

Intimate Multitudes: Femininity and collective eros in Gioconda Belli's *Sobre la grama* and *Línea de fuego*. Barbara Fraser-Valencia. UBC 2012

For all of the scandal caused by the publication of Gioconda Belli's first poems in *La prensa literaria* in Managua in 1970, Belli is not the first woman poet to openly explore themes of eroticism and femininity: predecessors Juana de Ibarbourou, Delmira Augustini, Alfonsina Storni and Alejandra Pizarnik all challenged artistic and social convention by including frank depictions of female sexuality in writing. Reading Belli's first book of poems, 1972's *Sobre la grama*, one is immediately reminded of Ibarbourou's *Lenguas de diamante* in which a joyous and defiant *eros* chants down the forces of entropy. At the same time one is also struck by the differences in tone between Belli's *eros* that of her male contemporaries and predecessors specifically, Dario, Cardenal and Neruda who experience in the loving encounter a sense of fugacity and alienation. For Belli, the erotic dyad becomes a means by which she is expanded to contain and express multiple voices. In *Sobre la grama* Belli becomes peopled by transmitting *eros* into utterance, by communing with nature, by becoming the mother of her beloved's children and by transforming her passions into a public form through the poetic art. Later in *Línea del fuego*, Belli expands on this "peopling" process to include the collective concerns of the Sandinista revolution.

The difference between Belli's experience and that of her male contemporaries invites several questions regarding *eros* from a woman's experiential point of view. Is female *eros* more collectively oriented than its male counterpart? And if so, does this collectivity affect *eros*' foray into the realm of social commitment? Is it easier for a female poet to synthesize political

commitment and sexual passion? Is there the same or any tension between the demands of dyadic and collective love for women as there are for men? It is the premise of this chapter that in these two texts Belli demonstrates an easier transferability between dyadic and collective love due to her reliance on both a fertile, feminine modality of *eros* and on Whitmanian subjectivity which views the erotic subject as in- communion with many. Belli brings Whitmanian subjectivity into a distinctly feminine mode, examining it in relation to male-female dyads and the role of woman as mother. This allows for Belli to resolve the tensions between collective and dyadic love in *Línea del fuego* by rewriting the Sandinista Revolution as a primarily erotic experience.

Women poets writing during the Sandinista Revolution found themselves pulled in two directions at once. On the one hand, feminist consciousness impressed upon them the need to "re-create themselves" and affirm their subjectivity outside of phallogocentric forms of representation by "writing the body" and reclaiming their experiential voices for themselves. On the other, participation in the revolution required a certain engagement with the process of history outside of subjective concerns. Greg Dawes notes that the act of "writing the body", can only be considered revolutionary if it is "accompanied by political action that works toward altering the ideology, institutions, and in the end, economic and political systems promoting patriarchy. (128) Dawes criticizes Belli's poetry for undercutting "realist depiction of experience in a revolutionary situation," displacing revolutionary actions onto a subjective, irrational foundation and creating a refraction of reality in which sexual issues are foregrounded. In some senses, Dawes is correct. Belli's poetry begins in the "Self" and moves outward to the multitude, such that revolutionary action becomes an extension of her subjectivity. The question of whether this invariably signifies a lack of political action is part of a much larger debate on

what aesthetic praxis are most conducive to revolutionary action. Nevertheless, Belli's strategy, the combination of a Whitmanian lyric voice and a feminocentric subjectivity harmonizes these two feminist concerns in a rather original way.

The title of her first book *Sobre la grama* is described directly in her memoirs as homage to *Leaves of Grass*, in particular Whitman's "celebration of the body, the landscape and the multitudes of his homeland." (El país 71). Belli's statement reveals what Chilean critic Fernando Alegría recognizes as Whitman's primary influence on socially committed poets in Latin America. He explains:

A mi juicio Whitman une a las nuevas generaciones de poetas americanos sobre la base de un programa que, en síntesis, recomienda las virtudes de un estilo realista y popular, la exaltación del tema americano con proyecciones universales, la defensa de los trabajadores en las luchas revolucionarias y la misión social y política del poeta. Whitman, el místico, el lírico cantor de refinados sentimentalismos y de complejas sutilezas metafísicas, no encuentra discípulos en español sino por excepción. (250)

Alegría is mistaken in at least one area, where the "metaphysical" Whitman finds common ground among Spanish language poets: the Whitmanian transcendental subject. Stovall explains "The I of *Leaves of Grass* is both the microcosmic Walt Whitman, citizen of the Universe, and the actual Walt Whitman, citizen of Brooklyn" (Stovall xxxvi). This Whitmanian I occupies two plains of existence simultaneously, both relishing his embodied nature ...the mate and companion of all people." (Stovall 9) Whitman in his poetry both preserves the dyadic quality of erotic discourse and is able to go beyond it to embrace collective concerns. He uses dyadic speech directed to the multitude as a collective/singular loved object. He describes himself as a multitude. He allows himself to become "possessed" by multiple voices. He takes on the "loving eye" of God and observes their lives and sufferings. The transcendental Self's communion with the multitude leads him to recognize the temporal injustice and suffering under

which they exist. Interestingly, Whitman's particular form of subjectivity aligns with what Helène Cixous describes as *écriture féminine*. In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous accords the female libido, and its expression in writing the same double-characteristic as being both embodied and peopleable, a condition which Cixous refers to as "bisexuality". She explains

Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me—the other that I am and am not, that I don't know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live—that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who?—a feminine one, a masculine one, some?—several, some unknown, which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars. This peopling gives neither rest nor security, always disturbs the relationship to "reality" (77.)

For Cixous, woman is naturally a "peopleable being", capable of being inhabited by a multitude of voices without drawing them into any type of "I/Thou" binary. Maternity and *eros* are two ways, distinct but interconnected, in which woman experiences being peopled through the body. By "writing the body", woman is able to create a peopleable discourse, a new type of language in which the body's members, and the multiple presences within the self are given leave to speak without submitting to any rational hierarchy.

In 1974 Gioconda Belli, with the help of Jaime Morales Carazo and José Coronel Utrero who included a laudatory six-page introduction, self-published the first edition of *Sobre la grama* from a series of poems written as early as 1970 when she began working as part of a creative team at the advertising firm Publisa. Taking the job at Publisa had the dual effect of introducing her to both the Sandinista cause and to the world of letters. This first edition of *Sobre la grama*, copies of which are still available, is itself a syntactic and poetic construction, differing from other works in that it lacks page numbers, chapters or an index¹. The text is organized into four interrelated thematic sections each introduced by a pencil sketch of Belli

¹ For this reason, citations of these text will refer to poem titles only

produced by Róger Pérez de la Rocha, an artist friend of the poet who designed the text. (El país 71) The poems of the opening section deal with the poet's discussion of herself, her internal emotional states, her fertile body and her desire to commune with the natural world. The second section is comprised primarily of love poems, describing her passionate romantic encounters with her. The third section is entirely dedicated to poems of maternity, exploring Belli's experiences of pregnancy, birth and motherhood. Finally the fourth section deals with the issue of writing, exploring her identity as a poet amidst the repressive regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle who held control of the country with his brother Luis after the assassination of their father Anastasio Somoza García in 1956. All four sections, which for the purpose of this analysis will be referred to as "Fertile Subjectivity", "Dyadic Eros" "Maternity" and "Writing" are organized into what might be called a "peopling telos", unified by Belli's own understanding of *eros* as a means of self expansion. The title encapsulates via the intertextuality with Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* the notion of *eros* as both grounded in the body and expansive. Similarly her first section is dedicated to establishing a Whitmanian subjectivity, a self that is fully her own and fully peopleable

Y Dios me hizo mujer,
de pelo largo,
ojos,
nariz y boca de mujer.
Con curvas
y pliegues
y suaves hondonadas
y me cavó por dentro,
me hizo un taller de seres humanos.
(“Y Dios me hizo mujer”)

The opening poem, a manifesto which introduces not only the theme of the book, but its syntactical structure, begins with a line echoing Genesis 1:27 “Y creó Dios al hombre a su imagen, a imagen de Dios lo creó; varón y hembra los creó”. Here Belli reframes the creation of

woman, removing it from the dyadic mode of the Genesis narrative and focusing on woman exclusively as a divine creation rather than as a part of man. The poet praises the detailed artistry involved in her construction, asserting her being through a *via positiva*. Belli travels through her body's physical elements from the top of her head to her womb as what Elizabeth Casimir Bruno calls "rhetorical portraiture". This trajectory foregrounds the peopleable body of woman as the locus of her being and the locus of her writing. God begins by creating her hair, eyes and face, elements which serve to identify her as a woman and as Woman, as a unique person and as one who stands for the collective, reflective in the chiasmic pattern "mujer de" and "de mujer" which frames the poem's description of her facial features. She is "a woman with long hair" –herself, but she also has features that belong to all women "a woman's eyes, nose and mouth". At the same time, the eyes, nose and mouth are also means through which the body communicates, receiving sensory information from the external world and enabling the woman to communicate her internal one through her glance, expression and utterance. The poem then extends downward along her body linking the communicative/identifying conjunction of features to the more erotic mid-body conjunction of "curves" "folds" "soft depths" through the enjambment between "de mujer" and "con" in lines 4-5. The erotic field of woman's body is composed of not only those physical elements which indicate sexual attractiveness and pleasure but also those which make woman peopleable as evidenced in the "workshop" image, one of the poem's only uses of a metaphoric device. The metaphor of the workshop fuses several modalities of creativity together. On the one hand it associates birth, writing and manual labor in a feminine revision of a Nerudian construct. On the other, the womb is the point of contact between divinity and humanity, as well as the source of woman's creative energy. Woman has a direct and unique link to the divine nature by being both a created being and participant in

creation through the twin acts of birthing and writing. The poem structurally becomes a womb within a womb, providing the discursive terrain in which the divine being moves and acts in order to create the body of the poetic subject, who herself is a terrain for the creation of both bodies and discourses, utterances and forms of expression. The female body is a peopleable space, habitable by other bodies which pass through her on the way to birth, as well as artistic creations which seek to move out into the world. In a sense, woman renders false the Cartesian mind-body divide. Everything that comes from her is grounded in the physical even as it transcends the embodied self. Transcendence itself involves a form of horizontal incarnation, as multiple bodies issue from the self and as the self expands to occupy multiple bodies, including poems which are seen as incarnate beings, a theme which will be picked up on later in the text.

Belli follows "Y Dios me hizo mujer" with three more which build on the theme of fertile subjectivity and expansion. The poems "Soy llena de gozo", "Estoy deseando" and "Metamorfosis" all describe a poetic subject hungry for communion with the natural world. "Soy llena de gozo" in particular relates to feminine peopleability in relation to this Whitmanian "communion." Some of Belli's lines are indeed evocative of the second stanza of Whitman's *Song of Myself* "I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked/I am mad for it to be in contact with me" (Stovall 3):

Imantada mi sangre con la naturaleza
Sintiendo el llamado del monte
Para correr como venado desenfrenadamente
sobando el aire,
o andar desnuda por las cañadas
untada de grama y flores machacadas
(“Soy llena de gozo”)

Like Whitman Belli longs for a return to the primitive elements which compose her, both those of the Judeo-Christian narrative, "el barro," "la costilla" as well as her animal nature "sangre de

animal" "instinto" "venado". Belli draws from Whitman the symbolic association between physical nakedness and primeval return. Clothing is a sign of alienation, imposing a false division between humans and nature and men and women. "Nature", both in terms of uncultivated wild spaces and unencumbered human instincts puts the lyrical speaker in contact with all of humanity through its common material origins and its erotic longings. *Song of Myself*, expresses the idea that all human beings are synchronically and diachronically linked to one another by their primeval elements "My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air, born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same." (Stovall 3).

If the opening Fertile Subjectivity poem refocused woman's creation by removing it from the Adamic dyad, the opening poem of Dyadic Eros restores the creation narrative to that of the couple. Here, Belli foregrounds woman as discursive subject in the title of her poem "De la mujer al hombre", inverting the Genesis order of creation by reframing man's creation as specifically for the female poetic subject.

Dios te hizo hombre para mi.

Te admiro desde lo más profundo
de mi subconsciente,
con una admiración extraña y desbordada
que tiene un dobladillo de ternura.

("De la mujer al hombre")

While the opening line suggests a direct inversion of the type of male-dominated subject/object discursive relationship commonly seen in poems such as Cardenal's Epigram 5, Belli immediately shifts to an egalitarian position, using her agency to upraise her beloved via the phrase "te admiro" in the second verse. The lyrical speaker then retreats to the passive position as an "observer/listener" of her beloved, a posture which recalls *Song of Myself's* transcendental

I who marks others with a loving gaze and allows himself and his verse to become open to the voices of others "Now I will do nothing but listen/to accrue what I hear into this song, to let sounds contribute toward it." (Stovall 29) The observer position neutralizes the power imbalance in yo/tú dyadic speech, allowing the song to emerge not, under the tyranny of an omniscient male subject as in Cardenal's epigrams to Claudia, but in the peopleable framework of a receptive, feminine discourse. Belli's loved-object is given free reign as an agent, speaking with his own voice. The male beloved is elevated both as the object of the poet's affection and admiration and also as an actor, someone with ideas who engages with the world and tries to "give it a new geography of words". His relationship to the female lyrical subject is both egalitarian and complementary. Their bodies are dissimilar, created for the purpose of giving and receiving one another both physically and discursively. Interestingly, Belli's description of her mind as "covada para recibir tus ideas" recalls her image of being "dug out inside" in order to become a workshop for human beings. As in "Dios me hizo mujer", mind and body are the same, and fertility and love are both discursive and physical. Her mind is shaped to be receptive for his ideas just as her body is for his semen. At the same time, her own poetic powers allow her to "give" or "birth" her own ideas and present them to him.

Belli's passion for her lover also stirs in her a desire for self-expansion through the twin vehicles of writing and maternity, which builds to a climax in the poems "Te veo como un temblor en el agua" and "Quiero." In the former the poet expresses a desire to "multiply" herself in order to people her lover:

Cuando estoy con vos
 Quisiera tener varias yo
 Invadir el aire que respirás
 Transformarme en un amor caliente
 Para que me sudés
 Y poder entrar y salir de vos

(“Te veo como un temblor en el agua”)

“Te veo como un temblor” reiterates several of the themes of the previous poems: Belli expresses her desire to become fertile terrain for her beloved, to “seed him like a great tree in her body” and to fuse with her beloved in a communion in which “no sabemos quién es quién.” The mind-body connection is also reinforced through the image of herself entering the body of her beloved in order to caress him cerebrally and to “explode along with each of [his] heartbeats. In the abovementioned verses, however, these feats are achieved by making a multiplicity of herself, necessitating “varias yo” in order to fully embody her ecstatic desire. The urgency and power of her feeling pushes her to create a multitude of her own I in order to contain and to express it in its completeness, to caress the lover simultaneously in every manner that she longs to, and interestingly, to people him herself. In “Quiero” her fantasy of making a multiplicity of the Self becomes concretized in the poet’s longing to become a mother.

Quiero ese hijo tuyo, amor.

Dárteme desde dentro de mi vientre
 En una nueva prolongación de la inmortalidad
 Mostrarte hasta donde puede crecer mi vida
 Como un árbol
 Si tú la riegas.

(“Quiero”)

Maternity becomes a focal point for the various longings expressed in both the Fertile Subjectivity and Dyadic Eros sections of the text. In terms of the former, it reinforces the poet’s connection to the natural world, echoed in the image of her life growing like a tree watered by her lover. In terms of the latter, it provides a means for her to multiply herself and her beloved, as well as manifesting her longing for communion with him. Dyadic *eros*’ effect on their finite human bodies provokes a hunger for infinite expansion and multiplication. Inasmuch as she and her lover possess each other, she wants their mutual possession to perpetually increase. As in

"Te veo como un temblor" Belli responds to the infinite expansiveness of dyadic love by multiplying herself, from her womb, by "giving" or "birthing" herself, emphasized by the repetition of "dárteme" at the beginning of line 2 and at the end of line 7. The phrase "dárteme" can be read as both "give you myself" in an erotic sense, and "birth myself for you" in the maternal sense, rendering the erotic peopling of lovemaking and the physical peopling of maternity indistinguishable from each other. Indeed, the movement between the first line of the poem and its subsequent elaboration throughout the rest of it reiterate this idea. The desire for a child expressed in line 1 transforms into the desire to find new and multiple channels for her erotic passion. Thus Belli's ache toward maternity is not due to a sense of motherhood as a defining factor of femaleness, nor due to any social pressure on women to have children. She doesn't conceive of herself as a chaste mother in the Mistralian sense, who wants a baby to hold and to nurture. Motherhood is a direct outflow of Belli's sexual passion for her lover. She doesn't merely want a child, she wants his child, to be inhabited by him and by physical manifestations of their passion. Throughout the Dyadic Eros section the notion of erotic passion is linked on the one hand with a desire for communion, and on the other with a desire for expansion into a multitudinous self. In "Quiero", motherhood becomes the main channel for such a multiplicity, something which the text's third section, devoted to maternity elaborates on.

The Maternity section synthesizes the text's main themes of subjectivity, dyadic eros and peopling through both physical motherhood and the particular "discursive motherhood" of the female poet.

Quiero escribir un niño
 Con grandes ojos como semillas
 Pelo color maíz
 Dulce sonrisa de níspero

Quiero escribir un niño

Hacerlo con palabras
 En el idioma de su placenta hecha de mar
 De sacuanjoches olorosos.
 ("Quiero escribir un niño")

In "Quiero escribir un niño" the poet brings physical pregnancy to the level of poetic creation, describing herself as "writing a child". Here the child is simultaneously a physical and imagined creation, a being both embodied and made of pure poetry. The poet's imagination selects the composition of the child's features, according to wild phenotypes of its own making and drawn from the genes of the flora and fauna of Nicaragua such as "níspero", "sacuanjoches" and "maíz". He is both poet "un verde niño poeta," "moreno cantor" and poem "[hecho] con palabras," "En el idioma de su placenta hecha de mar." The child's hybrid nature, as both physical and imagined being, is similarly reflected in his dual role. On the one hand the child himself is a creative agent, both singing and creating poems from his primeval origins in order to "fill the world with smiles." On the other hand he is an incarnation of these same primeval energies, bearing their images as physical attributes. By referring to him as "messiah of the vital message of nature", Belli emphasizes the duality of this role, messiah-as-messenger or prophet, and messiah-as-incarnation of divine forces. Maternity, in this poem, is rather curiously, displaced to the Earth itself. It is not her body which acts as the child's womb, but the "sea." Belli, rather, acts in a role analogous to the creator in "Y Dios me hecho mujer", the divine will who lays the teleology of the child's being. Following the "womb within a womb" pattern of "Y Dios me hizo mujer", "Quiero escribir un niño" describes the creation of a being who exists to perpetuate itself interminably, a being sung into existence in order to sing into existence other imaginary beings, to inundate the world with its "poems" and "songs. Thus Belli's poetry is not only seen to be "founded" in the body, that is generated by her physical reality, it is also as "peopleable" as her own body is.

The final section of *Sobre la grama* deals almost exclusively with Belli's vocation as a poet and creator of public discourse, moving out of her own embodied subjectivity though without relinquishing it completely.

Escribir para darle forma al mundo
 Para delinear el perfil de la lágrima
 La tristeza del árbol cortado

Escribir para despojarnos de la mañana recién nacida
 Para irnos desnudando del dolor y de la alegría
 Para revestirnos otra vez del sol, del mar
 De la pareja que inspira ternura sin saberlo.
 ("Dandose")

"Dandose" opens the Writing section by establishing three basic purposes of poetry which correspond to the division of the poem into three stanzas. In the first stanza, poetry becomes a means to, in Shlovsky's words, "defamiliarize" the world, to "frame speech" and "impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known" (Shlovsky 16). The poet, or in Belli's case, the poets "give shape" to the world by tracing a line around "the profile of a tear" and the "sadness of a cut tree", making them perceivable elements. In the second stanza the act of writing becomes a means of "becoming naked" in order to attain the same primeval communion as mentioned in the Fertile Subjectivity section, described as a "shedding of joys and sorrows," and a re-dressing in "sun, and sea", recovering a state of prelapsarian innocence. At the same time line 5 infers the poet's search for and public revelation of emotional authenticity. Indeed, Stanza's 1 and 2 together seek to establish the poet as the one who can make evident and public all that is suppressed, ignored or hidden, including experiences of loss and violation—cut trees, tears shed in private,—as well as the passionate and unencumbered love of couples lost in each other and oblivious to the rest of the world. In Stanza 3 the poet expresses the necessity of becoming consciously, a public being. The poet is called to not merely undress himself of "joys

and sorrows" but of her entire body, in order to substitute it for "other bodies that live and feel in us". Here Belli shows recognition of poetry as essentially a form of communication which straddles the subjective and objective discursive realms, echoing Theodor Adorno's notion of the poem as submitting to subjective emotion yet remaining a public object and a measure of the effect of the external world on the internal. Through poetic form, subjective emotions become language objects, externalized from the poet himself and integrated into the larger social discourse. Belli extends this idea to the body itself. The poet doesn't merely use language to make her internal stirrings public matter, she opens up her entire body and its perceptions and emotions, so that they can be inhabited by the other or multiple others, a "body of bodies" in Cixous' terms. The poet's task, as defined by Belli in both the title and the final six lines of the poem is to become open to what Cixous calls "possession" by multiple voices and to respond to the impulse to extend and multiply oneself. By doing this, the poet sacrifices the sovereignty of herself in a kind of death. This poem more than the others of the section, or indeed the others in the text, expresses the same set of concerns which characterize Belli's second book *Línea de fuego* to such a degree that one can imagine it as a precursor to that text. Although not openly a political poem, it is, one in which Belli demonstrates consciousness of poetry as a social act, one which contributes, and ought to contribute, to the collective objectives of the Sandinista cause. The idea of "getting rid of one's body" and "substituting it for other bodies which live and feel in us" can be clearly read as political as well as artistic statements, suggesting the necessity for poets to move beyond their private, subjective longings and to write in order to be read, to "inspire tenderness" in others and become an agent by which the world is nourished.

In some ways the structure of *Línea de fuego* represents an inversion of its predecessor. If in *Sobre la grama* the poet moves from an intense subjectivity towards a more collective

voice, in *Línea de fuego* the trajectory is the opposite. The text contains three sections varying in length. The opening section, "Patria o Muerte" contains a series of poems dedicated to the Sandinista cause while the second "Acero" and third "A Sergio" deal with two relationships which the poet had while in exile, the former a brief love affair with a clandestine operative named Eduardo Contreras, or "Marcos" for whom Belli served as a contact and who was killed by the National Guard in an operation in Managua in November of 1976, the latter a Brazilian she met in San José on New Years Eve of that year named Sergio de Castro whom she would eventually marry. This three-level structure, the foregrounding of the poet's political concerns and the differences between the two relationships which make up its second half create a multilayered vision of eros within social commitment, at times attempting to create a fusion of the two by "embodying" and "mothering" the nation, other times finding the fusion troubled by contesting demands between the poet's personal love and her political commitments

Quiero una huelga donde vayamos todos
 Una huelga de brazos, de piernas, de cabellos
 Una huelga naciendo en cada cuerpo.
 Quiero una huelga
 De obreros de palomas
 De chóferes de flores
 De técnicos de niños
 De médicos de mujeres
 ("Huelga" 10)

Alvaro Utrecho, cited in Zamora's study of Nicaraguan women poets describes this particular poem, the second in the text as an example of "the body becoming "civic" and conversely, "eros becoming a form of insurrection", a means to "overcome individual solitude and an expression of solidarity" (qtd in Zamora 951). This is very identifiably Belli's intention in both this poem and in the book *Línea de fuego*, as a whole, also discussed by Casimir Bruno (140) and Maria Salgado (7). This poem also imbues the "peopleable body," from *Sobre la grama* with political

and national significance, removing the Whitmanian/transcendentalist aura and applying it to immanent realities. In the opening lines Belli describes desiring a strike in which everyone participates: "a strike of arms, legs and hair...being born in each body." The foregrounding of the body in the strike action reflects Belli's idea of political revolution, expressed to Margaret Randall as something which begins within oneself "The revolution from the inside out, the search for one's authentic identity, for new human relations... to confront the inheritance of concepts and prejudices we carry inside" (150). Here, the "peopling telos" of *Sobre la grama* is brought into a political context. A strike is a sudden and conscientious refusal to participate in a particular social contract, whether that contract is large and general or small and particular, a workplace or a national culture. To undertake a strike requires what Paulo Freire refers to as "conscientization" the full recognition of the oppressive social contract and one's own role in it. Conscientization begins in the body's members, in the arms, legs and hair of individuals becoming aware of their role as instruments of the social contract either through their labors (arms, legs,) or through their patterns of consumption and cooperation with social norms, both elements which the image of "hair" could be seen to represent—especially for women who maintain their hair's appearance through a subset of commercial transactions. The conscientization process moves from the subjective to the objective, from the intimacy of the body to the public sphere through those same members which interact with the latter on a daily basis either as signs or instruments. At the same time, these members themselves become agents, possessing growing political conscience and acting of their own accord. The individual becomes a Cixousian body of bodies, inhabited by the multiple presences within the self which begin acting towards a common political goal. As the conscientization process continues, the multitude within expands to become a multitude without as the poem typographically splits,

organizing the participants of the strike into two basic columns which represent the public and private sphere. The first column identifies members of four professions, two commonly associated with the lower class "obreros" and "chóferes", and two with the professional and middle class "técnicos" "médicos." The second column counterbalances the first by referring to "doves" "flowers" "women" and "children", representing not only the private sphere, but elements and persons which tend to be purposefully distanced from political processes. The use of "flowers" and "doves" has two levels of reading, on the one hand they are images frequently used in lyric poetry, on the other they are associated with an idealized view of woman. Both uses represent an attempt to create a "purified" sphere excluded from politics, something which its typographical split from the "profession column" might be seen to represent. Belli, on the other hand, wants them to become part of the same struggle and of the same political action, something she represents by reunifying the poem in the second stanza with the lines "Quiero una huelga grande/que hasta el amor alcance." The strike action has to spread beyond and bridge the public/private divide, changing the very nature of "love itself", so that as in Alvaro Utrecho's words, "making love" and "making revolution" become the same thing. Belli expresses this by expanding the concientization process outward to the point of "love" and then drawing it back into the body, in particular those members associated with erotic contact in the third stanza, "una huelga de ojos, de manos, de besos" The act of loving in a dyadic union is reconfigured as a political act which reunifies the artificial divisions created between male and female, private sphere and public, subjective and objective reality. At the same time, revolutionary action is framed as another manifestation of the same erotic subjectivity, the people are an extension of her peopleable self, her revolutionary activities are forms of erotic love.

Ríos me atraviesan
Montañas horadan mi cuerpo

Y la geografía de este país
 Va tomando forma en mí
 Haciéndome lagos, brechas y quebradas
 Tierra donde sembrar el amor
 Que me está abriendo como un surco
 Para verlo libre, hermoso
 Pleno de sonrisas. (11)

As in "Huelga" the first stanza of the poem begins in the body, a body which is occupied by nature in a manner reminiscent of "Metamorfosis" from *Sobre la grama*. In that particular poem Belli describes transforming Daphne-like into a tree as her body longs to re-join the Earth from which it emerged "mis olores han cambiado/tropiezo con los muebles/ y mis piernas están rompiendo/los ladrillos/buscando la tierra." "Hasta que seamos libres" borrows some of the imagery of "Metamorfosis" as well as other poems of the Fertile Subjectivity section exploring the poet's desire for primeval communion with the natural world. Nature, the broad primeval terrain of *Sobre la grama* which the poet's body echoes in its fertility, has become "geography", a space named and circumscribed by time and history, containing both human and natural elements "Ríos" "montañas" "lagos" "quebradas". The second stanza moves this conscientization process further. The erotic love which caused her to "explode like a malinche pod" and "seed the wind" in "Deseo Explotar" is reinscribed as a desire to "explode with love", releasing not seeds but "shrapnel" which would "finish off the oppressors," conjugating burgeoning fertility with images of warfare. The poet has, in a sense, abandoned the prelapsarian innocence of *Sobre la grama*, in which life and love continuously perpetuate themselves without the rupture of death. Self-expansion, which is expressed in "Deseo explotar" as a kind of opening of to nature, now involves a sacrifice of the self in order to free the country from its oppressive forces. Elena Grau Llevería notes that by combining *eros* and *thanatos* in a "woman's voice" Belli seeks to transform them both, bringing love and historical struggle together as a

means to overcome the forces of entropy and to transform death itself into "la mayor muestra de amor que puede dar un compañero (49-50). Revolutionary action, at the same time, is reconfigured as a form of *erotic* love, a total reversal of the trajectory seen in Neruda. She explains:

Por lo tanto en la poética de Belli el amor es arma contra la opresión: es el deseo dionisiaco que vence a la muerte, a la desesperación. Es la forma de entender este nuevo proyecto revolucionario que conscientemente quiere alejarse del militarismo, de la masculinidad impuesta por la lógica y el orden de otras revoluciones. Belli crea un erotismo, un ideal de revolución que no es agresivo ni destructivo. Tanto el uno como el otro es la búsqueda de una sociedad libre. (52)

In a sense, Belli in this poem both conscientizes eros and eroticizes conscientization in an exchange of energies between the peopleable body and the multitude. Love enters her body through the act of primeval communion with her homeland, then leaves as her "multiple voices" begin to "sing through her pores", spreading outward and "infecting" the multitudes of her country with the same "love-sickness" and "desire for justice". Conscientization itself, becomes a manifestation of the same erotic self-expansion of *Sobre la grama*, while the poet's body becomes identified with the nation, making revolutionary action akin to lovemaking. Casimir Bruno explains "The poetic persona envisions her body as taking on the form of the land, a land that will be seeded with love by the liberators, through which they will give birth to a new nation, one that will be beautiful and free from political repression." (137). *Eros* thus becomes collectivized and politically engaged by bringing the body into the nation and the nation into the body.

The aforementioned second-section, entitled "Acero" explores Belli's relationship with Marcos in the aftermath of his death at the hands of the National Guard.

Amarte en esta guerra nos va desgastando
Y enriqueciendo
Amarte sin pensar en el minuto que se oscure

Y que acerca el adiós al tiempo de los besos
 Amarte con el miedo colgado a la garganta
 Amarte sin saber el día del adiós o del encuentro.
 ("La orquídea de acero" 49)

Belli sets up the section by framing the love relationship as an interlude in the war. She describes her relationship with Marcos as "a gift, a truce" amongst suffering and bullets, and "a moment inserted into the battle" in order to return to the self and to remember the body and its need for tenderness. For this reason, Belli frames her homage to Marcos not as a series of elegies to a fallen comrade, although the section does occasionally make reference to his martyrdom, but as a series of ardent lyric poems to her lost lover. As in Neruda's *Los versos del capitán*, the dyadic relationship is foregrounded while the Sandinista revolution frames the encounters between them as a backdrop. War, becomes the negative space of the poems composition, bringing into high relief the emotional intensity of both the relationship between the two and Belli's own sense of loss. In "orquídea" the war's effect on the relationship is primarily temporal. As in the poem "Ya van meses hijita" external circumstances have a reducing-effect on time, intensifying the emotional charge of each interaction. Belli's relationship with her lover occurs in her "off moments", whenever the two are able to meet and for undetermined periods of time. This temporal reduction eliminates any superfluity from the relationship, distilling it to an intense exchange of flesh and emotion. Any type of future for the lovers, other than the collective utopian future which orients their revolutionary activities is precluded. They are called to "love without thinking about the moment that passes" and "without knowing which day brings an encounter or a goodbye." The result of this temporal reduction is a fusion between *eros* and *thanatos*, between the love relationship and the war-stage on which it takes place. The couple has no line of flight in which to extend their relationship in time, but rather their lovemaking and union become elements of their revolutionary actions, even

as they provide respite from those same activities. Indeed, in spite of Belli's assertion of her relationship with Marcos as a kind of necessary "recovery" of the body and subjectivity, the dyad's union recalls the sacrificial posture of the mothers in "Engendramos niños." The lovers are called to hold each other lightly, savouring their time together as a gift while demanding nothing. At the same time, as the dyadic love relationship is reconfigured by the war-stage on which it occurs, so too is the revolution re-written as an expression of *eros*. Belli refers to the war twice in the poem, in the first line to establish it as the "stage" of the love experience: "amarte en esta guerra que nos va desgastando y enriqueciendo," presenting love as a refuge in a war which both "drains" and "enriches" the couple, purifying them by divesting them of any superfluous, subjective desires, and in lines 5-6 placing the fusion of *eros* and *thanatos* under embodied subjectivity. "Amarte en esta guerra que peleamos, amor/ con piernas y con brazos". Belli foregrounds the body's members by placing them on line 6 while at the same time connecting them to the "loving" and "fighting" of line 5 via enjambment. The body becomes the point of fusion between both acts. "Arms" and "legs" through the use of the prepositional phrase and its ambiguous link to the gerund verbs "loving" and "fighting" become the implements of both types of action.

This foregrounding of the body in the erotic union between revolutionaries is carried into subsequent poems of the section. Many poems such as "Yo la que te quiere" and "Como tinaja" recall the erotic subjectivity of *Sobre la grama*, even relying on some of its imagery. "Como tinaja" describes the poet's body as a clay jar collecting "the tender water" which her lover spilled over her, recalling the "guacal en que te derramas sin perderte" of "Yo Soy." In the *Sobre la grama* poem the poet's embodied, receptive role in lovemaking is associated with fertility. She describes herself as "loving his seed and preserving it." In "Como tinaja" a similar

metaphor is used in relation to barrenness and loss. The poet preserves her lover's "water" to allow it to remain alive long after his absence. War has altered the terrain of the lovers' union, and in a sense, the lovers' understanding of themselves. The instinct to propagate and be peopled has shifted to the desire to preserve and survive. The lover's memory permeates the water which she carries within her, keeping her thriving in a time of suffering and loss. The "peopling telos" of female erotic subjectivity which in *Sobre la grama* linked eros to motherhood has now been displaced. Motherhood has been removed from the *telos*, replaced by a collectively oriented denouement, a utopia which the revolution attempts to bring about. This is expressed in several poems. "Te busco en la fuerza del futuro" in which Belli describes seeking to "reanimate" her lover and the moments they shared with one another, finally concluding that he will be reincarnated as the strength that animates the revolutionary future, or similarly "Sólo el amor resistirá" in which she imagines seeing her lover again as a symbol of the indestructibility of love itself.

Sólo el amor resistirá
Mientras caen como torres dinamitadas
Los días, los meses, los años

Solo el amor resistirá
Alimentando silencioso la lámpara encendida
El canto anudado a la garganta
La poesía en la caricia del cuerpo abandonado.

This poem, left untitled in the collection, begins with an epigraph from Sergio Ramírez, one of the leaders of the Sandinistas. Ramírez use of "love" refers to the collective-oriented *philadelphos* which Ernesto Che Guevara describes as undergirding revolutionary action. Belli's poem performs two functions simultaneously. The first and second stanza gloss on Ramírez thoughts directly by examining the indestructibility of love in relation to revolutionary action and the writings of poets. In the first stanza she accompanies Ramírez' line with images

of "days," "months" and "years" falling like bombed towers, evoking both the material images of warfare and the protracted experience of temporality. In the second stanza, the same epigraphic verse is brought into the realm of embodied subjectivity. Love nourishes the souls of individual fighters in the war, strengthening their songs and poetry in moments of solitude and loss. In the third stanza, Belli conjugates Ramírez indestructible revolutionary love with her own erotic experience with her lost beloved, imagining the same indestructibility will enable him to be brought back to life. "Lo veré alto y distante/oiré su voz llamándome y sabré que el amor ha resisitido." Thus while Ramírez' collective revolutionary love is capable of resisting the rigors of warfare, so too is Belli's dyadic love. Resistance means not only the ability of the revolution to outlast the forces of counterrevolutionary destruction and entropy, but also the poet's beloved to live again through her love of him. The first two sections of *Línea de fuego*, read in conjunction with one another and in comparison to Belli's previous text *Sobre la grama* show a distinct transition between the subjective/transcendental *eros* of the former and the politicized love of the latter. The effects of Freirean conscientization on the poet's erotic feelings involve a radical shift in the poet's views on peopleable feminine subjectivity, on the links between dyadic and collective love, and intriguingly on the poet's subjective experience of time.

Conscientization leads to an immanentization of the transcendental selfhood experienced in *Sobre la grama*, wherein the poet ceases to imagine herself an ontological symbol of fertile, erotic womanhood and begins to experience love as circumscribed by time, as grounded in a historical reality in which she plays a role. Simultaneously, the "peopleability" of her erotic subjectivity goes from a vertical movement through motherhood to a horizontal one through collective engagement. Motherhood itself is, in fact, a problematic element the first two sections of *Línea de fuego*. Motherhood continuously calls the poet out of her collective

subjectivity and into a dyadic role. It is for this reason that while it is so passionately exalted in the former text, it is abandoned and relegated to political symbolism in the latter. Erotic love, on the other hand, is able to become politically symbolic, able to adapt itself to historical necessity and become integrated into the poet's revolutionary consciousness without demanding any special considerations. She is able to experience *eros* as a woman making love to a man, as a revolutionary seeking respite from the war in the arms of a comrade, as, in Neruda's words, a "fresh sword", a source of renewal when her spirits are low, and ultimately as a symbol of the revolution itself and her role within it.

The third section of *Línea del fuego*, dedicated to celebrating Belli's relationship with her second husband whom she met while in exile, expands on the latter two experiences of *eros*, bringing the text full circle with the first. The war-experience still casts a shadow over both the poet and her love relationship, only now rather than being the terrain which circumscribes the lovers and alters the way in which they encounter another, it, itself, is subsumed into the erotic union. The war becomes integrated into the erotic poems as a series of metaphors and images:

"Es larga la tarde
Y el amor redondo como el gatillo de una pistola
Me rodea de frente, de lado, de perfil.
(*"Es larga la tarde"* 81)

"Nos casaremos con el techo cerrado,
Cuando suenen los techos
Como ametralladoras (*"Nos casaremos en invierno"* 87)

This poem, the second to last in the text, also features the return of the same *Sobre la grama* elements which were excluded in the first two sections. In particular, time has returned to its normal flow. The poet and her beloved look towards a future with one another, not, subsumed into a collective utopian ideal, but as a couple seeking to affirm the permanence of love and the

enduring pull of all natural creatures towards life by marrying in the rainy season, characterized in the poem by a burgeoning fertility which affects both nature and human beings. Similarly, throughout the section, *eros* recovers its expansive peopling *telos* both in terms of maternity and writing. In "Mi amor es así" Belli compares her erotic passion to a rain-shower which not only fertilizes her language:

Así como esta lluvia
 Me desbordo en palabras
 Para contarte todos mis quehaceres
 Para meterte en todos los rincones de mi día (86)

But also her body, urging her towards motherhood and self- expansion

Y me duele la carne de querer prolongarte
 De querer florecer la semilla en mi vientre
 Y darte un hijo hermoso y vital. (86)

Read as a whole in conjunction with its earlier counterpart, the role of the Sandinista revolution in *Línea de fuego* is not the framework, in which love is a divagation, but rather an immanent interlude in Belli's transcendental *eros*, an attempt to infuse national and collective concerns with the same fertile erotic energy, orienting them towards what Elena Grau Llevería calls "La felicidad que produce el amar" (49). In this sense, Greg Dawes criticism of Belli for putting aside the immanent reality of the revolution in the name of love is apt, nevertheless it is notable that Belli, under the rubric of female erotic subjectivity and the Whitmanian affirmative approach is able to harmonize the tensions between *eros* and *philadelphos*, between partial dyadic-passion and collectivized love. Revolution and lovemaking are brought together as forms of seeking happiness and bearing creative fruit.