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Ana Teresa Torres. *Doña Inés contra el olvido*. Caracas. Monte Ávila. 1992. 239 pages.

By unraveling a labyrinthine lawsuit involving members of the Villegas lineage, Ana Teresa Torres's novel *Doña Inés contra el olvido* re-creates three centuries of Venezuelan history. The richness of the text lies in the exploration of the changing faces/phases of social inequities and the interplay of factors such as race and class during this period. The constant addresses to Alejandro, Doña Inés's cousin and late husband, and to Juan del Rosario Villegas, sired by Alejandro but emancipated by Doña Inés, liven up the narrative voice.

Doña Inés's refusal to give up the Curiepe valley, claimed by a black settlement whose leader is Juan del Rosario, triggers the conflict. By focusing on the lawsuit, Torres inserts Venezuela's legalistic archeology within the context of the Spanish conquest and colonization. Moreover, by following the parallel strands of the Villegas lineage diachronically through the colonial period, the wars of independence, the civil wars, liberalism, dictatorships, and democracy, her text echoes García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* and Isabel Allende's *Casa de los espíritus*.

The enigma posed by the conflicting statements about the status of the narrative voice—"¿Quieres decirme que yo, como mis títulos, sólo soy una hoja arrebatada por el tiempo? . . . no saldré hasta que haya quedado yo a mi vez convertida en un fantasma de papel"—is resolved by the self-conscious acknowledgment of death: "El tiempo ha dejado de interesarme, no me inquietan ya sus movimientos, porque he muerto hace mucho." This in turn reinforces the link with the Latin American literary tradition exemplified by works such as Machado de Assis's *Death of Quincas Borba*, Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, and María Luisa Bombal's novel *La amortajada*.

After learning about the purported origin of the text—"mi voz ha perdido peso porque necesitaba un escribano para hacerla valer"—we are made privy to the self-conscious demise of the narrative voice.

Hubiera querido . . . haber leído todos los documentos que acreditan nuestra existencia; pero no hay escribano que acepte tal empresa, y . . . únicamente he podido seguir la cronología de mi litigio, y puesto que ha terminado, mi crónica también llega a su fin. Ahora soy un muerto sin oficio y . . . no me queda otra compañía que la de mis cadáveres.

The social construction of the legal system is underscored in a postmodernist vein. Texts supporting the opposing factions in the litigation are set against different versions of events, suggesting that silenced areas are to be accounted for by the underlying vested interests. Referring to developments in the legal system, Doña Inés concludes that contemporary lawyers are more attuned to business and that history would have been significantly different had she been aware of the practice of negotiating.

In sum, Ana Teresa Torres's second novel, which received the Premio de Novela de la I. Bial de Literatura Mariano Picón-Salas, makes for excellent reading.

Cynthia Tompkins  
Arizona State University West