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Literary Shifts

María Luisa Bombal: Circulation and Translation Processes in the United States

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Abstract: The life and work of Chilean writer María Luisa Bombal, as well as her publishing history in Spanish and English, constitute a complex and singular latticework. By living and publishing in both Latin America and the U.S., she guaranteed herself a wide and heterogeneous audience. Furthermore, her unique prose has captivated North American academic circles, which have analyzed her work from a number of diverse theoretical and critical perspectives. This study focuses precisely on her reception within both academia and publishing in the U.S., and analyzes the processes by which her works were translated from Spanish to English and from English to Spanish.

Keywords: María Luisa Bombal, Latin American narrative, translation, gender studies, female subjectivities

¹ [Editors' note: This is an English translation, offered by the Observatorio, of the Spanish original submitted by the author. See study 066-12/2020SP.]

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Literary Shifts

Presentation

This work on the Chilean writer Maria Luisa Bombal inaugurates a new section in our series *Estudios del Observatorio/Observatorio Studies*, which will be devoted to the reception of Spanish and Latin American literature in the United States. All the issues in this new section will be introduced with the same label, *Translaciones literarias/Literary shifts* (in the Spanish or English version, respectively) –the terms 'translaciones' and 'shifts' denoting a change of location as well as the notions of transformation, adaptation and, of course, translation. When literary works are transposed to a country other than that where they originated, not only do they move physically but their reading in the new context (and often in a different language, as is the case here) implies a new reception and interpretation. The word travels and is altered in the process.

Each issue in the section will focus on an author or a relevant work belonging to a Spanish-language literary system, studying them from one (or several) of the following aspects: their critical and social reception in the United States; which US writers/literary trends they have been associated with; their translations and translators in English; which publishing houses have published their work in the US; the author's presence in US universities and/or other education levels (which of their works are taught/studied the most, how research on them is approached, etc.); are the works which are considered most relevant in the US the same as in their country of origin, or are they works which are not so highly appreciated by original readers?;

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any personal or professional relationship between the author and the US; etc. The actual structure and contents of each issue will depend on the specific characteristics of the writer/work in question as well as on the researcher's criteria. The issues may be the work of one expert, or collective volumes in which several researchers approach different aspects of the same writer/work, always from the perspective of the US context.

We hope this initiative will not only contribute to a better understanding of the reception of Hispanic literatures in the United States, but will also spark the readers' interest in these and other creators in the Spanish language.

Marta Mateo Martínez de Bartolomé
Directora ejecutiva del Observatorio

María Luisa Bombal: Circulation and Translation Processes in the United States

1. Introduction

Chilean writer María Luisa Bombal is a key figure within cultural relations between the Hispanic world and the U.S. The publication of her novels *House of Mist* (1947) and *The Shrouded Woman* (1948) marked an important milestone during an era in which Latin American literature was largely unknown to U.S. readers. Later—beginning in the 1960s, when Latin American literature programs began to proliferate in U.S. universities—Bombal’s novels and short stories became required reading in academia, and many U.S. researchers in the world of literary criticism began publishing studies on her work. Moreover, successive editions of the book *New Islands* (1982), which includes most of Bombal’s texts, attest to her editorial success, as well as her integration into Comparative Literature and Women’s Studies curricula at U.S. universities.

Bombal’s importance to Hispanic letters lies both in her development as an avant-garde artist as well as her use of discourses and imaginaries that were undoubtedly ahead of their time. She was the first woman writer from Latin America to create a discourse around female sexuality, which until that point had been described from an exclusively male perspective; in doing so, she inaugurated a topography and imaginary of the female body through the lens of feminine subjectivity. Furthermore, she posited a view of death that annuls Catholic doctrine and reaffirms the ancestral link between Woman and Nature. Within the patriarchal

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order, marriage is the rite that consecrates the dialectical reciprocity of the sexes around the axis of the man, the subject, and woman, his complement. María Luisa Bombal, however, postulates that relations between men and women are marked by an unequivocal division that makes any form of dialectics or true communication between the sexes impossible, a gender division within a patriarchal infrastructure she also applies to Knowledge, which, in her view, is not a single and absolute truth, but rather an entity bifurcated by gender perspective that can be catalogued as either male or female. In present-day terms, this notion would map onto the concept of hegemonic Knowledge and subaltern Knowledge.

Bombal's texts, mostly written in the 1930s, are not openly transgressive, in part due to the sexist prejudices of the time and because she was a woman who, despite making postulations on gender that are still valid by today's standards, shared the patriarchal view that a woman's only goal in life is to find love. Her work, therefore, shuttles between transgression and ideological orthodoxy. The same could also be said of her life, as her existential dependence on love spoiled her career at precisely the moment of her greatest success.

Thus, the life and work of María Luisa Bombal, as well as her publishing history in Spanish and English, constitute a singular and complex latticework, to which we must also add the critical reception of her work, especially within North American academic circles. This study focuses precisely on her reception by both academia and publishing in the U.S. I have included examples from both fields: first, a sample of the process by which the novel *House of Mist* was translated into Spanish and the novel *La última niebla* was translated into English, and second, a sample of the theoretical approaches that have been taken to her prose, specifically from a feminist perspective. Before delving into her reception in these two spheres, however, I would like to highlight a few aspects of the author's biography that are essential to understanding the complexity and contradictions of her work, and which I will analyze in later sections.

2. Key moments in the author's life

María Luisa Bombal was born on June 8, 1910 in Viña del Mar, Chile, to an upper-middle-class family. As the author recalls in “La maja y el ruiseñor” (1960), much of her early childhood was spent on the beach in Miramar—with its imposing rocks and sea—where she indulged in games and fantasies fueled by tales by Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm, which her mother often read to her. Her father died in 1920. Two years later, she moved with her mother and sisters to Paris, where she studied at Notre Dame de L’Assomption, the Lycée La Bruyere, and the Sorbonne. Thus, unlike other Latin American writers, she received a French education, which undoubtedly influenced her writing. Bombal acknowledged that in addition to the novels she read in her teenage years—including *Victoria* by the Norwegian Knut Hamsun and *María* by the Colombian Jorge Isaacs—her work was influenced by Blas Pascal, Prosper Mérimée, and the poets Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. Furthermore, she also took violin classes with renowned master Jacques Thibaut; in her role as a props assistant, she was present for the entire filming of the film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, directed by Carl-Theodor Dreyer; she also studied dramatic arts at Charles Dullin’s avant-garde Théâtre de l’Atelier, where Jean-Louis Barrault and Anthonin Artaud performed.

María Luisa Bombal began writing short poems at the age of eight, and as a teenager she received praise from Argentine writer Ricardo Güiraldes for a play he described as being the product of a miraculous imagination. She was awarded her first literary prize at the Sorbonne, where she studied under Ferdinand Strowski. According to Bombal, the winning text was the story of a man who slowly notices the almost imperceptible presence of someone behind the curtains in his bedroom with whom, over the course of several nights, he falls in love. Such is his anguish at the impossibility of seeing and touching her that, one night, he buries a dagger in the curtain (Bombal, 2010, p. 276).

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When her mother (already back in Chile) learned that María Luisa would have a small role in a play, guided by prevailing gender prejudices, she ordered her to leave the *Atelier* and the Sorbonne and come back to Chile at once. (In that era, acting was not considered a decent profession for a girl from a “good family”). In April 1931, she arrived at the Port of Valparaíso and, although her mother expected her to soon be wed to a young man from the Chilean high aristocracy, María Luisa chose to join the country’s intellectual circles instead. At the urging of writer Marta Brunet, she flaunted her mother’s prohibitions and joined the *Compañía Nacional de Dramas y Comedias*, led by Luis Pizarro, where she played major roles in three separate works. She also forged friendships with several Chilean writers, including Pablo Neruda and Julio Barrenechea, with whom she frequented bars and cafes such as *El Venezia* and *El Mozart*.

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In society’s eyes, Bombal’s artistic and intellectual acumen—in an era when women were expected only to fulfill their role as mothers and wives—transformed her into a person “with too much personality to be a woman,” according to one of her contemporaries (Gligo, 1996, p. 51). She was considered an eccentric, outspoken, irreverent woman who dressed too liberally and would rather speak with men than with women, who formed their own groups in social gatherings far removed from conversations on intellectualism and art.

But despite her “eccentricities,” she, too, had been captivated by the sexist notion that women were born only to love and be loved. When she arrived in Valparaíso in 1931, she was met not only by her family, but also Eulogio Sánchez, a man who met all the era’s codes of masculinity with gusto. A famed Don Juan, he was the leader of the *Milicia Republicana*, a paramilitary movement for the armed defense of the constitutional order that was formed after the fall of Carlos Ibáñez’s dictatorship.

Fervent passion was followed by neglect. Every afternoon, María Luisa would go to Eulogio's house, where she waited for him for hours while an elderly maid served her tea. In the evenings, frustrated and pained by her lover's indifference, she would walk home through misty Santiago streets. At a dinner Eulogio held at his home, seeking redress or perhaps planning to deal the relationship its final blow, María Luisa went up to Eulogio's bedroom, retrieved the revolver that he kept in his nightstand and, just as she was about to shoot herself in the heart, jerked her arm, thereby seriously wounding herself in the left shoulder instead. According to Catholic teaching, attempted suicide is a sin, and high society appears to have been no different: on September 3, 1933, her mother sent her to Buenos Aires to live with Pablo Neruda and his wife, María Antonieta Haagenar. In addition to serving as Chilean consul, Neruda was also a figure in the Buenos Aires nightlife and bohemian scene, and María Luisa accompanied him to his gatherings with writers and artists who considered her, as the only woman, the group pet. She became part of the Buenos Aires intelligentsia and met the writers Federico García Lorca, Raúl González Tuñón, Oliverio Girondo, and Conrado Nalé Roxlo, among others; she also formed a deep friendship with Jorge Luis Borges.

In many ways, the author was the victim of cultural constructions of gender: the fact that she lived in an era in which an unmarried woman of twenty-four was on the verge of becoming an old maid led her to a marriage of convenience in 1934 with Argentine painter Jorge Larco. Both needed cover from society's prejudices: her, to attain the status of a "respectable married woman," and him, to conceal his homosexuality. Nevertheless, the marriage lasted less than a year.

In 1935, Bombal published *La última niebla*, a novel that received extensive critical recognition, and in 1938, she published *La amortajada*, which dazzled readers with its originality and poetic reflection on death. She also published several short stories, mostly in the prestigious journal *Sur*.

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María Luisa Bombal reached the peak of her literary career between 1934 and 1940, though she had yet to find the “love of her life” and remained unmarried, despite several love affairs. In 1939, film director Luis Saslavski hired her to write the script for his latest movie. When it debuted in 1940, *La casa del recuerdo* was considered a groundbreaking film in Argentine cinema.

Such was her prestige that Argentina’s PEN Club selected her as their representative at the World Writers Conference, which would be held at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. There, she met a number of other writers, including Rómulo Gallegos, Pearl Buck, Lin Yu Tan, and Louis Aragon. However, it was not there that she met Sherwood Anderson, one of the authors she most admired, but rather, through an editor at W. W. Norton who arranged for them to meet at Anderson’s house. He became María Luisa’s tour guide, taking her to the most important sites in New York. Later, she received a letter from Anderson saying:

We are talking much about our need, in both Americas, to try to know each other better. I believe that this undertaking should start with the translation and publication here of your novelists and poets... In these moments exists, without any doubt, a great interest for South America. I dare say that it is not only a commercial type of interest; there is in this interest a kind of new sentiment. Something terrible seems to have seized the Old World. We cannot continue taking our cultural impulses from there. Something is corrupted there.²

Although Anderson was fighting to forge stronger literary ties between the U.S. and Latin America, it is worth noting that for strictly economic reasons, it was in film that those links ultimately materialized. In the wake of World War II, the U.S. ceased exporting films to Europe, and Hollywood turned to Latin America as a new market. It was, therefore, important to create movies with a Latin American flare in their

² Here, Anderson is referring to World War II, which was declared after Hitler invaded Poland in 1939. [Translator’s note: The source for this English quotation is C. C. Esplugas (Ed.). (2017). *Sherwood Anderson’s Pan-American vision. Letters in pursuit of a cross-cultural bond* (p. 160). Jefferson, NC: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers. The reference for the Spanish quotation in the original version of this study is: Bombal, 1939, p. 3.]

settings and characters. This gave rise to the so-called “banana movies” featuring Carmen Miranda and César Romero.

In late 1940, María Luisa Bombal returned to Chile in the throes of a deep depression. She was thirty, and had recently received news from Buenos Aires that Carlos Magnini, with whom she had a romantic relationship, had just married a young woman. Furthermore, she learned from the newspaper that Eulogio Sánchez and his wife had returned to Chile from the U.S. On January 27, 1941, as she walked forlornly through the streets of downtown Santiago with a pistol in her handbag, ready to kill herself, she saw Eulogio Sánchez exiting a building; she ran after him and fired three times, though he was only lightly wounded.

Bombal was immediately jailed, first at the Casa Correccional de Mujeres and later at the Santa María clinic. The doctors pronounced that she was having a severe nervous breakdown; in April 1941, she was released on bail, and officially cleared of homicide charges in October. In November, the publisher Editorial Nascimento published an edition of *La última niebla* that also included Bombal’s stories, with a prologue by renowned Spanish critic Amado Alonso; several months later, *La amortajada*, in a new edition, won the Santiago Municipal Literature Award. Despite the runaway success of her literary career, her assault on Eulogio Sánchez and her stint in jail had caused a horrible scandal in Chilean and Argentine haute-bourgeoisie society, and the author had no choice but to emigrate to the U.S.

In May 1942, Bombal was hired by the Chilean embassy in Washington, D.C. to oversee the dubbing of films in the U.S. and to authorize their import to Chile. The following year, she moved to New York to work for the Sterling company, writing Spanish-language marketing copy. She was also the voice of Judy Garland’s character in the Spanish dubs for the film *The Clock* (1945) and, together with Ramón Sender and Ciro Alegría, she wrote English subtitles for Spanish-language films. Her life was unstable: she moved from one hotel to another, sometimes

missing work so she could spend the day in her room, reading and drinking. Her salary hardly covered her living expenses, and she had several debts.

In early 1944, she received an invitation from Chilean marquis Jorge Cuevas Bertholin to attend his annual gala, to which she wore a dress she borrowed from a girlfriend. There, she met French count Fal de Saint Phalle, who, as a U.S. citizen, worked on Wall Street. In April of that same year, Bombal and the count were married, and in November, she gave birth to their daughter Brigitte. Bombal spent much of her life in the U.S. and, in 1969, after the death of her husband, she moved to Argentina, where she spent several years before ultimately settling in Chile in 1973. She died on May 6, 1980.

3. María Luisa Bombal's first works in the U.S.

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It was Bombal's husband, Fal de Saint Phalle, who made contact with publishers in the U.S., a country in which she went on to have an auspicious literary career. Farrar, Straus & Co. agreed to publish an English version of *La última niebla* and *La amortajada*, with the condition that both novels be extended to at least two hundred pages. To reach this length, she bolstered *La amortajada* (*The Shrouded Woman*, 1948) by including her short text "The Story of María Griselda," which was originally published by the journal *Norte* as "La historia de María Griselda" in 1946. As *La última niebla* was less than one hundred pages long, Bombal decided to write a new novel in English, which she titled *House of Mist* (1947).

3.1. House of Mist: from U.S. film to marvelous realism

One interesting aspect of *La última niebla* is the significant amount of material that the author recycled in order to transform the work—an avant-garde, highly aesthetic novel—into a text that suited the media-consumer culture of the U.S.'s sizable

middle class. Bombal modeled her adaptation on the movies of the thirties and forties, which often focused on the trials and tribulations of a couple, typically through a love story built on mix-ups and misunderstandings that are ultimately resolved in the interest of a happy ending.

In *House of Mist*, Helga, the protagonist, has married a man named Daniel, whom she has loved since childhood; Daniel, on the other hand, is an indifferent lover, seemingly still in love with Teresa, his former fiancée, who died just days before their wedding. As in the films of the era, there are several secondary events surrounding the main theme of Helga's anguish and longing. In a seemingly non-fantastical scene, Helga's sister-in-law holds a ball at her mansion one night. There, Helga goes to rest on a sofa hidden near a majestic marble staircase. She has just lain down, clutching her fan, when a handsome aristocrat appears out of nowhere. He asks her to dance, kisses her, and leads her to an old abandoned house where they make love—an act that Bombal only lightly insinuates, as U.S. audiences were accustomed to films in which, after an elegant dance, the characters share a chaste kiss as the soundtrack shifts to a Cole Porter-esque tune.

The book also clings to the format of the films of the era: Helga feels guilty about her adultery, a sentiment that reinforces the audience's ethical expectations. The conflict ultimately resolves with the discovery of the fan that Helga had with her throughout her brief liaison: it is found several months later, between the cushions of the sofa by the stairwell, and Helga realizes she fell asleep on the sofa; the entirety of her encounter had only been a dream. At around that time, Daniel begins to show her affection and, in the closing scene, the two embrace in a naturalistic scene that confirms the beauty of their shared love.

Although the adaptation of *La última niebla* for an entertainment-industry format required a superficial plot, it is worth noting the presence of artistic techniques that created intrigue and mystery: for example, the constant presence of

mist—a staple in gothic novels—produces a somber, ominous air, in contrast to the brightness of the luxurious crystal chandeliers often found in the book’s aristocratic mansions; Bombal describes the forests as enigmatic spaces and dark labyrinths, whereas the blue lights in the garden suggest an oneiric atmosphere. Furthermore, she legitimizes the use of magic in a book for adults, a style often reserved for children’s stories: the ghostly figure of Teresa, which appears every night on the pond, adds a fantastical element. This change to the tangible reality would form part of what U.S. readers came to know in the sixties as “magical realism,” mastered by the writers of the so-called “Latin American Boom.”

With this U.S. novel, María Luisa Bombal took on a temporal distance that enabled her to implicitly criticize melodramatic fiction through a story defined as antiquated. In the passages that directly address the reader, the narrator highlights that she is merely recreating a long-gone and irrecoverable world. Her modifications, however, contributed to *House of Mist*’s editorial success in the U.S. It was later translated to Czech, Japanese, Swedish, and German. In 1947, the same year as its publication, Paramount Pictures bought the film rights to the book, for which the author received \$125,000, a veritable fortune at the time. However, no film has been made to date.

3.2. The Shrouded Woman: *death as a return to primordial space*

The Shrouded Woman, published in 1948, was also a success and translated into several other languages. Although William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* (1930) includes a passage in which a dead woman recalls her past, Bombal extends this technique to introduce Ana María, the protagonist, who is already dead, but who can nevertheless see and hear people as they approach her coffin, which triggers a series of memories, feelings, and reflections.

Rather than focus on actions that occur on a fixed timeline, the book traces the protagonist's trajectory through key episodes, which revolve around her love life in a montage of non-chronological scenes; thus, it offers a portrait of a middle-class woman whose life was restricted chiefly to the roles of mother and wife. Ana María's sexual initiation during adolescence and outside of the patriarchal regime, her passive entry into social conventionalism as symbolized by marriage, and her inoffensive sublimation in unconsummated adultery are marked by her relationships with Ricardo, Antonio, and Fernando, respectively. At a more significant level, these episodes indicate the progressive degradation of instinct and vitality in favor of social conformity, causing her to adjust her behavior and consider the restrictions of prescriptive femininity, in an Ought-To-Be that annuls her Being.

The scenes that follow the life of *The Shrouded Woman's* protagonist are interrupted, in counterpoint, by her journey down into the earth. Something or someone guides her towards unknown spaces that, initially, take on oneiric connotations: she moves through a damp, shaded garden as she listens to the trickling of hidden ravines and the petals falling from rose bushes, at which point she is "struck by the damp wing of some invisible birds"³. The journey is interrupted and Ana María is returned to her coffin, surrounded by the people who enable her to relive her past, only to resume her descent, which brings her somewhere primordial. Thus, in the third episode of the journey down, she encounters tree roots, strange creatures with slimy bodies, and "marvelously white and intact human skeletons, whose edges were shrunken like they were in the mother's womb"⁴. The skeletons' fetal position symbolizes a view of death that is very different from the postulations of the Catholic faith, which contemplates the ultimate death of the body and eternal life of the soul. In *The Shrouded Woman*, death is part of the Eternal Return in which

³ [Translator's note: All the English quotations from *The Shrouded Woman* have been taken from: http://www.armandfbaker.com/translations/novels/la_amortajada.pdf. The reference for the Spanish quotation in the original version of this study is: Bombal, 2010, p. 98.]

⁴ [Translator's note: The reference for the Spanish quotation in the original version of this study is: Bombal, 2010, p. 143.]

the process of birth, death, and regeneration implies that dying only means reintegration into Matter, at which point life takes on a new modality.

At the end of the novel, Ana María has descended into the millenary space of the earth, and her body feels “an immense number of roots sink down and spread out of the earth like a powerful spider web through which the constant palpitation of the universe was rising, toward her”⁵. As an integral element of cosmic space, she enters “the second death: the death of those who are death”⁶. It is not death, but rather the body’s transformation into other bodies, revolving forever around primordial spheres.

4. Circulation of María Luisa Bombal’s work in the U.S. from the 1960s onwards

4.1. Presence and study in academia

In the 1960s, several U.S. universities developed Latin American literature programs in which *La última niebla*, *La amortajada*, and “El árbol,” were included in Spanish version on syllabi for both undergraduate and graduate courses. This led to a considerable increase in familiarity with Latin American literature, and U.S. academics began researching and publishing studies on the topic. The richness of María Luisa Bombal’s work and critics’ theoretical postulations on the same have given rise to a diverse array of perspectives, including intrinsic analyses of structuralist character, as in Margaret V. Campbell’s “The Vaporous World of María Luisa Bombal” (1961) and M. Ian Adams Smith’s chapter in the book *Three Authors of Alienation* (1965), as well as analysis of Bombal’s poetic language, as in Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman’s *The Lyrical Vision of María Luisa Bombal* (1988) and

⁵ [Translator’s note: The reference for the Spanish quotation in the original version of this study is: Bombal, 2010, p. 143.]

⁶ [Translator’s note: The reference for the Spanish quotation in the original version of this study is: Bombal, 2010, p. 144.]

Thomas O. Bente's "María Luisa Bombal's Heroines: Poetic Neuroses and Artistic Symbolism" (1984). This category also included a spatial focus, as in Tony Spanos "Spatial Dimensions in the Fiction of María Luisa Bombal" (1990). Researchers also published comparative studies, such as Celia C. Esplugas's "María Luisa Bombal and Sherwood Anderson: Early Twentieth-Century Pan-American Feminisms" (2013) and *The Aesthetics of Metamorphosis Ovidian Poetics in the Works of María Luisa Bombal and Elena Garro* (2004). Christine Garst-Santos has also expounded on her work from a philosophical perspective in "Critical Ethics: Witnessing Otherness in *La última niebla*" (2016).

The development of feminist criticism has led to the inclusion of María Luisa Bombal's works in several encyclopedias and books on female Latin American writers, such as *Women Writers of Spanish America*, edited by Diane E. Marting (1987). This critical perspective was first articulated by Linda Gould Levine, who, in 1974, published her essay "María Luisa Bombal from a Feminist Perspective," in which she highlighted Bombal's rejection of woman's subordinate position, a perspective that aligned with first-wave feminist criticism in the U.S. New concepts and critical approaches in a similar strain have led to more recent studies, such as Kara Zink's *Reading the Body in the Narratives of María Luisa Bombal* (2009) and Bernadita Llanos's *Passionate Subjects/Split Subjects: Twentieth Century Literature in Chile* (2009). In order to illustrate this critical perspective, I am including a sample from my own study of Bombal's narrative below; it describes the centrality of gender to her work, and, consequently, much of her contribution to the literary history of the Americas.

4.2. The Final Mist and New Islands from a gender perspective

María Luisa Bombal died in 1980 without knowing that *New Islands* (1982)—the English translation of *La última niebla* and all of her short stories, published with a

prologue by Jorge Luis Borges—would become an editorial success in the U.S.⁷ The first edition from Farrar, Straus & Co., with translations into French, Swedish, Dutch, and Norwegian, soon appeared in a pocket edition from Cornell University Press in 1982, and has subsequently been published in new editions, as it has been added to the curricula in Comparative Literature and Women’s Studies courses at U.S. universities.

Thanks to the publication of *New Islands*, U.S. readers can access the entirety of Bombal’s work and the ideological and aesthetic characteristics that make her a canonical figure in Latin American literature. This edition includes her first novel, *La última niebla* (1935), finally published several decades later with the translated title *The Final Mist*. Written from an avant-garde perspective, this story with an unnamed protagonist destabilizes the notion of “reality” and posits a discourse on the female body as well as a female subjectivity that acquires the position of subject through Desire (Roman, 2012).

4.2.a. Love and sexuality as a basis for identity

The Final Mist tells the story of an upper-middle-class woman who has married out of obligation. She is neglected by her husband and, upon seeing the passion the adulterous character Regina shares with her lover, begins to discover her own sexuality. One night at a plaza she meets with a silent, mysterious man who leads her to an abandoned house where they make love. For years, she draws nourishment from the memory of the affair, which may have been a mere dream or fantasy. When Regina tries to kill herself, the protagonist realizes the futility of dedicating her life to retaining the memory of an event that may not have even been real. Her existence loses all meaning, and she has no choice but to remain with her husband and

⁷ This translation by Richard Cunningham and myself, Lucía Guerra Cunningham, received the annual award from the Translation Center of Columbia University, under the auspices of the New York State Council on the Arts.

perform all the trifling duties of a self-sacrificing wife. The novel begins on the night of the protagonist's wedding: it is cold and rainy, and her husband's disinterest is symbolized by "an empty furrow on Daniel's side of the bed" (Bombal, 1982, p. 6), representing the absence of sexuality in a metonymy that extends into dubious anxiety, silence, the girl's death, the mist, and the cold wind from a bird that brushes the protagonist as it flies by in an omen of her own death and the negation of sexual pleasure as a sign of life. Threatened with the nullification of her own existence, she cries out: "I am alive, I exist!... And I am happy and beautiful! Yes. Happy! Happiness is no more than having a young, slender, and agile body!" (Bombal, 1982, p. 7).

In this first chapter of *Desire*, female subjectivity only intuits an absence and a yearning. Regina is the mediator who, as an adulteress, gives visibility to the libidinal impulse, as symbolized by her tousled long hair, in contrast to the castrating image of the protagonist's dull hair in a tight braid, which in turn symbolizes the laws that the patriarchy imposes on women. Outside of this Order, represented metaphorically as her house, the protagonist immerses herself naked in a pond, at which point she discovers and sensually becomes aware of her own body: "I had no idea that I was so white and beautiful... Before now, I never dared look at my breasts. Rounded and small, they seem like tiny blossoms suspended above the surface." (Bombal, 1982, pp. 9-10). Her submersion in the water engenders regimented sexual liberation and the experience of physical pleasure: "I sink to my ankles in thick velvety sand. Warm currents caress and penetrate me. Like silky arms, the aquatic plants embrace my body with their long tendrils. The fresh breeze kisses the nape of my neck, cools my feverish forehead" (Bombal, 1982, pp. 9-10).

Her encounter with a man who leads her to an abandoned house for a sexual liaison also takes place in nature. Modifying the conventional limits of reality, no distinction is made in this encounter between reality, dream, and fantasy, and the scene is written with an ambiguity typical of fantastical aesthetics, including

unflinching unreliability. Moreover, it is the first time in Latin American literature that an orgasm is described from a female perspective.

Although the protagonist of *The Final Mist* spends only one night with this lover, he becomes her reason to live, the only meaning in the life of a middle-class woman condemned to the subordinate role of a housewife. Years pass, and she writes him letters without knowing where to send them; she sees him appear in a carriage that gets mysteriously lost in the mist. When Regina attempts suicide because her lover has left her, the protagonist realizes that even if her lover was real, she has wasted the years she spent loving him: “[Regina] at least experienced the intense and complex emotions of a life full of passion; whereas I have but a single memory to sustain me, a memory whose fire must be fed daily with the fuel of imagination, lest it go out, a memory so vague and remote that it almost seems a fiction” (Bombal, 1982, p. 40). She has arrived at the end of the adventure in which she was the subject; she tries to kill herself by throwing herself in front of an ambulance, but her husband Daniel stops her, and she has no choice but to follow him. She has surrendered to the patriarchal order, symbolized by the undissipated mist. Her existence becomes limited to being “a decent woman,” a subordinate Other tethered to the figure of her husband, who holds the position of absolute subject.

Attributing her situation to “implacable destiny” (Bombal, 1982, pp. 46-47), rather than a historic circumstance that can be modified, the protagonist yields to prescriptive femininity and fulfills the conventional role that will inevitably nullify her autonomy: “Following him toward an infinity of insignificant tasks, toward a thousand trifling amusements; following him to live correctly—to cry from habit and smile out of duty; following him to die, one day, correctly” (Bombal, 1982, p. 47). The denouement in *The Final Mist* marks the cloistering of any possible transgression that might open the door to meaning in her life. Her identity is now condemned to silence and emptiness.

“El árbol,” which was included in *New Islands* under the English title “The Tree,” is a short story that appears in most anthologies of Latin American literature due to its commendable artistic execution. While Brígida is attending a concert, the music makes her recall the different stages of her life in a stream of memory that covers several spaces and times simultaneously. Mozart corresponds to her childhood and guileless joy, Beethoven calls to mind the anguish and suffering she experienced with her apathetic husband, and Chopin aligns with her nostalgia, as well as her anxiety about being loved. Surprisingly, the tune and rhythm of each musical piece is stylistically inscribed on the sentence level as poetic images, creating an experience that aligns with the sensations produced by each composition. Thus, the images of playfulness and brightness, in Mozart’s case, contrast with her dark and somber marriage.

Music also operates as a characterizing element for Brígida, who is fundamentally impulsive, and whose relationship with reality is based on intuited sensations and emotions that create a supra-reality directly opposed to logic and rational patterns. It is the sensations produced by the music, rather than intellectual reflections, that drive her to relive her life through memory.

While her husband is engaged in several activities in the public sphere, Brígida remains stuck at home, in her dressing room, across from which a leafy rubber tree is growing. The tree becomes a stand-in for the natural spaces that she is denied. The tree’s thick foliage gives her the illusion of being submerged in a green, cool aquarium, or of standing in the middle of a pleasant forest that reestablishes her link with nature and freedom. This sense of escape and sublimation is cut off when the city authorities order the tree’s removal; the space is to be paved over. With the rubber tree gone, Brígida comes to understand the cruel reality of her marriage, and she decides to leave her husband. For traditional criticism, the act of leaving her husband in search of love might have liberatory connotations, but from a current perspective, a woman having love as her only goal in life constitutes an act of

surrender to a patriarchal system that, through a mechanism that postulates love as woman's only essence of being, succeeds in excluding her from active engagement and participation in society.

4.2.b. Non-communication between the sexes and a gendered notion of knowledge

In all of María Luisa Bombal's texts, there is a recurring view of woman as linked to nature. This woman-nature link is commonplace in myths and archetypes from the patriarchal imaginary, according to which woman's primary function is not developing civilization or culture, but rather biological reproduction. Bombal makes a significant modification to this woman-nature link to reveal a gendered division that makes any form of reasoning between the sexes impossible, and which influences experiences of reality and knowledge.

22

The short story "Las islas nuevas" (1939, published in English as "New Islands") is the Bombal text that best exemplifies these concepts. This story takes place on the Argentine Pampas, that liminal space between civilization and barbarism, subject both to domestication and resistance against the same (Noguera, 2009). There, Yolanda (the symbol of woman-nature) lives with her brother, an emblem of masculinity. Absurdly, the men (whom the text refers to as outside of the "feminine" sphere) are determined to always keep busy with either essential undertakings or pointless, banal tasks, and when they have nothing to do, "they cough and smoke, speak loud as if they feared silence" (Bombal, 1982, p. 86).

Yolanda's perspective highlights the gendered division established in the Book of Genesis. Male action is conveyed metaphorically when Adam is created in the image and likeness of God, who gives him dominion over nature and all the creatures on the Earth, whereas Eve, in her primary role as mother and wife—as indicated by her name, which means "life-giver"—is associated with nature rather

than culture. Indeed, the original meaning of culture was “modification to nature.” While the Bible establishes these gendered roles as a norm dictated by divine will, Bombal extends this concept to criticize male dominion over nature and to argue that this gendered division hinders harmonious reciprocity between the sexes, as their respective primary roles entail different approaches to nature, which are themselves built on different views of reality and the world.

Yolanda and the new islands that mysteriously emerge and disappear in the story represent this epistemological leftover that the *homo faber* is unable to understand, despite his impulse towards knowledge and domination. Yolanda possesses a strange likeness to evasive, untamed wildlife. The first time that Juan Manuel sees her when he arrives at her house as a guest, she, at the piano, “rises so slowly that she seems to grow upright, uncoiling like a beautiful snake. She is exactly like her name, angular, and a bit savage” (Bombal, 1982, p. 87). Her long, thick hair releases the scent of honeysuckle and, in moments of excitement, she cries out like a cawing seagull.

That night, Juan Manuel also discovers that many years earlier, Yolanda refused to marry Silvestre, now an old man who insinuates to Juan Manuel that Yolanda possesses eternal youth. When he watches her naked through a window, he notices that, on her right shoulder, the stump of a wing is growing. In the context of the story, this atrophied wing represents both the ancestral link to nature and the myriad forms of repression heaped upon nature and “the feminine.” Yolanda too, like the new islands, is viewed by the men as an enigma, nature’s incomprehensible leftovers, controlled and modified by the male impulse to explore, analyze, and exploit for profit; this theme has opened the door to an eco-feminist analysis of “New Islands” (Clark, 2010).

Juan Manuel and the other men stand in stark contrast with Yolanda and the new islands. The men set out for the islands that have just appeared, which they discover are covered in slimy growth, with damp, slippery ground, similar to the primordial soup. Seagulls circle above, cawing. The men uselessly try to unroot coral until their hands bleed. An increasingly dense fume rises from the hot earth and, fearful, they flee in a defeat to male accomplishment and their territorialist zeal.

The division between nature (the new islands, Yolanda) and the *homo faber* in the practice of domination prevents any kind of harmony between the men and nature, a fact that, on a metaphorical level, highlights the impossibility of true communication and reciprocity between “the masculine” and “the feminine.” This irreconcilable opposition determines two distinct kinds of reality and knowledge. Yolanda’s movements are based on intuition, the unconscious, and the ancestral link with primitive nature, whereas Juan Manuel, in his pragmatic action, favors awareness and the objective rationalism that reduces nature to a synthesized object, which can be scientifically and encyclopedically defined

Although he has fallen in love with Yolanda, Juan Manuel decides to leave the *hacienda* and return to the city; when he receives a letter from her, he chooses not to read it to avoid entering into that world he is unable to understand, that other life and knowledge so alien to his own perspective: “He fears losing his way; fears falling into some dark abyss that no amount of logic will lead him out of” (Bombal, 1982, pp. 111-112).

This gendered notion of knowledge arises again in the short story “Trenzas” (“Braids” in English) and in poetic chronicles not included in *New Islands*. In those texts, there is an implicit criticism of male knowledge—which is associated with science, objective mapping and measurement—and of a thirst for knowledge that imposes a certain position upon the expert subject, a gaze and a function that aims to achieve a practical end (Foucault, 1973). The speaker in these texts ironically

imitates the method of the essay only to shift into a meandering discourse intended to demonstrate a different truth: woman is the carrier of a word and a knowledge that have been displaced by a hegemonic knowledge crafted by the male elite.

5. Translation processes related to *La última niebla*

As is clear from the sections above, it is only possible to fully appreciate María Luisa Bombal's work if we consider her biography and understand the motives and central themes in her writing, including her suggestion of distinct forms of knowledge that are determined by gender, and the tension she posits between love and sexuality. Consequently, any attempt to edit or translate her work must be sensitive to these considerations. To illuminate this point, I will now describe the process of translating her writing. A firm grasp of Bombal's life and work were ultimately essential in order to translate the texts below, which I translated or co-translated.

25

5.1. House of Mist in Spanish

In 2012, seventy-five years after the publication of *House of Mist* (which, as I explained in section three, was the author's own English adaptation of her novel *La última niebla*), a Spanish translation was released with the title *Casa de niebla*, completed by myself. As a translator, I decided to resuscitate María Luisa Bombal's Spanish voice through a "dubbing," which made the translation into a process of transforming two linguistic codes: the literal translation from English to Spanish, followed by a finessing of the translated text into the author's own literary idiolect, bearing in mind the style of her written texts in Spanish. Thus, the word "sad," for example, was initially translated as "triste" but subsequently converted into "acongojada," a recurring term in Bombal's writing. This two-stage process was possible because, apart from writing books on the author and compiling her complete works, for years I have taught her texts in my classes at the University of

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California, Irvine. This exhaustive familiarity with the author’s narrative voice, the rhythm of her sentences, and her preferred terms from within a specific semantic field enabled me to give *Casa de niebla* a distinctly Bombalian feel, as the following examples demonstrate:

a. *English original*: “He bowed and so great was the joy that filled my being when I found myself in his arms that I understood suddenly I had been waiting longingly for that moment.” (Bombal, 1947, p. 102)

Literal Spanish translation: “Hizo una reverencia y fue tanta la alegría que llenó mi ser cuando me encontré en sus brazos que, de inmediato, comprendí que, con nostalgia, había estado esperando ese momento.”

[*Literal back-translation*: He bowed and there was so much happiness that it filled my being when I found myself in his arms that, immediately, I understood that, with longing, I had been waiting for that moment.]

Literary Spanish translation: “Hizo una reverencia y fue tanta la dicha que me inundó cuando me vi en sus brazos que entonces comprendí que había estado esperando ese momento con verdadero anhelo.” (Bombal, 2012, p. 118)

[*Literal back-translation*: He bowed and there was so much joy that I was inundated [with it] when I saw myself in his arms that then I realized I had been waiting for that moment with true longing.]

“La alegría que llenó mi ser” was translated as “la dicha que me inundó,” recreating the author’s literary idiolect. The expression “de inmediato,” which in Spanish includes three stressed syllables and is sometimes associated with a certain haste, was replaced with “entonces,” a word that Bombal uses over and over to create a sense of expectation. “Con nostalgia” was replaced with “con verdadero anhelo,” thereby intensifying the yearning to be loved, as “nostalgia” in Spanish has passive

connotations, a sense of remembering what is missing with a degree of pain or impotence.

b. *English original*: “My heart seemed to come to a stop in my breast, as well as all sense of time in my brain, and I stood there, motionless, receiving that kiss like someone hearing pure crystalline water falling drop by drop on a dry, thirsty part of his being.” (Bombal, 1947, p. 107)

Literal Spanish translation: “Mi corazón pareció detenerse en mi pecho del mismo modo como el sentido del tiempo en mi cerebro, y me quedé allí, inmóvil, recibiendo ese beso como alguien que oye agua pura y cristalina cayendo, gota a gota, en aquella parte árida y sedienta de su ser.”

[*Literal back-translation*: My heart seemed to stop in my chest just as the sense of time in my brain, and I stood there, motionless, receiving that kiss like someone who hears pure and crystalline water falling, drop by drop, in that arid and thirsty part of his being.]

Literary Spanish translation: “Mi corazón pareció detenerse y perdí el sentido del tiempo. Allí me quedé, inmóvil, recibiendo ese beso como quien escucha agua pura y cristalina cayendo, gota a gota, en un lugar árido y sediento.” (Bombal, 2012, p. 121)

[*Literal back-translation*: My heart seemed to stop and I lost sense of the time. I stood there, motionless, receiving that kiss like someone who listens to pure and crystalline water falling, drop by drop, in an arid and thirsty place.]

“Pecho” and “cerebro” were removed from the literary translation, especially because in Spanish the latter word does not fit the emotional context of the scene. In María Luisa Bombal’s fiction, the use of brief paragraphs lends her style a very specific tension and rhythm. Thus, I divided the paragraph in two, placing emphasis and relief on the protagonist’s initial reaction. “Alguien” and “aquella parte de mi

ser” were replaced, eliminating the distance that “alguien” implies relative to “quien” and, to give it a Bombalian touch, I made the water metaphor more direct. This kind of change also fits the rhythm the author used in her prose.

c. *English original*: “In a high chimney, a big fire was lighting up with its joyous, warm gleam a room all done in chintz of faded colors.” (Bombal, 1947, p. 132)

Literal Spanish translation: “En una alta chimenea, un gran fuego estaba iluminando, con su alegre y cálido destello, una habitación decorada por cretonas de color desteñado.”

[*Literal back-translation*: In a high chimney, a big fire was illuminating, with its happy and warm glimmer, a bedroom decorated by chintz of faded color.]

Literary Spanish translation: “En una alta chimenea, el fuego iluminaba con su cálido destello una recámara de cretonas desvaídas.” (Bombal, 2012, p. 127)

[*Literal back-translation*: In a high chimney, the fire illuminated with its warm glimmer a room of faded chintz.]

In Bombal’s descriptions, I usually replace the gerund with the imperfect in order to give the style a slower cadence (e.g. “iluminaba” vs. “estaba iluminando” above). Although “joyous, warm gleam” in English adds to the sentence’s rhythm, I decided to leave out “joyous” and use only “cálido destello,” given the author’s characteristically poetic style. Furthermore, often, I use the word “recámara” in lieu of “habitación”; and, although in English “faded colors” has a certain poetic resonance, “de color desteñado” in Spanish is a bit prosaic, whereas the phrase I finally selected, “desvaídas,” emphasizes the passage of time, given its association with the age of the house.

5.2. La última niebla in English as The Final Mist

Unlike the translation of *House of Mist*, which mainly entailed adapting the English text to fit the Bombal's literary voice in Spanish, translating her texts into English represented a true challenge. In this section, and by way of example, I will refer to *The Final Mist*, the English translation of *La última niebla* (a text that is different from the English rewriting by the author, *House of Mist*). Every act of translation involves transference from one cultural system to another, often from a voice marked by gender. My husband Richard Cunningham, a U.S.-born writer, was in charge of the final version of the translation and on many occasions the sentimental style typical of the 1930s, as well as the discourse on female sexuality in English, transformed the text into an anachronistic cliché.⁸ Furthermore, behind the matter-of-fact dialogue there is a female voice with myriad variations: the voice of introspection and unsated sexuality, intense and sensual when she is fully immersed, nude, in the pond, and provocative when she is awaiting her lover in bed. There is also the voice of fantasies that may or may not be real, which is tragic and dramatic at the novel's conclusion. Additionally, there were woman-specific experiences that Richard sometimes did not understand, and which I had to explain to him in detail.

29

One of the novel's hard-to-translate poetic images was: "He conocido el perfume de tu hombro y desde ese día soy tuya" (Bombal, 2010, p. 71). Bombal wrote "He conocido el perfume de tu hombro" as a strategy for euphemistically bypassing the censors of the era in order to describe the character's sexual encounter with her lover. The literal translation "I have known the perfume of your shoulder" completely distorts this sexual content and becomes a trite, even ridiculous sentence. (It was not typical for men to use perfume in that era, much less on their shoulders.) However, the author used the word "perfume" and not "aroma"

⁸ For a detailed analysis of this question, see my book *Mujer, cuerpo y escritura en la narrativa de María Luisa Bombal* (Guerra, 2012).

to give the exchange the connotation of sensual intensity in the bedroom. Furthermore, although the image may prompt us to think of the protagonist's head lying on her lover's shoulder, in English, shoulders aren't a male body part with any particular sexual connotation. Thus, we had to expand the bodily cartography of the lover and say "Since that day when the aroma of your body empowered me, I am yours" (Bombal, 1982, p. 20).

In *La última niebla*, the narrator's exclamations evince a certain emotionality, but in English, they make the text a bit too melodramatic. Thus, we had to use another resource to recreate the same intensity in our translation: succinct, cutting sentences. Hence, the line "¡Oh no! ¡Yo no puedo olvidar!" (Bombal, 2010, p. 86) became a short, one-sentence paragraph: "And I cannot forget" (Bombal, 1982, p. 37).

30 Furthermore, in English, it was essential for us to add margins and change the syntax of the following paragraph in order to convey the anxiety the protagonist feels when she is walking through the city in search of the house to which, years earlier, she had been guided by her lover: "En medio de tanto silencio mis pasos se me antojan, de pronto, un ruido insoportable, el único ruido en el mundo, un ruido cuya regularidad parece consciente y que debe cobrar, en otros planetas, resonancias misteriosas" (Bombal, 2010, p. 90). In our translation, this became: "And the silence! —so all-embracing that my footsteps seem intolerably loud, seem the only noise in the world: ringing out as they rise into the night, sound waves on a cosmic journey transmitting their mysterious message, this resonant staccato, to whoever listens among the stars" (Bombal, 1982, p. 41).

Another undoubtedly significant challenge was how to maintain the rhythm that characterizes María Luisa Bombal's prose. She always said that an important aspect of her writing was never losing sight of how the story's tension lies in the rhythm of each sentence: if a word did not fit her desired rhythm, she simply

removed it. It was difficult to reproduce or create the illusion of that rhythm in English and, sometimes, doing so required use of poetic license, as in the following example: “Luego un nocturno empieza a desgranarse en un centenar de notas que van doblando y multiplicándose” (Bombal, 2010, pp. 60-61). In our English version, this became: “and then a nocturne opens: hundreds of notes spinning up and down like a flight of sparrows” (Bombal, 1982, p. 9). In our opinion, “flight of sparrows” captured the movement of “desgranarse,” “doblarse” and “multiplicarse,” terms that, in a literal English translation, would make the rhythm of the prose clunky.

The scene in which the protagonist and her lover have their sexual encounter was also difficult to translate:

Su cuerpo me cubre como una grande ola hirviente, me acaricia, me quema, me penetra, me envuelve, me arrastra desfallecida. A mi garganta sube algo así como un sollozo y no sé por qué empiezo a quejarme, y no sé por qué me es dulce quejarme, y dulce a mi cuerpo el cansancio infligido por la preciosa carga que pesa entres mis muslos. (Bombal, 2010, p. 69)

[*Literal English translation:* His body covers me like a big boiling wave, he caresses me, he burns me, he penetrates me, he drags me fainted. In my throat something like a sob rises and I do not know why I start moaning, and I do not know why it is sweet to moan, and sweet to my body the tiredness inflicted by that precious load that weighs between my thighs.]

For a contemporary reader, we not only had to make the sexual nature of the scene more explicit and involve the protagonist in the action, but also add words to produce the effect of a rhythm that would be closer to the Spanish sentence:

And then we roll entwined onto the center of the bed, his body covering me like a huge hot wave that sets me afire with caresses until at last I feel him penetrating deep inside me and gathering me to him, by then we are flowing

together as on the silken crest of an endless wave that leaves me faint with rapture, surprised to hear a sob rising in my throat, and then for the first time I moan with pleasure and experience that sweet weariness produced by the precious weight of his body between my thighs. (Bombal, 1982, pp. 17-18)

“La preciosa carga,” which would have been vague and incomprehensible to an English-language reader, becomes more specific as the weight of the lover’s body. A literal English translation of “no sé por qué empiezo a quejarme” as “I do not know why I start moaning” would project a timid ambiguity and obscure the phrase’s sexual meaning. Thus, it was necessary to be more explicit: “for the first time I moan with pleasure.”

Another important component of *La última niebla*’s style is its precision, despite its poetry and ambiguous atmosphere. When the protagonist is in the pond, she sees her lover’s carriage arrive, and the scene is described in very specific detail, as when the horse stomps on dry leaves without producing sound or drinks water without producing ripples in the water. The author adds to these details the fact that the carriage begins to drive again “como si se lo hubiera tragado la niebla” (Bombal, 2010, p. 75). In Spanish, this phrase is loaded with meaning that alludes not only to the scene’s dreamlike nature, but also to its fantastical feel, thereby heightening the reader’s uncertainty as to whether the protagonist’s lover was ever even real. The literal translation “it was swallowed by the mist,” while it may tangentially mean disappear, does not have the strength of fantastical meaning that the source does. Thus, we had no choice but to say “it evaporated in the mist like a phantom.” We used “phantom” and not “ghost” because of its poetic feel, which more precisely aligns with the style employed throughout the text.

The novel reaches its dramatic crescendo with the following phrase: “Alrededor de nosotros, la niebla presta a las cosas un carácter de inmovilidad definitiva” (Bombal, 2010, p. 95). The mist, which until this point had created an atmosphere, now becomes a metaphor alluding to the protagonist’s situation, from which she cannot escape; in English, this does not fully work. “Niebla” in English could be “mist” or “fog.” Given *La última niebla*’s poetic nature, we chose “mist” for the text, except in two instances. After entering the house to which her lover has brought her, the protagonist says: “La noche y la neblina pueden aletear en vano contra los vidrios de la ventana; no conseguirán infiltrar en este cuarto un solo átomo de muerte” (Bombal, 2010, p. 67), which in our translation became: “The night and the fog are without, waiting behind the windowpanes—striving in vain to enter, for not one atom of death can infiltrate this room” (Bombal, 1982, p. 16). Even though the author uses the Spanish term “niebla” rather than “neblina” (which has a less consistent thickness), the fact that she is alluding to the bourgeois order that imposes chastity and purity upon women of the era led us to choose the English term “fog,” which is associated with darkness and oppression.

The mist also takes on this connotation at the end of the novel, where we again use “fog” to convey that it is acting as a dense wall: “Alrededor de nosotros, la niebla presta a las cosas un carácter de inmovilidad definitiva.” In the novel, this marks the denouement in which the bourgeois, patriarchal order imposed on women of the era has triumphed. The protagonist, therefore, succumbs to a vacuous and routine existence. In English, that “inmovilidad definitiva” would translate as “definitive stillness,” or, even worse, “definitive immobility,” both of which lack the force of an allusion to death or death of the spirit, which is present in the Spanish. Thus, we chose to compare the mist to a shroud: “Around us the fog settles over everything like a shroud” (Bombal, 1982, p. 47).

6. Conclusion: María Luisa Bombal's present-day relevance to U.S. audiences

New Islands enjoyed a very positive critical reception. The third paperback edition included comments from Leonard Michaels, *The New York Times* and *The Nation*. The comment from the latter reads:

In four of these five fables [...] the central characters are women who appear, at first glance, languid, compliant, virtually inert in the grip of a patriarchal society. But they have extravagant secret lives. Rather than contend in the rational, colorless spheres of men, who behave 'as if tranquility were a mortal enemy,' these women construct and inhabit lush, sensuous kingdoms of the imagination [...] Bombal's fiction takes the daring, imaginative flights we have come to expect from a later generation of Latin Americans, for whom she must rank [...] as the Founding Mother. (Bombal, 1982)

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This concept of the Founding Mother was confirmed by Carlos Fuentes, who, at a conference in the U.S., declared Bombal as “the mother of all of us,” as well as by an article by Ronald de Feo on Bombal in *The New York Times* titled “The Beginning of the Baroque” (December 19, 1982).

In Spain, Seix Barral learned of María Luisa Bombal's work through *New Islands* and subsequently acquired the rights to her work in Spanish, publishing a first edition in 1984, followed by several successive editions. Furthermore, in Brazil, where *La última niebla* was published in Portuguese as *Entre a vida e o sonho* in 1948, a new edition appeared in 2013 under the title *A última nevoa*.

In 2000, I published María Luisa Bombal's *Obras completas* (complete works) in Spanish, including the poetic chronicles printed in journals in the 1940s, an autobiographical testimony, her letters, and interviews with the press (Guerra, 2012). Furthermore, in 1995, University of Texas Press published *House of Mist* and *The Shrouded Woman* in a single volume. In 2008, Farrar, Straus & Giroux reprinted

both novels as part of its Classics series. This edition included the following comment by Penelope Mesic in her review for the *Chicago Tribune*:

[Bombal] with her bold disregard for simple realism in favor of a heightened reality in which the external world reflects the internal truth of the characters' feeling, and with her deliberate mingling of fantasy, memory and event—is the precursor of the magical realism that is the flower of South American writing today ... Both [novels] awake a feeling of genuine discovery, of minds and hearts not borrowed from European literature but indigenous to a New World of thought and feeling. (Mesic, 1995)

María Luisa Bombal's work continues to draw praise today. Notably, in December 2019, in *Dawn, Books and Authors*, Zulfikar Ghose wrote: "Bombal and Her Vision: [...] it is Bombal's concentrated language with its cosmic imagery that takes the work to a metaphysical level and which turns a story of less than fifty pages to a large memorable novel in the reader's mind."

María Luisa Bombal's relevance and her artistic talent are not limited to the realm of literary criticism. Rather, she is notable for achieving editorial success with a wide audience.⁹

35

"To be sick is to live in vain," she declared in her final interview, published on April 14, 1980, just days before her death (Bombal, 2010, p. 456). Although her life and literary career were conditioned by the era's cultural and gender norms, she did not live or write in vain. Besides serving as a foundational figure for later generations of Latin American writers, Bombal is a key figure in the narrative of Latin American women, in a genealogy of literature that today aims to give voice to the experience of women's subjectivities within a patriarchal order.

⁹ On the popular website of literary reviews, Goodreads, we can find, for instance, the following comment from one of the site's users: "One of my favorite books ever! Her writing is rich with imagery and emotion. I was swept away. How do I know? I only have to look in the margins at all the exclamations and notes!"

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