INTRODUCTION

n his 1915 novel, Los de abajo (The Underdogs), long recognized as one of the most important works of the Mexican Revolution, Mariano Azuela employs a fragmented structure that complements his depiction of disorganized troops lacking a common cause or ideology. Toward the end of the century, in Rosamaría Roffiel's Amora (1989; Love), a lesbian novel that celebrates a woman's freedom to be whoever and whatever she wants, segmented pieces of prose serve to invoke the protagonist's doubly marginalized status as a lesbian and as a woman. That two such dissimilar works are linked through striking technical articulation is not so surprising, because one of the constants within narrative discourse in the Mexican novel of the twentieth century is fragmentation. At every seminal point of development, there are outstanding fragmented texts that epitomize the fundamental essence of each movement.

Mexican narrative is not the only national literature to exhibit fragmentation. No writer composes from within a vacuum, and at a minimum, many of the novelists discussed here have been influenced by authors from Western Europe and the United States, such as James Joyce, William Faulkner, and John Dos Passos. What is significant in Mexican letters is the writers' insistence on fragmentation as a literary technique throughout the century, both as a technical strategy within the aesthetic sphere and as a mode that, contextually or metaphorically, evokes the social and political realities of the country.

The most basic definition of a fragmented novel is a work that is broken into sections, with spaces or gaps that separate the pieces of prose. These spaces can be blank or filled with a variety of designs: asterisks, geometric figures, numbers, or, on occasion, vignettes. Other examples of textual fragmentation are experiments with spacing between words, the repeated use

of sentence fragments, and the graphic depiction of disordered thoughts. One cannot reasonably ask *why* authors choose to fragment their novels. A more appropriate question is what is the *effect* of a novel's discourse as written that way, what are the implications for the reading process of textual segmentation?

All fiction is a construct, and, in marked contrast to more traditional fiction that maintains the narrative illusion in part through an apparently seamless narrative, these authors have elected to lay bare the building blocks of their "construction." In so doing, they invite readers to contemplate not only the artifice of fiction, but also the reading and writing process. The first consideration of fragmentation, then, is as a narrative strategy, one that will be shown to be effective in promoting a more active role for readers. A second focus results from the transition from the aesthetic to the social, from the textual to the contextual. It is difficult, if not impossible, for readers to respond meaningfully to Mexican fiction without contemplating the sociopolitical subtext, as illustrated by the epigraphs by Carlos Fuentes and Federico Patán that appear later in this book.

In the 1970s, much suggestive conjecture emerged within the rubric of reader-response criticism. Stanley Fish prompted abundant dialogue on the subject with his notion of "affective stylistics" (383–427), which focuses on the effect(s) of the text on readers through time. Norman Holland, generally considered to be the major proponent of the psychoanalytical approach during this period, dealt with subconscious responses to the written word. The phenomenological strategy, which places equal emphasis on the text and the reader in the production of meaning, was best described by Wolfgang Iser. Finally, Jonathan Culler explored the same problematic relationship among text-author-readers through a structuralist prism. These are but four of the most representative scholars and approaches of the time.

No matter what the approach, there is an inherent subjectivity within reader-response criticism. Surely one's ideas about how readers respond to a text are rooted in one's experience in reading. In that sense, every critic's notion of the ideal reader is herself or himself. From a more objective viewpoint, the ideal reader is generally considered one whose experience of the novel most closely matches that of the author. In *The Act of Reading*. Iser refutes this possibility: "an ideal reader is a structural impossibility as far as literary communication is concerned. An ideal reader would have to have an identical code to that of the author; authors, however, generally recodify

prevailing codes in their texts, and so the ideal reader would also have to share the intentions underlying this process. And if this were possible, communication would then be quite superfluous, for one only communicates that which is *not* already shared by sender and receiver" (28–29; emphasis in original).

It is impossible for readers to respond to a novel exactly as the author intended it. Even more, there could be, indeed have been, a number of distinct, yet equally competent responses to the same text. In the following analyses, it is necessary to keep in mind the distinction between the *product* of a response, that is, whatever meaning might be deduced by readers, and the *process* itself, the act of responding. I propose to demonstrate how discourse, that is, how the novel is written, is instrumental in determining the measure of potential response. As a technical strategy, fragmentation will be shown to evoke frequently a more participatory role for readers, denying a passive reading.

The distinction between active and passive readers or, as Vladimir Nabokov called them, major and minor readers (Bowers 2) refers to the degree of activity on the part of readers, not to the correctness of their response. The same distinction was suggested by Julio Cortázar's lector cómplice, the reader who becomes the author's accomplice, and his lector hembra, an unfortunate term for the reader who embodies all that is passive and supposedly feminine (453–454). Although I am not referring to specific individual responses, there are a few aspects of the notion of the production of meaning that are relevant to a discussion of active and passive reading responses. With the phenomenologists, I think that meaning is produced when the text and reader meet, that there is a role for each. The text provides the signifiers but does not have tight control over how they will be decoded as signifieds. Culler has provided an excellent description of this sense of limitation: "a series of signifiers whose signified is an empty but circumscribed space that can be filled in various ways" (19). By the same token, readers bring their own limits to the novelistic experience by virtue of their degree of literary competence. The possibilities are endless, and yet the notion of a circumscribed space holds true here as well. Different interpretations can be accepted if they are both plausible and justifiable when explained within the context of the established conventions of a genre (Culler 124).

After an initial chapter exploring basic concepts of fragmentation as modified by the Mexican context, the remaining seven chapters of *The Fragmented Novel in Mexico* will examine defining moments in the development

of Mexican fiction and the role that fragmentation plays in each. Chapter 2 features the works of the early innovators, revolutionary in form and theme. I have selected Mariano Azuela's Los de abajo (1915) as representative of the novels of the Mexican Revolution. Included here also are novels of the Mexican vanguard, with particular emphasis on Gilberto Owen's Novela como nube (1928: Novel Like a Cloud) and Jaime Torres Bodet's Proserpina rescatada (1931: Proserpina Rescued). The chapter concludes by returning to Azuela, with his experimental trilogy, highlighted by La luciérnaga (1932; The Firefly). Chapter 3 examines Gregorio López y Fuentes's El indio (1935; The Indian) and Agustín Yáñez's Al filo del agua (1947; The Edge of the Storm), grouped as nationalist literature parallel in interesting ways to the muralist movement in the postrevolutionary period. Theirs is a theorized nationalism, however, for the realities of Mexican class segmentation remain firm after the failed revolution. In Chapter 4 I discuss texts that focus readers' attention on the process of reading and writing as examples of self-referential literature: Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo (1955) and Josefina Vicens's El libro vacío (1958: The Empty Book). Chapter 5 is distinct in that it is focused entirely on one author. Carlos Fuentes. The first two selections are pivotal: La región más transparente (1958; Where the Air Is Clear) and La muerte de Artemio Cruz (1962; The Death of Artemio Cruz). Both novels are crucial in their smashing of narrative norms and confirming of the locus of Mexico's atomization as the city. My final choice, Agua quemada (1981; Burnt Water), represents a return to the thematics established in the earlier two.

The 1960s in Mexico yield an ideological split between the tendency toward a more universalized, text-oriented practice dubbed *escritura* and a more social treatment of rebellious Mexican youth culture called the *Onda*. Chapter 6 details three canonical examples of *escritura*: Juan José Arreola's *La feria* (1963; The Fair). Salvador Elizondo's *Farabeuf* (1965), and José Emilio Pacheco's *Morirás lejos* (1967; You Will Die in a Distant Land). For Chapter 7's discussion of classical *Onda* fiction I have selected Gustavo Sainz's *Gazapo* (1965) and José Agustín's *De perfil* (1966; In Profile). I then append a later work, Héctor Manjarrez's *Lapsus* (1971) as an example of the maturing of *Onda* fiction. Chapter 8 has a split focus. The first half is devoted to gay and lesbian fiction: Luis Zapata's *El vampiro de la Colonia Roma* (1979; The Vampire of Colonia Roma) and *en jirones* (1985; in shreds), followed by Rosamaría Roffiel's *Amora* (1989). Ending the chapter is an examination of recent women's fiction that brings to the foreground the marginalized

status of Mexican women and suggests ways of rereading Mexican history as a tool for renegotiating both national and personal identity. Featured here are Mónica de Neymet's Las horas vivas (1985; The Vibrant Hours), Carmen Boullosa's Mejor desaparece (1987; Better It Vanishes) and Antes (1989; Before), and María Luisa Puga's La forma del silencio (1987; The Form of Silence).

Although the range within conception and execution is wide, binding the varied treatments of fragmentation are notions of revolutionary activity promoting change, whether social or political, whether based within fiction (subverting traditional norms of narrativity), generational conflict, class conflict, or gender. In all of these novels, form complements content; discourse serves an essential function as reflector of theme and as a means of engaging readers with the text's thematics and with the text itself. Whether used metaphorically or as a vehicle for the manipulation of reader response. fragmentation is commonly paired with the following narrative strategies: disruption of conventional narrative norms; strategic placement of fragments; flaunted pluralisms that prohibit a tightly defined meaning; interpolated stories that emphasize the process of narration; narrators- and/or readers-in-the-text; discursive lures that promote a rereading and a consideration of the work as a unit; and intertextual references that expand the historical, aesthetic, or cultural reach of the novel. Thus as an aesthetic tool, as metaphor for sociopolitical realities, or, as will be shown to be a common occurrence, a combination of both, fragmentation has a profound impact on the reading experience.

The novels selected for analysis in *The Fragmented Novel in Mexico* break with traditional notions of narrativity in some way and invite, even demand, an active engagement from readers. There will be examples of texts that lay bare their pluralisms, inviting readers to ponder multiple responses; privilege portions of narrative by framing them; abruptly sever the narration, making readers aware of the writing process; address readers directly, whether seemingly sharing an intimacy or aggressively confronting them; provide readers-in-the-text who serve as models in dealing with convention-breaking narrative; and dramatize situations in which characters voice their view of the malaise of Mexican society or serve as models for ways of addressing the problems, specifically by questioning the status quo and by rereading the past from a nonphalocentric point of view.

Certain literary terms will be used throughout the analyses, and I want to make their meanings clear from the start. I distinguish *story*, as content,

or the "what" of the narrative, from discourse, the "way" of the narrative, how the novel is presented or which technical strategies are employed, as used by Seymour Chatman. The term diegesis refers to story elements, and diegetic describes aspects of narrative rooted in story. Interdiction means the threatened or effected truncation of narrative, whether the graphic severing of a sentence or, in an echo of Miguel de Cervantes, a character's statement at a moment of suspense that he or she forgets the rest of the tale and cannot continue. The term thus reverts to the Latin meaning of a prohibition, in this sense, prohibiting narrative continuity.

All translations not otherwise credited are my own.

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with complexity: they are the faithful reflection, I would almost say inexorable and

absolutely necessary, of cultural experience . . .]

-Carlos Fuentes, "Discurso inaugural"

Mexican fiction is quite aware of the shaky condition of its society; at the same time,

it is quite aware of the need to reflect that shaky condition.

-Federico Patán, "Recent Mexican Fiction"

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THE FRAGMENTED NOVEL IN MEXICO

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