.S. reader twenty five

²¹ Neruda seeks unity along class lines, but García Márquez set out to establish political solidarity on broader continental and intercontinental levels.

years later “appreciate the magic of [his] own life” (1) is a form of symbolic violence that ignores the history and reality of an entire continent. García Márquez responds to such disregard: “We have had to ask but little of our imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude” (18). Oprah, a powerful U.S. actor who invites the voiceless to speak and supports and mingles with powerful political figures, is the personification of “them.” She is an actor who has the power to reduce symbolic violence against Latin America but does not do so because she is looking at the continent and its cultural productions from the Western lens. The crux of Latin American solitude is this very symbolic violence that denies the continent world recognition of its struggles, its sovereignty, and its reality.

The global context that the laureate incorporates into his lecture positions U.S. and Europe against Latin America. Here, it is important to ask, “Who represents Latin America?” Who is included in García Márquez’s “we” when he articulates the desires and needs of the continent? Who is represented when he counters the West’s symbolic violence against Latin America? “We have not had a moment’s rest... There have been five wars and seventeen military coups... In the meantime, twenty million Latin American children died before the age of one – more than have been born in Europe since 1970” (García Márquez 18). The atrocities that plague “us” are not unique to one particular Latin American country, they afflict the entire continent.²² These harsh realities that are

²² To investigate a different opinion, see Carmenza Kline’s *Fiction and Reality in the Works of Gabriel García Márquez*. Kline argues that the author’s works are primarily regional and national, and are continental only on a sub-secondary level. She claims that

experienced by all of Latin America are a symbol of continental solidarity. Carlos Fuentes claims that in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* García Márquez “reúne la nostalgia y el deseo en el presente permanente: los da a luz, los sitúa en el mundo, los exterioriza: todo mito es comunicable, es la tangibilidad del sueño privado” (29). García Márquez, a Colombian by origin, does not specifically refer to difficulties within Colombian borders, but rather addresses the magical “reality not of paper, but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths, and that nourishes a source of insatiable creativity, full of sorrow and beauty” (18). Although the laureate frequently names or alludes to Latin American countries that have suffered, the laureate speaks of “our reality” and not of Colombian, Guatemalan, Argentine or any other reality because the continent has experienced real and symbolic violence as a whole. Here is a significant point of departure between Neruda’s centrally Chilean identity and commiseration with the Chilean people and García Márquez’s continental position. The historical context in which he speaks has dramatically changed from Neruda’s Nobel lecture on socialist victory in Chile. In 1982, no country has managed to escape from the injustices and misfortunes that have befallen Latin America.

Political and literary actors from Europe and the United States are not the only ones to practice symbolic violence against Latin America; actors from within the continent are also responsible for the tangible and symbolic suffering of the Latin American people. García Márquez acknowledges that “our independence from Spanish

García Márquez’s work is internal because “for so many years, being Latin American meant being universal, but today, regardless of if it is better or worse, people are being less Latin American and more Colombian, less continental and more national” (79).

domination did not put us beyond the reach of madness” (17). This time, it appears that the division between “us” and “them” actually lies within Latin America. The laureate recalls, “General Antonio López de Santana, three times dictator of Mexico, held a magnificent funeral for the right leg he had lost in the so-called Pastry War... General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, the theosophical despot of El Salvador, who had thirty thousand peasants slaughtered in a savage massacre, invented a pendulum to detect poison in his food” (17-18). Incredible reality also characterizes the internal problems that Latin America faces as García Márquez attributes the internal chaos to the various generals and their forces. Almost a century before García Márquez gave his lecture, José Martí declared: “The government must be born from the country. The spirit of the government must be the spirit of the country. The form of the government must be in harmony with the country’s natural constitution” (3). In the 1980s, the “spirit of the country” is broken by the corrupt military. Although the military leaders are Latin American in origin and should therefore be part of the Latin American “us,” the lens through which they view their countries and behave toward their people separates “them” from the rest of the population.²³ While the coups and the massacres that military juntas mount are evidence of real yet unbelievable violence, the political and social corruption of the military is a form of internal symbolic, but also very real violence against the rest of Latin America. This distinction of the military sector from the rest of the society divides the “us” and disrupts the continent’s unity as it cultivates the Latin American

²³ Rosenberg’s “The Good Sailor” discusses the elite status of Argentine naval officers who were vicious torturers and yet were not accountable to the society or to other branches of the military either during or after the dirty war.

solitude. The laureate reminds Latin America that the “immeasurable violence and pain of our history are the result of age-old inequities and untold bitterness, and not a conspiracy plotted three thousand leagues from our home” (19). Change that will come only from outside the continent will not truly lead to the effects of social reforms that the laureate and the people he speaks for desire. The symbolic violence of Latin Americans in power, whether military or economic, against their own continent must be reduced or eradicated to counter real violence.

However, there is an important distinction between the Latin American population that García Márquez seems to speak for and the segment of the continent’s society that he actually represents. Returning to the opening lines of the laureate’s lecture, García Márquez states that the Florentine navigator Pigafetta wrote about “his passage through our southern lands of America” (17). The phrase “our southern lands” draws attention to the perspective from which the laureate himself is speaking. At the time of European contact with Latin America, the lands were inhabited by indigenous groups such as the Mayas, the Incas, and the people of their empires. The laureate is a white elite male who incorporates the struggles of the conquest of the native population into his definition of “we.” García Márquez further deepens the incorporation when he states that Pigafetta’s account is a “short and fascinating book, which even then contained the seeds of our present-day novels, is by no means the most staggering account of our reality in that age” (17). This statement contains two separate classifications of “we” that actually clash with each other and show the laureate’s very own unintentional symbolic violence against the indigenous. Bourdieu’s theory posits that art is about the power of who is authorized to speak for whom, and the actors in these positions are the ones who

control the exercise of symbolic violence (Swartz 123). The “we” of our “present-day novels” refers to the modern Latin America of which in which the white elite, including García Márquez, have the voice and power to mold the art and the history of the continent. The “we” of “our reality in that age” refers to the annihilation of the indigenous lives as well the indigenous way of life. This conflict concerning who García Márquez speaks for when he says “we” makes it seem as if the plight of the indigenous people is the same as that of the rest of the population. However, the injustices and inequalities that the indigenous of the continent endured since the conquest era are unique to indigenous populations. It appears that race is a factor that García Márquez, a dominant figure, overlooks in his Nobel lecture.

In a statement about García Márquez and representation, Franco notes, “Although Colombia is a country that includes many indigenous peoples as well as substantial Afro-Colombian population, its major writer, Gabriel García Márquez draws for the most part on the popular culture of Hispanic populations” (160). It seems that García Márquez, a leader in a dominant position, performs acts of symbolic violence as he neglects the indigenous populations when he unites the two perspectives. José Martí declared, “Liberty, in order to be viable, must be sincere and full, that if the republic does not open its arms to all and include all in its progress, it dies” (6). Therefore, the unity of the white and indigenous “we” is faulty: the social change that the laureate is calling for will only attend to the needs and desires of the non-indigenous sector of society. Although García Márquez tries to break the vicious cycle of problems that plague the continent, his own inadvertent exercise of symbolic violence against the indigenous does not attend to the very root of the problem. Even the laureate fails to recognize that in order to eradicate the

fantastic reality of Latin American lives, a reality that blurs with legend, the continent needs to address the racial tensions that reinforce Latin American subservience to the West.

**A CALL FOR RECOGNITION: RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ IN OPPOSITION TO SYMBOLIC
VIOLENCE AGAINST GUATEMALA'S INDIGENOUS**

*It is not possible to conceive a democratic Guatemala, free and
independent, without the indigenous identity shaping its character into
all aspects of national existence.*

– Rigoberta Menchú, Oslo, Norway, 1992

I. Introduction

Rigoberta Menchú, the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, was born in Guatemala's Quiché region on January 9, 1959 to a family of Maya peasants. As a child, Menchú helped her family with farmwork in the highlands or on plantations. In her early youth, Menchú followed her family's footsteps and became active in social reform. As guerilla forces occupied the Quiché territory, the government accused the Menchú family of participating in guerilla activities (Abrams 35-36). Between 1979 and 1980, the army orphaned Menchú with the deaths of her father, mother, and brother (Menchú, "Crossing Borders" 159). In the wake of the tragedy, Menchú campaigned to organize strikes demanding better conditions for farm workers and educated the Indian peasants on how to resist military oppression. Menchú had to flee to safety in Mexico, where as the spokesperson for the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) she began to promote resistance to oppression in Guatemala and to campaign internationally for indigenous rights.²⁴ Menchú's story caught international attention when in 1983,

²⁴ Menchú discusses her years of exile in Mexico and her international political activity in *Crossing Borders* published in 1998.

Elisabeth Burgos Debray, recorded and published Menchú's autobiographical testimony of her hardships and the suffering of the Guatemalan Mayas.²⁵ Shortly thereafter, Menchú became the first Indian delegate to the United Nations and as its functionary organized and headed commission meetings to promote indigenous rights throughout the world.²⁶

Menchú's and other Guatemalans' struggles were a result of a violent civil war. The war officially began in 1966 and lasted for decades claiming over 200,000 human lives (CEH, "Armed Confrontation" 1). The United Nation's Commission on Historical Clarification (CEH) concluded in 1999 that the use of repression instead of the law, closing of political spaces, "racism, the increasing exclusionary and anti-democratic nature of institutions...are the underlying factors which determined the origin and

²⁵ Menchú met Elisabeth Burgos in January of 1982 on her first trip to Paris. Burgos, a Venezuelan, was also a political exile who was actively involved with the Communist Party, campaigned with Che Guevara in Cuba, and took particular interest in indigenous peoples' struggles (Stoll 178-180). For 18 hours Burgos taped Menchú's account and then transcribed Menchú's words into *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (Burgos xix). A controversy unfurled ten years later when David Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* uncovered that not all of Menchú's words were strictly autobiographical. "Now that native people are insisting on equality, they are less willing to have their words mediated by outsiders," writes Stoll (181). See notes 32 and 33 on representation and testimonio.

²⁶ In "Heiress to an Ancient Culture at the UN," a chapter from *Crossing Borders*, Menchú describes her UN campaigns as a member of the International Council of International Treaties.

subsequent outbreak of the armed confrontation” (2-3). Beginning with Guatemala’s independence in 1821, the State protected economic interests of whites and Ladinos, people of mixed white and indigenous descent, so dividing Guatemala’s politics and society along class and racial lines (CEH, “Armed Confrontation” 1). In 1944, Juan José Arévalo and his successor Jacobo Arbenz Gúzman instituted a decade of social and political reforms. In 1952, Arbenz recognized the Communist Guatemalan Labor Party that quickly gained support in labor unions and key peasant organizations.²⁷ Dissatisfied with Arbenz’s policies that threatened its power, the army overthrew his government in a 1954 coup backed by the Cold War-driven United States (Perera 40-41). A series of unstable military rulers that followed the coup ordered harsh repressive measures against any possible opposition. A series of massacres, the creation of death squads, assassinations and disappearances characterized decades of ensuing violence.²⁸

The period between 1978 and 1982 was the most violent and is referred to in Guatemala as “La violencia.”²⁹ Under General Efraín Ríos Montt’s 1982 “Scorched

²⁷ Social security, labor and agrarian reforms were at the front of Arévalo’s reform movement. Peter Calvert describes Arévalo’s time in office as a “period of sympathy for the man who works in the fields, in the shops, on the military bases, in small businesses” (75-76).

²⁸ A Guatemalan lawyer speaks on the impact of the war’s violence: “You may say that 1966 was the start of our civil war and the beginning of our brutalization” (Perera 40).

²⁹ See “Chronology of Events During the Armed Conflict in Guatemala 1962-1996,” an annex to the CEH report that according to each presidential term outlines the

Earth” campaign, the Guatemalan army burned 625 Mayan villages and displaced approximately one and a half million people in an effort to eliminate indigenous support for guerilla forces (Sanford 14). The 1999 CEH report found that the Guatemalan army and its agents were responsible for ninety-three percent of the deaths during the civil war, and reported that eighty-three percent of the victims were Maya (“Human Rights” 1). CEH further established that the army committed acts of genocide based on findings that it systematically enacted severe human rights violations against entire Maya communities. Out of 669 massacres in Guatemala, 344 occurred in the Western region of Quiché, Menchú’s home (“Massacres by Department” 1).

In 1992, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded Menchú the Nobel Peace Prize “in recognition of her work for social justice and ethno-cultural reconciliation based on respect for the rights of indigenous peoples” (29). In this chapter I examine Menchú’s Nobel lecture, and propose that she inserts an indigenous perspective into the discourse used to construct the concept of peace. I first analyze how Menchú expands discourse and then comment on how the indigenous presence in her Nobel lecture resists symbolic violence against the indigenous.

II. Indigenization

Rigoberta Menchú addresses the Oslo audience as a Latin American, a human rights activist, a woman, and most importantly, as an indigenous person. I consider her indigenous perspective critical in terms of the context and the content of her speech.

government’s general policy, its counterinsurgency strategy, and social movements and insurgency in Guatemala.

Menchú's 1992 speech marked five hundred years since Columbus made first contact with the New World. More significantly, the content of Menchú's lecture inserts an indigenous presence into the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony and its lectures. Even if some of Menchú's critics disagree to what extent she truly represents Guatemala's indigenous,³⁰ Menchú herself asserts that she speaks for the indigenous and from this perspective delivers her Nobel lecture:

When evaluating the overall significance of the Peace Prize, I would like to say some words on behalf of all those whose voice cannot be heard or who have been repressed for having spoken their opinions, of all those who have been marginalized, who have been discriminated, who live in poverty, in need, of all those who are the victims of repression and violation of human rights. Those who, nevertheless, have endured through centuries, who have not lost their conscience, determination, and hope. (40)

³⁰ David Stoll argues that Menchú was less of a representative of the indigenous than guerilla forces and popular movements that used her to "put a human face on opposition that still had to operate in secret" (7). Stoll further notes that "most peasants did not share with Rigoberta... her definition of the enemy" because they viewed both the guerillas and the soldiers as one source of violence and devastation (8). Menchú's account and its popularity is problematic because "we think we are getting closer to understanding Guatemalan peasants when actually we are being borne away by the mystifications wrapped up in an iconic figure" (227). My purpose is not to take sides in the controversy, but rather to examine the perspective from which Menchú purports to speak in order to analyze how her lecture expands discourse and resists symbolic violence.

From Menchú's first sentences it is evident that she positions herself as an Indian who speaks for her Quiché village, the Maya of her country, and other indigenous populations. Indeed, Menchú's lecture is a testimonio,³¹ much like her 1983 biography, that captures her own struggles and those of other politically and socially marginalized indigenous populations. As she advocates for peace and for the political and social measures necessary to propel humanity toward peace, the laureate presents herself as the embodiment of the indigenous voice. It is not surprising that an indigenous perspective is evident in her discussion of colonialism, Europe's first prolonged contact with America. However, what is remarkable about Menchú's lecture is the subsequent discursive indigenization of her speech, the insertion of the subaltern³² into a discussion about democracy, development, and modernization. Through Menchú's words we see that the Cold War, the United Nations, national sovereignty and other such concepts not only

³¹ John Beverley defines testimonio as an account "told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually 'life' or a significant life experience" (31). Testimony differs from oral history because the intention of the narrator, not the recorder, is paramount (32). However, Beverley admits that because the testimonio is not yet governed by literary norms, an attempt to define it is "at best provincial, and at worst repressive" (31).

³² In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak posits that if the subaltern could speak in a way meaningful enough to compel the intended audience to listen, then they would no longer be subaltern. In other words, not being listened to is what constitutes the subaltern. I claim that the Nobel lectures allow the subaltern to speak, to be meaningful, to oppose the subaltern status.

pertain to the West but are subject to interpretation by the subaltern. In other words, Rigoberta Menchú's Nobel lecture is important because it infuses with the indigenous presence the discourse used in the West to discuss peace, politics, and society. She speaks of democracy, development, and modernization alongside concepts such as equality, human rights, and justice as she believes indigenous people view them. It is my position that her Nobel Speech thus results in an expansion of Western discourse about peace. In the next section of this chapter, I examine the ways in which indigenous symbols in Menchú's Nobel lecture promote an indigenous perspective on peace and politics at the same time that their presence indigenizes the discourse of the Nobel Prize.

III. Indigenization and Indigenous Symbols

Menchú incorporates into her Nobel lecture the symbols of traditional and modern indigenous culture. The laureate manifests cultural symbols as facets of ethnic culture to express past and present Maya history and traditions. Indigenous symbols also emphasize the foundation of indigenous interaction with nature and the environment. In this section, I examine Menchú's use of traditional cultural symbols and their effect upon indigenization.

The Quetzal, the resplendent national bird of Guatemala, is the first of multiple symbols of indigenous culture that appear in the lecture. In the beginning of her speech, Menchú explains to her audience that the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize medal will be temporarily housed in a museum in Mexico because she foresees that peace and justice will not promptly reach Guatemala. The medal will remain in Mexico, a country that admitted many Guatemalan refugees and exiles, "until peaceful and safe conditions are

established in Guatemala to place it here, in the land of Quetzal” (40). The quetzal, an ancient bird of brilliant green, red, and blue plumage that is part of the trogon family, lives in mountainous, tropical regions of Central America where it feeds on fruit, insects, and lizards. The twin iridescent emerald tail feathers that male quetzals grow during the mating season measure up to three feet in length (“Trogon”). The quetzal tail feathers were more valuable than gold in the time of the Mayan empire. Priests and royalty wore the sacred quetzal feathers in ceremonies.³³ Clearly, Menchú incorporates the quetzal into the speech because of its historical link to ancient Mesoamerica. Although tropical deforestation and captivity now threaten the quetzal’s survival, it has survived to represent the Maya’s past and present. Via the insertion of the quetzal into discourse about late 20th century political conditions in Guatemala, Menchú indigenizes that discourse. Cruel dictators, repressive governments, human rights violations, poverty, banishment and exile are problems of Guatemala as a whole nation: the indigenous are part of that nation.³⁴ It seems to me that as the laureate invokes the quetzal she directly brings the concerns and problems of the indigenous into the dialogue about both the problems in Guatemala and the desire to improve Guatemala. The link between the Nobel Prize, the Maya, and the quetzal seems to signify that the medal cannot be moved to the “land of the Quetzal” until Guatemala recognizes and represents its indigenous people.³⁵

³³ In contemporary Guatemala, the quetzal is also the name of the country’s currency.

³⁴ Menchú fills a gap in García Márquez’s lecture on who constitutes Latin America.

³⁵ Irwin Abram’s 1999 publication of Menchú’s Nobel lecture notes that although the government and the guerillas signed a peace agreement in 1996, the Nobel medal still remains in Mexico (49).

The laureate further suggests that Guatemala is incomplete without its indigenous population because the indigenous are the country's foundation. By giving voice to those who "endured through centuries, who have not lost their conscience, determination, and hope" (40), Menchú inserts the history of the Mayan civilization into the national story. She enumerates ancient Maya accomplishments in mathematics, astronomy, agriculture, medicine, engineering, and architecture. "The Mayas discovered the zero value in mathematics... They prepared a calendar more accurate than the Gregorian, and in the field of medicine they performed intracranial surgical operations" (41). Menchú clearly links the ancient Maya's numerous contributions to knowledge with development, and I believe that she thus indigenizes discourse about progress. In her lecture, scientific and social advancements are not represented as white, elitist concepts, but are rooted in the Maya culture. Menchú laments, "Who can predict what other great scientific conquests and developments these people could have achieved, if they had not been conquered by blood and fire and subjected to an ethnocide that affected nearly 50 million people in the course of 500 years" (41). It seems that Menchú uses the historical record to dispel the notion that "indigenous" is synonymous with "backwardness." According to Menchú, progress leads to "fraternity and understanding among human beings." For this very reason she relies upon the historical record of the Maya to indigenize the concept of progress, and to build a future for her people.

The huipil, another reference to the ancient and contemporary Maya, is perhaps the most suggestive indigenous symbol in the lecture. This traditional Maya female blouse is woven out of bright colors in distinct patterns to signify which village the woman who wears it comes from, her social and marital status, religious beliefs and her

personality (Josserand, “Traditional Clothing” 1).³⁶ The huipil is a form of the grand weaving culture. Menchú introduces the huipil in her final remarks:

By combining all the shades and nuances of the ‘ladinos’, the ‘garifunas’ and Indians in the Guatemalan ethnic mosaic, we must interlace a number of colors without introducing contradiction, without becoming grotesque nor antagonistic, but we must give them brightness and a superior quality, just the way our weavers weave a typical huipil blouse, brilliantly composed, a gift to Humanity. (49)

Handmade according to ancient techniques, the huipil requires time, dedication, and vibrant materials. Only the elite could afford to wear ornate weaved designs in the pre-Columbian era, but weaving today is the cultural and economic cornerstone of the indigenous Maya (Hooks 69-70; Josserand, “Economics” 1). I suggest that Menchú speaks about the huipil at the end of her lecture because the process governing its construction resembles the process the laureate wants to take place in Guatemala in order to achieve peace. What does peace require? According to Menchú’s indigenous perspective, peace mandates the combinations of “all the shades and nuances” of Guatemala’s races without contradiction and antagonism between them. Furthermore, peace must contain “brightness and a superior quality.” The contrast among the huipil’s threads significantly contributes to its uniqueness and beauty, while sturdy weaving produces durability that prolongs the life of the cloth for twenty or even thirty years (Josserand, “The Huipil” 1). Likewise, according to Menchú, peace will be beautiful

³⁶ Dr. J. Jathryn Josserand, an associate professor of anthropology at the Florida State University, was the advisor to the 2001 Mesoamerican Textile Seminar in Florida. The information regarding the huipil and weaving comes from the seminar’s website.

because of the contrasts of racial colors and customs that will combine not to bleed and mix into one color, but to construct a durable “ethnic mosaic” of distinct beautiful pieces. The resilience of the huipil is necessary because the huipil takes many years and many resources to make. Likewise, the “superior quality” of peace is similarly indispensable and for this reason ceasefires, treaties, and other politics must not be superficial, but rather genuine agreements that include the voice and interests of the indigenous. Menchú suggests that peace assembled in a manner that includes the indigenous is a “gift to Humanity” because it exemplifies to other racially troubled countries mutual understanding and participation of multiple societal segments. The “Land of Quetzal,” understood in these terms, would undoubtedly be worthy of housing the Nobel Peace Prize medal.

We see that peace according to Menchú’s indigenous perspective is more than the absence of war; it is a life of unity and harmony.³⁷ Life is universal, but cultures and religions explain its origin differently. Menchú describes the origins in Quiché terms: “To us Mother Earth is not only a source of economic riches that give us maize, which is our life, but she also provides so many other things that the privileged ones of today strive for” (42). At first glance, “maize, which is our life” seems to refer to the nutritional value of maize that is certainly necessary to physically sustain life, or the health of a person. In this context maize represents life as it generally pertains to the function and biological condition of a human body. However, maize is also a metaphorical life force

³⁷ Neruda focused in his lecture on building solidarity across classes, and twenty years later Menchú incorporates crossing racial and cultural into what constitutes fraternity.

based on traditional Maya culture. The *Popol Vuh*,³⁸ chronicles how, according to Maya teaching, man himself was created from maize. The modern ancestors of the ancient Maya spiritually identify with maize and consider it a gift from the gods. Menchú unites a common, perhaps even universal, understanding of life as a biological concept with a spiritual indigenous interpretation. Thus, the presence of maize, as a literal and spiritual life force, serves as an additional component in the indigenization the Nobel discourse. It therefore seems to me that Menchú insists on a right to peace in which the indigenous people of Guatemala and Latin America are able to thrive both as biological beings and as a spiritual culture. In addition, Quiché thought often personifies maize as a woman. Throughout the lecture, Menchú, a female Quiché representative on a global stage, embraces the power represented by this symbol in order to insert women, indigenous women, as a powerful component in the nation's story.³⁹ Menchú articulates her desire for peace in Guatemala, or a life free from human rights violations and physical and

³⁸ The *Popol Vuh*, or the "Book of the Community," is a mythological narrative written in Quiché saved from destruction during conquest. The book includes stories on creation, gods, and Mayan heroes. See Christenson's *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya* and Tedlock's *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition*.

³⁹ Margaret Hooks compiles in *Guatemalan Women Speak* a series of Guatemalan women's testimonios on their life before, during, and after the long period of violence that devastated their country. Hooks highlights not only the various dimensions of oppression that Guatemalan women have suffered, but also the women's agency in bringing about social change.

economic abuses. Moreover, she calls for a life free from the social stigma of race, religion, and traditional culture.⁴⁰

Cultural symbols that deal with nature are also pivotal to indigenization. Menchú repeatedly invokes the Mayan relationship with nature as she discusses a variety of themes that range from her culture to non-indigenous topics. The laureate first talks about the natural world in detail when she explains the human relationship with it:

The peculiarities of the vision of the Indian people are expressed according to the way in which they are related to each other. First, between human beings, through communication. Second, with the earth, as with our mother, because she gives us our lives and is not mere merchandise. Third, with nature, because we are an integral part of it, and not its owners. (42)

According to Menchú, the Maya tend to communicate by emphasizing three specific human interactions: interactions with other people, the earth, and nature – three natural

⁴⁰ On August 17, 2007, Rory Carroll of the *Guardian* reported that a five-star hotel in Cancun, Mexico asked a woman dressed in indigenous clothing to immediately vacate the hotel, assuming that she was a vendor or a beggar. However, that woman was none other than Rigoberta Menchú who was at the hotel at the request of the Mexican President Felipe Calderón to participate in a conference on drinking water and sanitation. Only until a journalist who was due to interview Menchú intervened on her behalf, the security guard was adamant about throwing her out. To this day, there seems to be a stigma associated with race and the indigenous culture.

entities.⁴¹ The implication, here, is that in the eyes of the indigenous, interaction between humans is natural regardless of their race, wealth and status. Of course, this communicative tendency – communication between and among people – is expressed not just by the Maya, but by Westerners as well. However, the second type of communication, a daily spiritual interaction between humans and the earth, is less common in the West. In the quote above and the previously discussed reference to maize, Menchú codifies the relationship between the Maya and nature as one between children and their mother. Although a mother may be an international symbol of love, respect, and of course, life, she is not always intuitively linked with earth. I read the personification of the earth as “she [who] gives us our lives” in Menchú’s speech as a way of emphasizing to Western audiences the extent to which the earth and the Maya are bound. This union complements the third relationship between nature and people, a relationship in which humans are seen as “an integral part of [the earth], and not its owners” (42). Menchú seems to make a clear distinction regarding the manner in which Westerners and indigenous people act and the way they perceive their actions. I believe that elements of the natural world are constantly visible in the lecture in order to suggest that what is “natural” in Menchú’s indigenous culture is valuable even beyond Menchú’s indigenous culture.⁴² Here, Menchú fills a void in the Western understanding of concepts such as

⁴¹ Whereas Neruda communicates via poetry, Menchú speaks of interaction and solidarity in completely different terms, natural symbols.

⁴² Note that nature for Neruda was a metaphor for obstacles, for the unknown. However, as an indigenous woman, Menchú integrates nature into her lecture as a cultural concept, something that is inherently indigenous.

peace, justice, and equality, an understanding which, in 1982, tended to ignore the indigenous. Menchú's explanations of Mayan interactions with the world at large validate the indigenous perspective from which she delivers her lecture.

Menchú once more refers to the earth as a mother when she discusses indigenous suffering during the cruel and extensive Guatemalan civil war. General Ríos Montt's "Scorched Earth" campaign burned indigenous villages and maize fields to prevent the inhabitants from helping or joining guerilla forces (Sanford 146-147). The Guatemalan army savagely exiled the indigenous men, women, and children from their land. The refugees then wandered without food, shelter, and medicine in the inhospitable jungle (Sanford 159-166).⁴³ Menchú laments:

Among the most bitter dramas that a great percentage of the population has to endure is forced exodus. Which means, to be forced by military units and persecution to abandon their villages, their Mother Earth, where their ancestors rest, their environment, the nature that gave them life and the growth of their communities, all of which constituted a coherent system of social organization and functional democracy. (46)

Menchú describes indigenous suffering and continues to link "Mother Earth" with life. However, it seems to me that in this reference, Mother Earth is not linked just with the biological mother that gives and sustains physical life, but is rather a source of cultural

⁴³ Sanford documents the dramatic memories of a twenty-year-old woman who was five when the soldiers killed her father: "I still have susto from running past all the dead in the mountains; the dogs and the hawks were eating them... I always remember the dead and the pieces of the dead in the mountain, but I can't remember my father's face" (163).

and political life. Forced to flee in order to save their physical lives, the indigenous leave behind their ancestors, “their environment, the nature that gave them life and the growth of their communities.” Given that indigenous Mayan culture is focused on land, it is clear that Menchú presents land loss and the subsequent exile as a cultural loss.⁴⁴ She talks neither of lost lives, nor money, but rather grieves over the displacement and loss of a “coherent system of social organization and functional democracy.” It seems to me, then, that this incorporation of the earth as a cultural symbol indigenizes the discourse about a significant and widespread humanitarian problem. It is a tragedy that thousands of people perished, that countless victims endured torture, and that many unborn children died in their starving mothers’ wombs. However, Menchú focuses not so much on individual tragedy but more on how forced dispersion above all destroys indigenous culture, identity, and society. Again, Menchú inserts the protection of indigenous culture into a broad humanitarian agenda, and so further expands our understanding of “peace” and what must be accomplished to achieve it.

Preservation of indigenous culture is also necessary to safeguard “functional democracy.” It appears, according to Menchú’s speech, nature and land interplay with culture to constitute an indigenous perspective on democracy. “There cannot be a true democracy as long as this problem [of displaced and exiled people] is not satisfactorily solved and these people are reinstated on their lands and in their villages” (46).

According to Menchú, the Guatemalan government has ignored the need, the troubles,

⁴⁴ As opposed to Menchú, exile for Neruda is the loss of immediate connections with the Chileans he was leaving behind. Each laureate presents a different type of solitude: exile for Neruda is political solitude, while Menchú presents exile as form of cultural solitude.

and the voice of the indigenous. Furthermore, Menchú makes a case that the displacement of the indigenous is undemocratic. As a result of the position she takes here, democracy, a political concept widely recognized and revered in the West, now applies to all of Guatemala, not just those people within its political boundaries who resemble Westerners. The obvious implication is that the U.S.-supported coup and the corrupt governments that followed disrupted the indigenous people's "coherent system of social organization and functional democracy" (46). The less obvious implication is that democracy is "natural" to the indigenous. The irony, then, is that when, in their pro-democracy Cold War fever, the U.S. and Guatemalan governments attacked indigenous villages in Guatemala, in fact, they attacked democratic strongholds. Therefore, it appears that "democracy" as U.S. and Guatemalan governments and armies defined it is not a "true democracy" because it was solely vested in political elites who marginalized others' national identities.

Finally, Menchú calls for a societal reorganization based on a form of democracy that would include the indigenous and "allow for the development of the agricultural potential, as well as for the return of the land to the legitimate [indigenous] owners" (46-47). According to Menchú, "this process of reorganization must be carried out with the greatest respect for nature, in order to protect her and return to her, her strength and capability to generate life" (47). Notably, Menchú does not leave nature out of her call for land reform. Land must be respected as it is a part of nature. According to Menchú, land redistribution must occur to protect nature and to "return to her, her strength and capability to generate life." It seems to me that Menchú ascertains that only the indigenous people are guardians of nature who know how to properly care for it. I

previously discussed the ways in which nature surfaces in the lecture as representation of both physical life as well as cultural life. Here, it is associated with agricultural life as well. This is to say that it supports both the culture and the economy. For Menchú, the earth, venerated by the indigenous bears the crops that also sustain the Guatemala's non-indigenous populations, which is to say, the nation. I view this segment of Menchú's lecture as a treatise on the connection between democracy, land reform and nature, each an integral component of Menchú's vision of a new Guatemala. In my opinion, land reform functions in this context to legitimate the indigenous people as Guatemalan citizens. While race and culture distinguish the indigenous people, land ownership places them in the definition of Guatemala as permanent nationals and also agricultural contributors to the country's economy. In other words, land ownership is an opportunity for the indigenous to participate in Guatemalan politics, economy, and society. Land, a natural, political and economic construct, gives the indigenous people a voice and a place in the structure of Guatemalan identity.

One of the main arguments of the speech is that the new Guatemala will thrive, and Menchú seems certain of that. The laureate foresees that the process of change will be difficult, but it is time for the indigenous people to push aside the historical obstacles of race, culture, and money and contribute to the indigenous Guatemala. Menchú declares that in the new Guatemala, the indigenous emerge alongside the forces of nature:

Our history is a living history, that has throbbed, withstood and survived many centuries of sacrifice. Now it comes forward again with strength. The seeds, dormant for such a long time, break out today with some uncertainty, although they germinate in a world that is at present characterized by confusion and

uncertainty... The peoples of Guatemala will mobilize and will be aware of their strength in building up a worthy future. They are preparing themselves to sow the future, to free themselves from atavisms, to rediscover their heritage. To build a country with a genuine national identity. To start a new life. (49)

Menchú presents the indigenous community's plan of action metaphorically, in terms of seeds that must break through the tough ground to reach sunlight and ensure their own survival. The indigenous people are the seeds that the civil war scattered in the inhospitable Guatemalan mountains at the edge of civilization, and at the brink of humanity. In my opinion, the comparison of the indigenous struggle with germinating seeds portrays the indigenous as survivors unwilling to relent. Clearly embedded in this metaphor is the notion that despite centuries of sacrifices, the indigenous people have survived, but at a great cost. Now is their time to thrive. Via the symbols of nature, Menchú indigenizes discourse about political action and, establishes it as natural, thus legitimizing indigenous resistance to the Guatemalan government and its policies. Furthermore, Menchú urges the indigenous people to rise up for a greater Guatemala with a "genuine national identity." It appears to me that because Menchú links nature with politics, the latter concept begins to lose its association with greed and selfishness. Just as a seedling finds its way through the asphalt, so the indigenous Guatemalans, invoked throughout Menchú's Nobel speech, must engage in politics to assert their social and cultural rights. In this way, Menchú justifies the indigenous' political mobilization because it promotes their participation in the construction of a national identity. Culture and politics are interwoven in Menchú's speech in order to further a "genuine national identity," a new identity that organically includes Guatemala's indigenous. "It is not

possible to conceive a democratic Guatemala, free and independent, without the indigenous identity shaping its character into all aspects of national existence” (Menchú 46). Therefore, I see Menchú’s 1992 Nobel Peace Prize as an implementation of change on a discursive level and as the impetus for facilitating change on a political level.

IV. Indigenization in Opposition to Symbolic Violence

Menchú insists throughout her lecture that a coherent Guatemalan society and all of its functional branches must in itself include the country’s indigenous population. The laureate maintains that the 1992 Nobel Prize is “not only a reward and a recognition of a single person, but a starting point for the hard struggle towards the achievement of that revindication which is yet to be fulfilled” (40). Indeed, the Nobel Peace Prize imparted esteem upon the recipient, as well as indirect intellectual European pressure on the Guatemalan government and guerilla forces to reach a ceasefire and eventually to make peace.⁴⁵ Menchú affirms that the Nobel Peace Prize is “an instrument with which to fight for peace, for justice, for the rights of those who suffer the abysmal economical, social, cultural and political inequalities” (39). The laureate hopes to employ her Peace Prize in order to “establish political and legal grounds that will give irreversible impulses to a

⁴⁵ Stoll proposes the possibility that the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Menchú may have had the paradoxical effect of perpetuating violence. *I, Rigoberta Menchú* legitimized URNG’s version of the war leading activists to believe that “the guerilla movement sprang from local needs, that it was an inevitable response to oppression” (216). Therefore, there was support for the guerilla’s refusal to compromise during the peace talks, consequently drawing out violence in Guatemala.

solution to what initiated the internal armed conflict” (39). On the one hand, the Nobel Peace Prize is an economic instrument that Menchú anticipates will foster real action for peace, equality, and justice. In this thesis, I am arguing that it is something else as well.

I propose that the Nobel Prize, more specifically the lecture that the Nobel Prize makes possible, is a tool with which the laureate opposes symbolic violence. I return again to theory: symbolic violence takes form when dominant actors within a cultural field deny other actors resources, treat them as inferior, or limit their realistic aspirations (Bourdieu, “Symbolic Power,” 117). So when Menchú inserts the subaltern indigenous perspective into a broad international articulation of concepts such as life, peace, progress, land, democracy, and politics, she opposes the symbolic violence that occurs whenever elites, Westerners, and white people ignore the indigenous in *their* articulations of these concerns.

Racism is of course a primary concern of any indigenous person in a country that launched genocide against its indigenous population. Symbolic violence occurs whenever racism is ignored. Menchú helps her audience see that Guatemalan inequality and injustice are linked to racial divisions and divisive social and political boundaries. From her lecture, it is evident that Menchú calls for the eradication of this harmful racial segregation. In my analysis of her speech, I have made the case that her position is argued in terms of the relationship between nature and the nation. I have theorized that the indigenization of the Nobel discourse operates as a rhetorical tool, a kind of discursive resistance against racial violence.

It is important to recall, here, that according to Menchú, the indigenous people express themselves in terms of how they relate to other people, to the earth, and to nature (42). Indigenous relations bind people, earth, and nature into one unit:

From these basic features derive behavior, rights and obligations in the American Continent, for the indigenous people as well as for the non-indigenous, whether they be racially mixed, black, or whites or Asian. The whole society has an obligation to show mutual respect, to learn from each other. (42)

Menchú's words imply that an assessment of racial superiority of one group over another defies the world's natural order. It seems that nature requires human cooperation to ensure certain "behavior, rights and obligations" for people of all races. Society "has an obligation [to nature] to show mutual respect," otherwise no rights are guaranteed. It appears that in this manner, Menchú establishes the organic features of human fraternity and so places racism on nature's periphery. Throughout Guatemalan as well as Latin American history, racist attitudes have resulted in poverty, starvation, and death. The indigenization of the Nobel laureate's discourse opposes the 500 years of racially-motivated symbolic and actual violence against Latin America's indigenous populations.

Indispensable to a Nobel Peace Prize winner's lecture is an appeal for social justice. Inequality within a society, whether local or global, sharply emphasizes the dominant actors' symbolic violence against those they consider less worthy. Ironically, most human societies are organized in such a way that the most unfortunate have the least access to services and opportunities to better their lives. On the basic needs level, social justice, to borrow Menchú's words, "demands a solution to the frightening statistics on infant mortality, malnutrition, lack of education, analphabetism, wages insufficient to

sustain life” (47). The laureate opposes social and political institutions that practice symbolic violence whenever they ignore the indigenous’ needs. Disregard for the indigenous’ welfare is also rooted within Guatemala, and such disregard perpetuates a cyclical pattern of social problems. Clearly then, Menchú’s discourse functions in opposition to the ignoring. It functions in opposition to the symbolic violence that dismisses indigenous rights.

At a time when the commemoration of the Fifth Centenary of the arrival of Columbus in America has repercussions all over the world, the revival of hope for the oppressed indigenous peoples demands that we reassert our existence to the world and the value of our cultural identity. It demands that we endeavor to actively participate in the decisions that concern our destiny, in the building-up of our countries. (43)

In response to the violence, Menchú promotes cultural knowledge and active politics. It seems that the laureate follows her own recommendations to “reassert our existence in the world and the value of our cultural identity” (43). The suggestion is that the audience matters here. Menchú brings to this non-European audience life, peace, unity as a series of non-European cultural symbols. The Nobel Committee recognized Menchú’s campaigns on behalf of Guatemalans. More importantly, however, they gave her exposure on an international stage in Oslo. As a consequence of this committee’s decision and the laureate’s words, it becomes more difficult for agents of symbolic violence to ignore or refute injustice. Menchú speaks to this audience and to a broader one as well. She recognizes that some “economic power, some statesmen and intellectuals” will not agree to the indigenous’ political activity, but is certain that “the movement initiated by different

political and intellectual ‘Amerindians’ will finally convince them that, from an objective point of view, we are a constituent part of the historical alternatives that are being discussed at the international level” (44). Menchú thus manifests the indigenous people’s cultural distinction and historicizes their contributions to humanity.

Finally, Menchú not only opposes the violence of the Guatemalan government, she also strongly opposes the international community’s symbolic violence against Guatemala. She locates her position in a historical narrative. Before she speaks of modern international relations, she returns to the time of first contact between the indigenous and European civilizations. “If the indigenous civilization and the European civilizations could have made exchanges in a peaceful and harmonious manner, without destruction, exploitation, discrimination and poverty, they could, no doubt, have achieved greater and more valuable conquests for Humanity” (42). Here, Menchú’s historical contextualization suggests that symbolic violence is not new: Europeans of the colonial era used racial and cultural differences in order to set themselves above the continent’s indigenous. Menchú counters that historical practice with the following remarks: “One cannot talk about a ‘discovery of America,’ because... America and its native civilizations had discovered themselves long before the fall of the Roman Empire and Medieval Europe” (42). Menchú clearly faults European empires and explorers for initiating a relationship of symbolic violence. As we know from the García Márquez speech, this is not particularly new on the Nobel platform. Her strategy is rhetorical. It allows her to unmask oppression as long-standing and historic and to then link it to modern international violence, both symbolic and real. It allows her to advocate for another international opportunity to more justly engage the indigenous. That just engagement is, of course, a political one. She says, “I

invite the international community to contribute with specific actions so that the parties involved may overcome the differences that at this stage keep negotiations in a wait-and-see state, so that they will succeed, first of all, in signing an agreement on Human Rights” (48). Moreover, Menchú approaches the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize as the “recognition of the European debt to the American indigenous people” (42).

Above all, Menchú frames the struggle in terms of race. I would suggest that class matters here as well. However, the class struggle at this time is clearly less central to Menchú’s agenda. Her focus on the racial component of the conflict in Guatemala allows her to isolate an issue that can be addressed internationally. In a time of rising international alarm over racial genocide, Menchú addresses not only the Nobel Committee members who honor her. She also addresses the international perpetrators of symbolic violence. By doing this, she sets the stage for sustained opposition to violence both symbolic and real.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I set out to analyze the overlooked Nobel lectures of Latin American laureates. I interpret the Nobel lectures of Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez, and Rigoberta Menchú as powerful cultural products which the laureates strategically construct to oppose symbolic violence against their nations and the Latin American continent. My study demonstrates how Latin American laureates appropriate the Nobel lecture as a literary and political instrument to create a site for the representation and negotiation of social relations. In other words, the Nobel lecture is an opportunity for the laureates to make a statement focused on Latin American opinions and criticisms.

Each Nobel lecture that I examined illustrates how the laureates used their lectures to resist symbolic violence of Western as well as Latin American actors against the continent's social and political growth. Neruda, the first Latin American laureate to deliver a Nobel lecture, poetically celebrated the political achievements of the Chilean masses and so resisted the symbolically violent ideas that poetry and politics belong to the bourgeoisie. A decade later, García Márquez focused international attention on the need to change the perspective that objectified and defined Latin American political rights in the eyes of the world. Then, in 1992, Rigoberta Menchú grounded the discourse on life, peace, and democracy in indigenous concepts and perspectives in opposition to symbolic and real violence against Guatemala's and Latin America's indigenous. Clearly, there is a historical progression within the Latin American Nobel lectures in regard to who delivers the lecture and to whom the laureate gives discursive power. Although each lecture is unique to each laureate's historical context, the three lectures form a kind of

unified trajectory across time and national boundaries to oppose the socially constructed perception of Latin American people as inferior.

The study of Latin American laureates' Nobel lectures is central to Hispanic Studies. The laureates are spokespeople for both their genre of cultural production and their nations. Neruda, García Márquez, and Menchú are key figures who have been recognized on a global stage and who hold significant interpretive power. Their lectures are powerful symbols of political and social situations in and around Latin America, and it is vital to understand who the laureates claim to represent and how they accomplish this mission. In this thesis, I showed that the laureates use their interpretive power to expand on the work of their predecessors and to include multiple sectors of society in their visions of Latin America. However, it is also clear that symbolic power has much to do with who is left out of the representation. Whether a laureate chooses to represent the whole continent and neglects the indigenous or speaks for the indigenous as if all have one voice, the laureate defines how he or she practices interpretive power. What will the lectures of future Latin American Nobel laureates express? What kinds of scholarly projects are still pending? I see my work as a first step in a more extensive academic discussion about symbolic violence, interpretive power and the Nobel lectures. There is more work to be done in this area. For example, further studies of the Latin American Nobel lectures might take into account all seven lectures in order to study the changes and continuities. Such studies might also investigate how the messages of the Latin American laureates compare to lectures given by laureates from around the world. What sectors of the society do other laureates represent? Was the indigenous voice present in Nobel lectures prior to García Márquez's or Rigoberta Menchú's lectures? When

answered, these questions would help advance an international understanding of Latin America's position within the world.

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