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Source: *MLN*, Vol. 106, No. 2, Hispanic Issue (Mar., 1991), pp. 370-394

Published by: [The Johns Hopkins University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2904864>

Accessed: 01/03/2011 21:00

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# Gestures of Authorship: Lying to Tell the Truth in Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*



Lucille Kerr

How do we read a text that lies? How do we read a text that, somehow, persuades us to believe what it says, though we suspect that it doesn't really tell the whole truth? Documentary fiction—and especially the Spanish American *novela testimonial*—raises these familiar questions.<sup>1</sup> Though they are questions that may well occur to us as we read any work of fiction, they are also questions we may be likely to disregard. However, the *novela testimonial* would push us to reconsider these queries, and to see them perhaps as meaningful rather than as marginal issues toward

<sup>1</sup> A few words about terminology. I am using the phrase *documentary fiction* as the general term to encompass all those texts that purport to function as documents concerning the social, political, or historical realities they take as their referents, and which do so in ways that have been read as literary. I am using the more specific *novela testimonial* or its English equivalent partly because Poniatowska identifies her text in those terms (see below) and partly because it is the phrase most widely used in Spanish to classify a variety of texts that fall into the “testimonial” or “documentary” category. Various discussions of the loosely defined genre would implicitly or explicitly address the matter of generic terminology, but the end result has yet to clarify or normalize the vocabulary. Different terms mean different things to different readers; different texts elicit different labels from different quarters: in English, compare the uses of “documentary fiction” (Foley), “documentary narrative” (Foster), “documentary novel” (Barnet translated by Bundy and Santí, Foley, González Echevarría [110-23]), “testimonial literature” (Foster), “testimonial narrative” (Beverley), “testimonial novel” (Beverley); in Spanish, “novela-testimonio” (Barnet), “narrativa de testimonio” (González Echevarría [110-23]), “novela testimonial” (Beverley), “testimonio” (Beverley). The case of Poniatowska's text is exemplary but not representative of all the texts that would fashion personal testimony into a form of writing that gets taken as more or less literary. Indeed, the matter of classification rests as much (if not more) with critical response as with authorial intention.

which our vision might yet be turned. Moreover, in raising the question of how texts tell the truth (or not), this current in contemporary Spanish American literature leads us to look once again at the figure of the author, whose critical position is revitalized as much as eroded by the *novela testimonial*.

Though this documentary trend has established its distance from texts thought to be typical of Spanish American new narrative, the *novela testimonial* also reveals that it has some surprising affinities with the seemingly more literary focus of much boom and post-boom fiction, and with the kind of speculation that such writing has raised about traditional literary conventions and characters.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the testimonial novel seems to make it difficult, if not impossible, to talk about the author as either an original or privileged figure. Yet, it also reaffirms the importance of the author's role, as it redefines that role by resituating the author's responsibilities as at once both investigative and editorial, textual and testimonial.

To talk about the testimonial novel, and the activity or identity of its authors, is to talk about a variety of testimonies that would aim to establish such a text's truth. That testimony is given not only within the novel itself but also around it and in its borders. However, we are also aware that, inasmuch as the *novela testimonial* seems to testify to the truth of what it tells through the language of literature, a good many questions may be raised about how such a text may become accepted (or not) as truthful, and about how the figure of the author associated with it may come to exercise any authority at all.

Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* addresses this kind of question not only through what its author says about and does with the documentary materials that comprise the text. Its narrator—protagonist also problematizes such matters (unwittingly, it seems) within the narrative itself. Poniatowska's novel may well serve as an instructive example of how the route to a verifiable referent or to demonstrable veracity (apparently plotted out by the testimonial novel) is also a reflexive route that turns our reading away from as much as toward so-called reality.<sup>3</sup> It also suggests

<sup>2</sup> Beverley would counterpose "testimonio" to existing literary forms such as "new" narrative, while Foster would establish the (mainly formal) points of contact between them.

<sup>3</sup> I aim to emphasize how a particular *novela testimonial* can be read not simply in terms of its referent but as a text that, inadvertently or not, reflects upon its own

ways in which the figure of the author associated with such a work becomes visible (while also appearing to efface itself) as a figure of renewed authority.

That documentary or testimonial novels are inherently duplicitous, in the way that narrative literature is itself always double or divided, may well be evident. That such texts may somehow take note of their own discursive duplicity (in a sense, of their own lies) is perhaps less noticeable.<sup>4</sup> *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* implicitly raises the matter of its own doubled and divided status, its own propensity to lie in order to tell the truth, as forcefully as it seems to bypass such self-recognition through the testimonial narrative it unfolds. Indeed, this work openly introduces the question of the truth precisely at those moments when it insistently raises the specter of the lie.<sup>5</sup> It tells us a number of things about the kind of text or the kind of author that seems to have to lie, as it were, to tell the truth—that is, about a text such as a *novela testimonial* or an author such as Poniatowska.

Like other works that utilize the testimony of a single subject who may come to represent a group of similarly situated individuals, Poniatowska's novel is narrated in the first person by the character whose life story it tells.<sup>6</sup> As readers familiar with the text will recall, that narrator-protagonist is one Jesusa Palancares, a

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status as testimonial literature. In that Poniatowska's text virtually demands such a double reading it would establish its proximity to, as well as distance from, texts customarily considered to be reflexive or more properly literary. For two rather different views on the literary status of testimonial fiction or its relation to the tradition of literature more generally, see Beverley, and González Echevarría (110-123). See also Foley's consideration of the documentary novel for a complementary discussion.

<sup>4</sup> With these comments, and others below, I am thinking also of Said's discussion of the duplicity, the "molestations of authority," inherent in all narrative fiction, and especially in the role of the author (83-100).

<sup>5</sup> The general question of the truth-value of works thought of as either testimonial or documentary may be taken up in different ways, and indeed has been considered by a number of critics in different forums. See, for example, Barnet, Cavalari, Foster, González Echevarría (110-23), and Prada Oropeza, on Spanish American writing, and Foley, on European and Afro-American models.

<sup>6</sup> If we were to accept González Echevarría's description of the two trends in the Cuban documentary novel (the "epic" trend and the "account of the marginal witness") as representative of the dominant forms of the *novela testimonial* more generally, Poniatowska's text could be grouped with the second of those trends—"the *petite histoire*, a sort of cultural history dealing with everyday life and folk traditions" (116), presented by the protagonist's own narration. Cf. Kiddle's categorization of the testimonial novel in Mexico and *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* within it (85), and Feal's discussion of some testimonial novels as ethnobiography.

Mexican woman who was raised in poverty, lived through and took part in the Mexican revolution, and survived to old age by living a life whose patterns we may regard as somewhat literary. That is, the autobiographical tale she tells comprises episodic employments and adventures we may be tempted to read in terms of (or even as having originated from) an established literary tradition—that of the picaresque.<sup>7</sup>

Though there may well be points to be made about such literary resemblances, Poniatowska's novel also purports to be something else. In fact, the author's testimony about the text's production moves in two directions. On the one hand, Poniatowska has emphasized the literary aims and techniques employed to produce *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*. She has explained summarily how the text was composed, how she suppressed or selected, combined or cut, materials from Jesusa's testimony, so as to construct a *novela testimonial*. But she has also insisted that Jesusa (her "native informant") and her story are still the "real thing."<sup>8</sup> As Poniatowska reveals the techniques by which she transformed the material gathered directly from the person she calls "Jesusa," through tape recordings and notes, and as she talks about her own relation to the woman presented as a textual figure, she reaffirms the existence of an objective reality beyond the discourse that gives her text and its protagonist the appearance of truth (see "Jesusa Palancares" and "Testimonios").

Poniatowska's revelations about the novel's composition thus

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Poniatowska's character is read from different angles as a representative figure by Davis (225-26), Fernández Olmos (70 and 72), Lemaitre (135), and by Poniatowska herself ("Jesusa Palancares" 11 and "Testimonios" 159). On the other hand, Franco reads her story as unique rather than representative, and thus as unassimilable or incomparable to other such testimonies (*Plotting Women* 178). See also Poniatowska's conversations with Méndez-Faith (57).

<sup>7</sup> On the novel's resemblance to the picaresque, see Jaen and Tatum; on its differences from that model, see Beverley (15-17).

<sup>8</sup> However, Poniatowska emphasizes the difference between her text and a social science or journalism project, for which similar techniques may be utilized. She says: "Para escribir el libro de la Jesusa utilicé un procedimiento periodístico: la entrevista. Dos años antes, trabajé durante mes y medio con el antropólogo norteamericano Oscar Lewis, autor de *Los hijos de Sánchez* y otros libros, Lewis me pidió que lo ayudara a 'editar' *Pedro Martínez, la vida de un campesino de Tepoztlán*. . . . Este [sic] experiencia sin duda ha de haberme marcado al escribir *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*. Sin embargo, como no soy antropóloga, la mía puede considerarse una novela testimonial y no un documento antropológico y sociológico" ("Jesusa Palancares" 10). See also her conversation with Méndez-Faith (56-57); cf. Kushigian's proposal for classifying the novel in terms of other literary genres.

provide some ground for talking about the author's "artistic" intentions and the text's "literary" qualities.<sup>9</sup> But, given the attention paid to Jesusa as an empirical entity, as a person with whom the author developed a personal relationship (see especially "Jesusa Palancares"), Poniatowska's comments also aim to bear witness to the material reality that informs Jesusa's story and Poniatowska's presentation of it. Therefore, as the author's confessions insist upon the novel's origins in historical and biographical fact, in social and cultural history, in the life, memory, and discourse of its own narrator-protagonist, we are reminded of this text's problematical generic affinities and of the unstable boundaries of the *novela testimonial* more generally.<sup>10</sup> Such authorial comments would seem to complicate as much as clarify how one might identify the origins of Poniatowska's text, and they would also seem to raise the question of whether the author's activity can be considered at all original.

One might therefore argue that, although Jesusa's narration and the autobiography fashioned through it may well seem to be assimilable to an established, familiar literary tradition such as the picaresque, the author's statements concerning the text's genesis nonetheless insist that, on the contrary, Jesusa ought not to be taken only as a textual effect. That is, Jesusa's narrative, though shaped by Poniatowska, ought not to be read as a lie. What we are supposed to read in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, then, is essentially the truth, not merely a verisimilar fiction.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, we are directed

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the following statement by the author would also suggest that the text ought in some way to be read as a literary production: "Utilicé las anécdotas, las ideas y muchos de los modismos de Jesusa Palancares pero no podría afirmar que el relato es una transcripción directa de su vida porque ella misma lo rechazaría. Maté a los personajes que me sobraban, eliminé cuanto sesión espiritualista pude, elaboré donde me pareció necesario, podé, cosí, remendé, inventé" ("Jesusa Palancares" 10). Lagos-Pope emphasizes precisely such literary activities as the very strategies that enable the author to present the text as if it were an authentic documentary. For other discussions of the interplay of literary technique and factual material, see Fernández Olmos (70-71), Kiddle (84-85), and Kushigian (667).

<sup>10</sup> See Foley (25-41) on the question of generic borders of documentary fiction.

<sup>11</sup> The discussion assumes distinctions among the real, the true, and the verisimilar, as proposed by Kristeva (211-16). The first term refers to what we call material or objective reality, which is self-evident and entails no discursive mediation. The second ("the true") and the third ("the verisimilar"), on the other hand, refer to types of discourse, and discursive effects. The true is a discourse that resembles the real. The discourse of the true produces an appearance of reality, but it is itself not the real. The verisimilar is a discourse that resembles another discourse (that is, the true or the discourse of the true), which is the discourse that resembles the real. The verisimilar is therefore at a second remove from the real, which it

to consider the text as a testimonial to truth, even though, as the author freely admits, such truth has been shaped by a good many lies inherent in the techniques of literature.

Oddly, this text we are to take as an accurate testimony, as a reliable and essentially truthful (not simply verisimilar) account of what its narrator has told the author and she here presents to her reader in literary form, is a text that puts into question the possibility of fashioning such testimony. In *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* access to such truth, if not to reality, is proposed as problematical, if not also impossible, by Jesusa herself, the subject whose seemingly truthful discourse fills its pages. Indeed, the novel seems to block the path to certainty about the correspondence between what has been said and what has happened, between what is told and what is truthful.

There are a number of places where this matter of lying or telling the truth is introduced in the text. Its introduction is the responsibility of no less an authority on the story's truth than Jesusa, the narrating subject whose appearance as a character we are to take as faithfully resembling the person with whom Elena Poniatowska spoke as she gathered the material for her book. Appropriately (and, perhaps, intentionally) this question is first raised in the text's epigraph, attributed by the author to Jesusa, who, in one of their conversations, is quoted as projecting forward to a moment when the telling of her story to Poniatowska will already be in the past:

Algún día que venga ya no me va a encontrar; se topará no más con el puro viento. Llegará ese día y cuando llegue, no habrá ni quien le dé una razón. Y pensará que todo ha sido mentira. Es verdad, estamos aquí de a mentiras: lo que cuentan en el radio son mentiras, mentiras las que dicen los vecinos y mentira que me va a sentir. Si ya no le sirvo para nada, ¿qué carajos va a extrañar? Y en el taller tampoco. ¿Quién quiere usted que me estrañe si ni adioses voy a mandar? (8)<sup>12</sup>

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might appear to resemble through its resemblance to the true but from which it is in fact doubly distanced. To read the true as the real is to not see the true as a discourse. To read the verisimilar as either the true or the real is to not see one or another as an effect of discourse, to be blinded to the discursive mediation inherent in their appearance, which such willful (or unwitting) blindness would lead one to take for something it is not.

<sup>12</sup> Poniatowska cites the first sentence of this statement also in "Jesusa Palancares," commenting before it that "Y se me va a morir, como ella lo desea; por eso, cada miércoles [the day on which she would interview the Mexican woman each week] se me cierra el corazón de pensar que no podría estar" (9). Moreover, many

If we read Jesusa's words as no more than a preliminary revelation of character through the idiosyncracies of discourse, the quotation becomes a predictive disclosure of the attitude, personality, and mode of expression that will individualize the protagonist throughout the text. But if we read her epigraph statement in relation to the text that follows it, the quotation highlights the text's status as a *novela testimonial*, which its narrative body might otherwise seem to conceal. It also begins to raise the question of truth in a rather telling fashion.

Jesusa's comments set up an oddly "literary" statement about the relation between the text we will read and the tale she will be seen to have narrated, if not entirely authored. For it posits her absence as an inevitable ending for the dialogue between the invisible (but necessarily audible) author and the protagonist, between the documentary researcher and the native informant. It prefigures the disappearance of the character whose responsibility for the text may come to be regarded as equal to, if not greater than, that of the author whose name can also be read as authorizing that of Jesusa. Moreover, her statement prefigures the precarious placement of her own author-interlocutor, whose aims she would challenge but whose authority she would certify in the act of saying (or appearing to be permitted to say) anything at all.

Jesusa's epigraph statement also implicates Poniatowska in a virtual dialogue about telling lies. This dialogue runs throughout the testimonial novel and also seems to spill over into the author's statements about it.<sup>13</sup> Jesusa's intermittent insistence on the idea of telling the truth, which she repeatedly opposes to that of telling lies, draws attention to the question of how something told might

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other, though not all, quotations that appear in this piece also appear in the novel's text, sometimes with some variation (e.g., compare her comments on Villa or Carranza in the novel [95-96, 136-37; cited below in notes 21 and 22] with those in "Jesusa Palancares" 6). Such variations of course raise questions about how to identify the original words of Jesusa: are they the words cited in the novel, but somehow copied incorrectly by the author later in her explanatory statements? or are they the words that appear in Poniatowska's comments, returned to their original state after having been altered by the author for inclusion in the novel? or are both instances of citation but alterations of Jesusa's original words, recorded accurately by machine or remembered and written up either adequately or inadequately by the author?

<sup>13</sup> That the narration, which appears as Jesusa's monologue, is situated within (and apparently occasioned by) a dialogue exchange is only revealed intermittently, when Jesusa addresses an interlocutor, whom Poniatowska, in her statements about their interview sessions, would identify as herself; see, e.g., 171, 173, 271, 313.

be taken or not to be true, to how, or under what circumstances, telling or learning the truth may become possible at all. Indeed, her statements become a problematical and reflexive introduction to—an oddly “theoretical” statement about—some of the constitutive features of the *novela testimonial* itself.

According to Poniatowska, the person she has identified as Jesusa has herself insisted vehemently that the text we read (the text in which the narrator named “Jesusa” makes similar statements) is a sham, a lie. It has little to do with the truth she has told to the author, who presumably has also aimed to tell it to us. Poniatowska relates that, after *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* had been read to Jesusa, she declared to the author: “Usted inventa todo, son puras mentiras, no entendió nada, las cosas no son así” (“Testimonios” 160).<sup>14</sup>

In fact, Poniatowska has had to lie to tell her interlocutor’s story, which we may wish to regard as otherwise essentially true. For it has recently been revealed that the name “Jesusa Palancares” is an authorial invention, an agreed-upon design to cover her informant’s real identity. The name “Jesusa Palancares” displaces and hides, as it also takes the place of, the name “Josefina Bórquez.” This newly revealed name is the real name of the woman whose story the novel tells, the name of the person with whom Poniatowska spoke over the course of several years and a good percentage of whose conversations she recorded and transcribed as well as shaped into the text that bears her name.<sup>15</sup> In order to present this tale as a testimonial, Poniatowska has had to veil her subject’s legitimate identity; she has been obliged not to tell the truth. This literary, nominal lie is precisely what permits the telling of the story and empowers the presentation of the character (and the apparent truth about her) in the novel.

The disjunction between referent and proper name, which the

<sup>14</sup> Even though she says she wanted to learn to read, Jesusa remained illiterate throughout her life; she notes as much in her own narrative (e.g., 52-53, 286) and in statements cited by Poniatowska in the author’s testimonies about their conversations (“Jesusa Palancares” 9).

<sup>15</sup> Although Franco reveals Jesusa’s real name to be “Josefa Bórquez” (*Plotting Women* 177), Elena Poniatowska has more recently provided the correct first name as “Josefina.” At Josefina’s request, Poniatowska agreed not to reveal her name while she was still alive, and therefore has only been at liberty to disclose it after Josefina’s death in 1988. (I am grateful to Cynthia Steele for first sharing the information about the name “Josefina” with me, and to Elena Poniatowska, who confirmed the correct information in a personal conversation.) In a number of ways, then, a lying of sorts becomes a condition of possibility for the novel’s very existence.

empirical Jesusa (or, rather, Josefina) underscores indirectly with her statement of dissatisfaction, also figures a rupture between reality and the discourse presumed to resemble it. Jesusa's own performance would lead us, along with her, now to consider or now to conceal precisely such a rupture between the real and the true. Thus, besides raising the question of authorship, as well as the whole issue of authority, for Jesusa's story, Jesusa's (or Josefina's) critical statement puts a wedge between the text (Josefina's story as arranged and authored by Poniatowska under the name "Jesusa") and the truth (Josefina's "real" life, told by her to Poniatowska, who has "Jesusa" merely repeat it [or not] for the reader).

Her view of the relation between the real, the true, and the act of telling seems to assume that an accurate, truthful presentation of things, an adequation of discourse (as either speech or writing) and the world, is possible, but that in this instance a disjunction has instead been produced by the text (or the author) she thought was aiming to solidify it. The tension within Jesusa's statements is a telling one. For it demonstrates how the *novela testimonial* (a genre whose truth-value many readers have come to accept as self-evident, given its apparently faithful resemblance to the real) may inadvertently suggest its own distance from the true as well as from the real, how such a text may inevitably recognize its own verisimilar, and therefore textual, properties.

Appropriately, Jesusa (the "authentic" narrator who establishes herself also as a credible character) is the one who introduces such problematical matters within the novel. Jesusa's statements within the text of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* draw distinctions between the telling of things (that is, the narrative as such) and the things themselves. Through such statements she also proposes to her interlocutor a view of the relation between reality and discourse that undercuts the apparent aims and essence of the text in which she makes those proposals.

In effect, for Jesusa reality finally amounts to subjective reality and the possibility of telling the truth (that is, the possibility of producing a discourse that corresponds to the real) becomes a subjective possibility. Access to the truth about things finally depends upon subjective experience; the truth can only be told or produced by a subject who is also the subject of the reality that such a discourse would be seen to resemble.<sup>16</sup> As we read her text, we see

<sup>16</sup> Jesusa's theory situates the subject within the question of the true both as a reader and as a producer of her own discourse. Hers is a solipsistic theory of truth,

that Jesusa-the-narrator would present herself as telling the truth. But as we consider her own “theories” about the truth and how it gets told, and also what Poniatowska tells us that Jesusa (or Josefina) has said about the novel, we may come to read Jesusa’s narrative not as unquestionably true but, rather, as convincingly verisimilar, as a persuasive lie.

Jesusa’s notions about telling the truth go something like this. If one witnesses an event, if one is present to reality, one knows and may well present (or not) the truth about it.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the truth is only evident to the one who tells it, to the subject who can verify that the true is true precisely because it adequately resembles the real. Throughout the text, Jesusa makes a good many comments about the inherently uncertain status of truth for stories told by others, and which cannot be verified by her own experience. These comments arise equally from her confrontations with everyday explanations of events or people’s actions as from her encounter with popular sayings or beliefs. Indeed, rumors, popular stories, political or cultural myths, as well as personal reports of particular events, all become objects for her skeptical, and often corrective, criticism.

For instance, about a rumored familial intrigue (i.e., that her brother was forced to marry his wife because his mother-in-law was Jesusa’s father’s lover), she says: “Quién sabe si sería cierto porque eso no lo vi . . .” (56); about the explanation of her brother’s death provided by presumed witnesses, she declares: “Todo eso me lo contaron a mí, ahora quién sabe cuál será la mera verdad” (62); and, about the popular belief that earthquakes are actually the movements of a large animal within the earth, she says: “Eso cuentan, pero no me haga caso, váyase a saber la verdad” (39; for other examples, see also 46, 73, 100, 124-25, 164).

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in which each subject would become its own self-validating teller of truth and in which the discourse of the true would also seem to validate itself. The listener or reader of such a discourse could therefore have only a skeptical relation to truth, a relation that would run from faint doubt to full-blown denial. This is precisely what seems to happen in the case of Jesusa herself, as noted here.

<sup>17</sup> A characteristic example of Jesusa’s view of the inherently untruthful aims of a good many speakers, and an instance of how she contradicts and corrects information given by others (of which more examples are presented below), is the following response to things she has heard said about Chihuahua: “Puras mentiras. La gente decía que en Chihuahua no había cristianos sino puros apaches. . . . Los de allá son como los de aquí, lo que pasa es que a la gente les gusta abusar, contar mentiras, platicar distancias y hacer confusiones, nomás de argüendera. Yo nunca vi un apache” (95).

Jesusa repeatedly questions, if not entirely discredits, the discourse, the narratives, of other subjects precisely because she, as listener to their tales, is not in a position to verify that what is told actually corresponds to the real and that it is, therefore, true. She (and, consequently, her narrative) is, from her perspective of course, exempt from that judgment. No such skepticism surfaces within her own tale of what she claims to have experienced or witnessed herself. In fact, as the text unfolds and Jesusa becomes more familiar, her narrative ever more plausible, it would appear that though others may lie she always tells the truth.<sup>18</sup>

There is a particularly telling instance in which Jesusa reveals distinctions of this sort. And, because of its suggestions about how a lie may disguise itself, about how the telling of the effect of such a disguise may figure the discursive or textual nature of the true, it is also a significant moment for the novel as a whole. Jesusa's account of her forays into the center of military activity during the Mexican revolution, disguised in men's clothing, draws a distinction between an accurate testimony and a suspect narrative in rather suggestive terms:

Casi no iban mujeres en campaña; a mí me llevaba Pedro [her husband] sin orden del general Espinosa y Córdoba; por eso me vestía de hombre para que se hicieran de la vista gorda. Me tapaba la cabeza con el paliacate y el sombrero. Por lo regular, unas iban como yo, porque sus maridos las obligaban, otra porque le hacían al hombre, pero la mayoría de las mujeres se quedaban atrás con la impedimenta. Doy razón de varias partes porque si me hubiera quedado en la estación, allí no veo nada ni oigo nada. La verdad, es bonito porque siquiera no es cuento. Uno vio. (109-10)

The effect of Jesusa's disguise is to produce in those who see her the acceptance of her appearance as real. Yet, her disguise, which is at once a simulation (she pretends to be what she is not, a man) and a dissimulation (she pretends not to be what she is, a woman), has the effect of making her disappear to those who would see her as she can—or ought to—be seen. Disguised, Jesusa may be taken for the real; however, she here reveals herself as at best but a verisimilar appearance. That she can successfully disguise herself de-

<sup>18</sup> This truth, she assures us, has been recorded accurately in her memory, to which her own testimony would also appear to remain transparently faithful. For example, Jesusa states: "yo tengo el defecto de que todo lo que oigo se me queda en el pensamiento, todo, y a mí se me grabó aquello [a scene to which she has just been witness]" (161).

pend, however, as much on the willful blindness of those who could see her for what she is as on her own ability to disguise the truth about her appearance.

We see that, in pretending not to see, or in turning a blind eye to, her, Jesusa's witnesses are themselves seen as in some way allowing her to disappear, along with her disguise. She would appear as a veritable man precisely by being allowed to disappear as a disguised woman. Jesusa thus makes an equivocal appearance on the field; this is a field we can of course read as both the military space into which she appears to place herself and the textual stage upon which she is presented. It is precisely this appearance of resembling the real that gives Jesusa, as participant-witness, an apparent access to reality, and that later makes it possible for her to claim that she is telling the truth. Her telling of that truth, however, becomes subject to the distinctions she herself proposes. It also remains open to the judgment of other witnesses (or readers) who might (or might not) be able to turn a blind eye either to her discourse or to her disguise.

Indeed, the implicit hierarchical relation between her own narrative and what she calls *cuento* rests on distinctions that the text of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* also renounces, and which we, like other of her readers, might (or might not) be willing, or able, to see. Though Jesusa's story advances mainly by recounting events that she herself appears to have seen and heard, it also incorporates presentations of dialogue and descriptions of action in which she has neither participated nor been present (e.g., Jesusa's recounting of the exchanges between her husband Pedro and Refugio, a young boy he once befriended [118-19], or her versions of her ancestors' history or immediate family's story as imagined by her or recounted to her by her father [220-24]). Clearly, some of her narrative does not qualify to be taken as true.

We can see, then, that the test of truth that Jesusa implicitly proposes for the tales she hears is a test that her own text also fails. If we apply to Jesusa the conditions of truth she applies to others, her story emerges as unverifiable, as another example of the *mentiras* she herself ridicules throughout the novel. Her implicit claim to the authority to tell her story (after all, she was participant and witness throughout) and to contradict the stories of other tellers, to whose tales she counterposes her own, is also a self-authorizing claim. It is precisely this simulation of authority which becomes one of the necessary fictions of the novel, wherein Jesusa's story

would finally produce a persuasive, verisimilar effect rather than a certifiable resemblance to the real.

We may be led to accept Jesusa's narrative as generally, if not completely, truthful, precisely because it seems so verisimilar. The effect of verisimilitude would here (and perhaps characteristically in the *novela testimonial*) have the effect of masking itself (as does Jesusa herself in the passage about her disguise, cited above) so as to lead us to take the text as a presentation of the truth.<sup>19</sup> But, as that effect becomes visible, it also becomes possible to see that Jesusa's narrative places us in the very position from which, her own comments remind us, the path to certainty, the route to truth, becomes ever so problematical. Indeed, it is the very place from which we, just like Jesusa, might be pushed to say, "váyase a saber la verdad."

This undecidable situation, one could well argue, is a situation that obtains in the *novela testimonial* generally. For the genre is predicated upon the kind of lie, the type of disguise, inherent in the play of names and performance of lying or truthful figures that shape Poniatowska's text. The testimonial novel as such inevitably shifts our focus between the subjects that seem to frame and the subjects seemingly framed by it. It also seems to make any such framing a shifting, unstable line of demarcation between the truth and the lie, between one kind of subject or discourse and another.

Jesusa's concern with the truth implies a dialogue (if not an outright polemic) about that issue. As she focuses on the topic she also calls attention to the effects produced by both her own discourse and the text we attribute to the novel's author. Jesusa's statements bring under scrutiny the subjects presumed to be responsible for such statements' intentional (or unintentional) design. The question of truth as raised by Jesusa thus implicates the different subjects and sites of authorship that seem to authorize the textual or discursive activity out of which *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* arises to present its testimony.

What is also particularly telling in the cited passage about Jesusa's battlefield appearance is that both her access to and subsequent recounting of events appear through a set of disguises, through devices of verisimilitude. These disguises allow her to present another face, a believable identity, which, in turn, allows her both to see and to be seen, to tell and to be told in the novel. And, as we are well aware, such a play of identity may be inherent

<sup>19</sup> On verisimilitude as a masking of itself, see Todorov 83-84).

in the apparent truthfulness that the *novela testimonial* seems to display, as well as in the authorial performance that supports it. Poniatowska's testimonial novel thus both disguises and displays its relation to the real and the true. It makes visible and yet conceals the effects of verisimilitude through which the truth, as it were, about Jesusa's story seems to be either veiled or revealed.

Jesusa's disguise as a man, as a figure of disguised difference, also figures the conditions of possibility for such a display in Poniatowska's novel. Her self-presentation as a disguised figure also implicates the conditions under which either the novel's author or its narrator-protagonist is able to present the story or produce the text we read. Thus, as she unwittingly figures the authorial duplicity that underlies her appearance as a teller of truths, Jesusa manages to disguise with verisimilar effects the very lie upon which the telling and writing of her story depend. Indeed, as we have already seen, though *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* would seem to be a demonstration of the possibilities for presenting the truth about Jesusa (or about Josefina), it also gives testimony to the limits of the discourse through which such truth would seem to appear.

Jesusa's insistence on the matter of truth assumes, from another perspective, that there exists an authoritative subject from or through which such truth can be emitted, or who might attest to the truthful status of individual or whole statements. We know that Jesusa is empowered to speak by the author of the text in which her story appears. However, like other testimonial novel narrators, she performs as a self-authorizing subject within her own narration. Though her performance also depends on other figures around her, Jesusa's voice may nonetheless be heard as independent and masterful. It resonates as apparently adequate to the tale and the "truth" she would tell.

Jesusa fashions herself as a figure of more or less authority within her narrative not only through the way she is presented as telling her life story but also through her depiction as a figure who has insistently challenged, even while also having had to accept and abide by, the authority of others. Jesusa becomes a figure of resistance as she presents her corrective readings of the public tales or private opinions she is compelled to counter, and as she represents herself as an actor in events through which she has come to play a variety of unconventional roles.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Chevigny has commented on Jesusa's relation to authority (55-56), Davis has taken up Poniatowska's interest in her as an exemplary "defiant woman" (226), Lemaître has considered her in the context of patriarchal society (131-32).

Jesusa's opinions and actions seem to situate her as ever at odds with, and all too often openly critical of, some of the major institutions and political or popular myths of Mexican culture (the family, the military, the church; the Mexican revolution and its heroes). Rather visible are her vehement attacks on some of the strategies and end results of the revolution, and on the legendary status achieved by some of its leaders. Jesusa's counterstatements to and criticisms of the stories that have come to stand for the truth about Mexico's well-known military and political figures present her as a subject engaged in a virtual polemic with popular discourse, and thus potentially with the text of history. They also reveal how she authors for herself a role as a purveyor of truths, and especially as an authority on the history and myths that, according to her testimony, have been fabricated out of lies.

If her general characterizations of the injustices and inefficacy of the revolution are aimed as much at its participants as at its overall results (e.g., 94, 126, 134, 137), her revelations of the truth, as it were, about its leaders take aim at the fabricators of untrue stories, and at their fabrications, which seem to have passed from the text of popular discourse to that of official history. She aims to correct as well as to criticize the legends and lies that, having been told and retold, have been propagated as fact. Though Jesusa's denunciation of the telling of untruths about well-known figures, or her criticism of the disguising of the facts about certain incidents, must finally be read as having a questionable relation to the real (i.e., as statements whose truth-value cannot be determined, though they have a convincing, because verisimilar, appearance in her narrative), they have a certain force within the novel's text. It may well be the forcefulness of Jesusa's convictions, the certainty her voice projects (but which some of her confessions nonetheless disprove), that provides the ground from which her appearance as an authoritative figure arises.

For example, her revelations about Villa, the revolutionary leader for whom she confesses a particular hatred ("Yo si a alguno odio más, es a Villa" [95]), are pronounced also as invectives against untruth. In fact, Jesusa's truths are as often as not but the contradictions to lies. In Jesusa's discourse the truth is proposed as the negation of a lie, and not only as an assertion of a truth. She presents her version of the truth so as to debunk and displace the *mentiras* through which the glorified, but false, image of Villa, for example, is perpetuated. And her counterstatements take aim not

only at falsified figures (e.g., Villa) but also at those who tell the legendary lies—that is, at the falsifiers of the “truths” that Jesusa is compelled to contradict.<sup>21</sup> Those who falsify do so not only by telling untruths but also by simply failing to tell all that could be told.

Moreover, Jesusa insists that the falsification of the truth can be found even in newspaper and radio reports—precisely in those forms of discourse that would appear to present and preserve the truth for modern culture.<sup>22</sup> (They are, we might also note, the very forms of discourse with which Poniatowska has worked so extensively, and thus Jesusa’s—or Josefina’s—expressed distrust of and disappointment with the author, already noted above, would seem a logical extension of the statements within the novel.) In a good many of her negative assertions regarding such falsification, however, Jesusa doesn’t actually offer a statement that can be taken as a complete and truthful account (i.e., as a discourse that could be taken as corresponding to the real). She merely makes declarations of her own doubts or beliefs (e.g., 96).

Nonetheless, Jesusa always seems to speak as an authority. But her voice has no real ground to stand on except the virtual ground

<sup>21</sup> Jesusa’s invective against Villa is triggered by an announcement of plans to honor his name: “Oí que lo iban a poner en letras de oro en un templo. ¡Pues los que lo van a poner serán tan bandidos como él o tan cerrados! Tampoco los creí cuando salió en el radio que tenía su mujer y sus hijas, puras mentiras pues qué. ¿Cuál familia? Eso no se los creo yo ni porque me arrastren de lengua. . . . Ése nunca tuvo mujer. Él se agarraba a la que más muchacha, se la llevaba, la traía y ya que se aburría de ella la aventaba y agarraba otra. Ahora es cuando le resulta dizque una ‘señora esposa,’ y dizque hijos y que hijas. ¡Mentira! Ésas son puras vanaglorias que quieren achacarle para hacerlo pasar por lo que nunca fue. ¡Fue un bandido sin alma que les ordenó a sus hombres que cada quien se agarrara a su mujer y se la arrastrara! Yo de los guerrilleros al que más aborrezco es a Villa. Ése no tuvo mamá. Ese Villa era un meco que se reía del mundo y todavía so oyen sus risotadas” (95-96).

<sup>22</sup> Her skepticism about what is told on the radio, as evidenced by what she says they have not chosen to tell, shows up in the following comments: “[Carranza] se apoderó de la mayor parte del oro que había dejado Porfirio Díaz en el Palacio. Hiza [sic] cajas y cajas de barras de oro y plata y se las llevó. Adelante de la Villa, en Santa Clara, los obregonistas le volaron el tren, le quitaron el dinero y lo persiguieron y él cayó en la ratonera, allá en su rancho por Tlazcalaquiensabe. . . . Nomás que eso tampoco lo dicen por el radio. Anuncian lo que les parece pero no aclaran las cosas como son. No dicen que el Barbas de Chivo [Carranza] siempre andaba de escape, siempre de huida. . . .” (137). Her distrust of newspapers arises from an instance in which a news report contradicts what she herself has seen at the scene of her friend Sara’s death: “. . . cuando hablan los periódicos, no les creo porque en aquella época dijeron que Sara Camacho había muerto en la Comisaría en las primeras curaciones y son mentiras, porque la sacamos muerta de debajo del tren” (260).

she, as self-appointed arbiter of truth, constructs for herself from her own acknowledged position of marginality. Jesusa is a figure of counter-authority, and, like that of a good many other testimonial subjects, her voice comes from below, as it were, to overturn some of the stories about which, her narration would propose, it is precisely the marginal subject who knows, and can thus tell, who is lying and who is telling the truth. And though, as we have seen, her discourse would have to be characterized as capable of producing an effect of verisimilitude rather than of truth, Jesusa's narrative succeeds nonetheless in concealing the shaky supports of its narrator's (and perhaps also its author's) authoritative, testimonial performance.

This voice from below would not only give another version of things. It would also upend the relations of authority within which its subject seems to be situated. Jesusa's verbal or physical challenges, her ideological or inspirational positions, may well seem unconventional, as well as idiosyncratic, perhaps because her marginal status as a woman on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic order would seem to provide her with no place of authority from which to speak. But Jesusa's authoritative appearance derives not only from her pronouncements about lying or telling the truth within her narration. It also emerges from the narrative in which, as a character, she assumes positions or plays roles of authority, or resists yielding to the power of others. In fact, Jesusa often challenges paternal or spousal privilege (e.g., 52-53, 83-84, 99, 109); she makes many self-authorizing declarations of independence (e.g., 152-53, 267); she assumes various roles of domestic or military responsibility and power (e.g., 48-49, 129-30, 174-75, 213, 288): such are the gestures, the attitudes and actions, through which Jesusa becomes the most visible, if not the most viable, figure of testimonial authority in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*.

Jesusa's story, which surfaces from the margins of social, political, and cultural history, is also a story about being marginal. Such is the situation characteristic of many of the figures who would speak in the *novela testimonial* generally.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the authority of the subject in such a text derives precisely (though paradoxically) from the denial of his or her authority elsewhere. This figure of marginality, then, becomes a figure of textual as well as testimonial authority, much like the authorial figure that also authorizes Je-

<sup>23</sup> For related comments on marginality and the *testimonio*, see Beverley.

susa's performance in the novel. But Jesusa, the textualization of the person called "Josefina," is a figure that remains subject to the authorizing gestures of another figure (i.e., the author), whose position she supplants as she gives her testimony. And, though the figure of the novel's author may well recede behind the text of Jesusa's narrative, Poniatowska yet emerges as an authoritative (and properly authorial) figure around it.<sup>24</sup>

We could well speak about *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* as the work of not one but of two authors—as a "compositely authored work" (Franco, *Plotting Women* 178),<sup>25</sup> inasmuch as the *novela testimonial* puts into question the activity of its named author (in this case Poniatowska) as an activity of original authorship (that is, the author does not herself originate or found the story told in her novel, and therefore, in some way, is not an author or *auctor*).<sup>26</sup> But, since the reading of Poniatowska's testimonial novel is, perforce, tied up with the reading of other of the author's texts around it (that is, authorial documents or testimonies), her position as authoritative figure (as much as her appearance as author of the text) is reasserted by the different testimonies that are incorporated into, and/or are attached to, her novel.

Oddly, authors of testimonial novels seem to be called upon, either by private necessity or public demand, to give further testimony about the materials that have shaped the texts that bear their names, texts that presumably tell a self-evident truth.<sup>27</sup> By more or less revealing the process by which the documentary materials have been copied, compiled, edited, and arranged, Poniatowska's

<sup>24</sup> We might also note that the original source of the novel's discourse—the figure we would refer to as "Josefina"—is but another displaced figure, dislodged as she is to a marginal, if not altogether invisible, position by Jesusa (the textual figure) and Poniatowska (the author), both of whom cover her up while also creating a space for her story.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Franco's reading, which bypasses explicitly the problematic hierarchy of authority from which the figures of Poniatowska, Jesusa, and also Josefina, may confront one another either within the text of the novel or among the fabric of testimonies of which the novel as such is but one document.

<sup>26</sup> On the concepts inherent in the term *auctor*, see, for example, Chenu, Minnis and Arendt (91-141).

<sup>27</sup> Such documentary statements may surface in materials appended to the body of the testimonial text in the form of a prologue or introduction (see, for instance, Miguel Barnet *Biografía de un cimarrón* [1967]) or Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú . . .* [1985] or Alicia Partnoy, *The Little School* [1986]), or in essays, interviews, formal statements (this is the case for *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*) or theoretical proposals (see Barnet's "La novela testimonio") published separately.

statements do a number of things. They redirect attention to the author as a person engaged in an activity that is both more and less than that of a “traditional” author. They establish Poniatowska as a secondary and editorial figure, as an author who would speak through the voice of another. Yet, given that she also confesses to being responsible for the novel’s overall composition and even for the invention of some of its discursive features, her testimony also seems to establish her role as originator, in addition to confirming her status as textual authority. Moreover, Poniatowska’s statements remind us of the testimonial novel’s (and also its author’s) responsibility to try to tell the truth. For the author’s apparently extra-literary testimony, as much as (or perhaps more than) the novel itself, aims to authenticate what is told, principally by telling more about where its stories and subjects come from.

That the author speaks at all about the origins of his or her work might in itself be taken as evidence that such explanations are necessary: it might be taken as proof that someone else needs to speak or that something else needs to be said about what otherwise appears to stand truthfully on its own. Indeed, Poniatowska’s statements about the novel appear as a necessary supplement to the testimony offered by its main text, which also spills beyond its original borders as some of its passages are repeated in her auxiliary comments. Yet, the status of this authorial testimony may be as equivocal as that of the text whose truth it would appear to reassert; the position of this author may be as problematical as that of the narrator whose tale she supports.

The one and the other kind of testimony—the one projected in the voice of the author, the other pronounced by the voice of her interlocutor—would suggest that the truth-value of each is to be taken as readily perceivable. Yet each would also reveal that the truth of the one may be visible only from the telling of the other. This reciprocal authorization of testimonies takes Poniatowska, as much as the apparently self-sufficient Jesusa, from a seemingly invisible and secondary position to a position of discursive privilege and textual authority. In fact, the two figures may be seen in competition with one another, a competition from around which the figure of the author also emerges with renewed, rather than reduced, vigor.

Poniatowska speaks about the origins of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* as a virtual response to the queries that might be posed by her readers and as a direct reply to the questions that have been put by

her interviewers.<sup>28</sup> Her testimony about the process by which she came to write the novel supplies the facts regarding her encounters with Jesusa (or Josefina) and the general techniques she deployed to compose the work.<sup>29</sup> Her testimony can be read not only as a virtual response to the text of the novel itself, but also as a way of replying and paying homage to the subject in whom her opportunity for authorship originates, and through whose discourse she herself also speaks. In fact, her testimony is cast in confessional terms. She emphasizes her personal debt to the woman to whose life her novel is meant to bear witness and with whom she claims to have identified herself; she describes the personal experiences as well as authorial decisions that informed the production of its testimonial tale.<sup>30</sup>

Poniatowska's discourse purports to tell us the truth about the truth apparently told to her by her informant. Yet that it persuades us of its adequacy to such a truth is due as much, if not more, to its adherence to the conventions of authorial explanation or testimony as to its presumed resemblance to the real. Like the story told by Jesusa, the confessions of Poniatowska would present themselves under the guise of the true precisely because they are constituted by a discourse whose verisimilar appearance is sufficiently effective to persuade us of its own authority and veracity.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> The most detailed of Poniatowska's statements about *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* can be found in "Jesusa Palancares" and "Testimonios." Related, if not identical, material also appears in her conversations with Durán and Durán and with Méndez-Faith.

<sup>29</sup> Her account of how Jesusa came to her attention and sparked her interest is also a telling one: "La conocí en la cárcel. . . . la Jesusa iba continuamente a la cárcel, pero no para visitar, sino porque caía presa, y yo la escuché hablar y la escuché también hablar en un lavadero en un edificio del centro y dije: '¿Pero qué mujer es ésta?' Porque le hablaba a la otra lavandera con un gran vigor y le decía: '¡Qué tonta eres! . . .' y yo dije: '¿Quién es esta mujer? Yo quiero conocerla, verla, oírla'. Entonces le pregunté a la portera dónde vivía y así la fui a ver" ("Testimonios" 157). On the author's research and composition techniques, see also notes 8 and 9.

<sup>30</sup> Poniatowska's description of her relationship with "Jesusa" (she uses that name for Josefina in her own testimonies) is also a confession of her self-discovery (e.g., the discovery and solidification of her Mexican identity) through the development of their special friendship and her identification with this extraordinary woman ("Jesusa Palancares" 9-11 and "Testimonios" 158; interview with Méndez-Faith 57). On some of the textual consequences of this complex relation between author and protagonist-informant, see Kushigian (667-69 and 675); see also Chevigny (54) and Fernández Olmos (72).

<sup>31</sup> If we read the author's testimony as belonging to a class of writing that could be defined generically, we might consider it in terms of Todorov's, rather than Kristeva's, discussion of verisimilitude, and specifically in terms of his description of generic verisimilitude (80-88). In doing so, however, it would be difficult if not

That Poniatowska's statements may tell us less (or even more) than the whole story is perhaps, like the testimony of Jesusa, of less consequence for her authorial performance than that she makes any statement at all. Indeed, it may well be that the conventions of producing testimonial literature virtually dictate that the author must assume additional responsibilities and authority for texts that purport to be based on, if not to tell exactly, the truth. In such cases, it is the responsibility of the author to supply additional testimony, to provide supplementary and original statements that would further certify the status of a text whose nature is also presumed to be self-evident. The responsibilities of the author of a testimonial novel may thus appear at once to be both limited and excessive. They are the responsibilities of a figure who seems to have relinquished his or her role as authentic originator but also to have retained (or reassumed) considerable authority and responsibility characteristic of a more conventional author.

Given the kinds of responsibility subsumed by the activities of the author of a testimonial novel, such a text seems to bestow upon that figure responsibilities that might be associated with very different, though related, figures. As a matter of fact, the function of the author of testimonial fiction may be viewed principally as that of a researcher, organizer, or arranger of personal testimony and/or historical documents—that is, as a *gestor*.<sup>32</sup> Such an identifica-

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impossible to map the one theory entirely onto the other, since Todorov virtually dispenses with the category of the real, explaining such verisimilitude entirely as a relation of discourses.

<sup>32</sup> *Gestor* literally means “manager,” “promoter,” “administrator,” “representative,” or “business agent.” Barnet proposes this term as a substitute for *autor* in “La novela testimonio,” his seminal discussion of the *novela-testimonio* and manifesto of sorts about the aims, techniques, and meaning of the modern genre, of which his own *Biografía de un cimarrón* figures as a founding text. Barnet’s terminological proposal, however, appears as a slippage in terminology. Though he uses the word when he defines the characteristics of the genre, he does not focus on the term itself, either to define it or contrast it with *autor* or to take up its theoretical or ideological implications. Barnet merely introduces the word by virtue of using it in place of the term it displaces. (The substitution begins in the section entitled “El fenómeno histórico” and runs throughout the rest of the essay.)

Oddly, the essay’s abridged version in English fails to recognize—indeed, erases—this crucial terminological shift within Barnet’s discourse. Wherever *gestor* appears in the original, the term *documentary novelist* is used in the English text; and in one place the term *author* (28) is reintroduced where not even the term *gestor* appears in Barnet’s text (297). The slippage from one to the other term (and perhaps even the translators’ reinsertion of the original word into Barnet’s text) may well figure the difficult relation between the concepts to which each might give a name. They may well be considered concepts that inevitably move towards as much as away from one another in both the theory and practice of the *novela testimonial*.

tion would appear to position the author as a secondary and mediatory figure, as a figure of considerably reduced authority.<sup>33</sup> It would virtually situate that figure in the position of a modern *scriptor*, *compilator*, or *editor*. Yet, the additional, and apparently authoritative, documents or statements (that is, the testimony) offered around the *novela testimonial*, as well as the special kind of responsibility attributable to the figure of the *gestor*, would also establish such a figure in a significant, and essentially privileged, position—a position we might be tempted to identify with that of a modern *auctor*.

Indeed, the role of the testimonial author would fulfill the responsibilities of both the one and the other figure. The *gestor*, it could be argued, asserts as much as repeats the assertions of others, and thus, according to one view, could be seen to do precisely what an *auctor* is responsible for doing (see Minnis 100-1). The *gestor* would him or herself appear not as the personal origin of the story to which the testimonial novel testifies but, rather, as the professional compiler of the text of another, who is presented as the original subject of the text's assertions. However, it is also in the nature of the *gestor's* role to assert as well as repeat or report the apparent truth told by another. Though assertions made by the author-as-*gestor* around such a text may appear as secondary statements, they also have a crucial role to play: they function as essential, critical complements without which we might not be willing to read the text as telling the truth.

The figure of the *gestor* confounds as much as clarifies the relations of textual authority, and perhaps even the rights of authorship, that would appear to obtain in the *novela testimonial*. The *gestor*, a kind of *auctor* in disguise, is a figure through which the author gestures toward the authority of another subject while also consolidating his or her own authorial position. The confession of a secondary discursive function becomes a gesture that finally underwrites, as much as it might first seem to undermine, the activity and identity of the author. Though such gestures may well proclaim the depersonalization of authorial activity, they also shift authority from one image or role of the author to another, and back again.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Bruce-Novoa's reading of Poniatowska follows such a characterization (509); on general related points cf. Beverley (17-18).

<sup>34</sup> Such a depersonalization (Barnet's term) entails, in a way, a repersonalization—a personalization of the *gestor* as another person, as his interlocutor-informant,

If viewed as the *gestor* of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, then, Poniatowska, much like the subject with whom she might be seen to compete for testimonial, and consequently textual, authority (i.e., Jesusa or Josefina), would recover her position as an authoritative author by, as it were, coming from behind the apparently more original figure whose position her authorial gestures also support. Though Poniatowska's role in and around *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*—that is, the role of a *gestor*—may figure a critical break between originality and authority, it also reveals how, in the *novela testimonial*, the one finally appears to inhere in and acquire new meaning through the other.

The gestures of the *gestor* recuperate the author's privileged place, if not also his or her marks of personality, which otherwise might be regarded as having disappeared. Poniatowska's performance reminds us that her identity as a *gestor* is an equivocal identity, that the gestures of such a figure move things in a number of directions at once. Poniatowska's testimonials (her novel, her personal testimony) recover as much as reject the gestures of authorship associated with other, perhaps more traditional, figures of the author. The figure of the *gestor*, then, may well revitalize, in a somewhat altered form, an authoritative figure presumed to have disappeared with the "death" of the author.

The gestures of authorship inherent in Poniatowska's roles take the figure of the author to a place in which it seems to have appeared before and yet in which we seem to see it for the first time. The testimonial novel thus gives testimony to the authority assumed by contemporary figures of the author as much as it seems to testify to that figure's demise. *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* would therefore seem ready to tell us a good deal more about itself, about some of the issues raised by the genre with which it is associated, and about the critical figures through which we read a variety of texts—even when it would appear that, as a *novela testimonial*, it has already told us everything there is to tell.

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whose personal experience he also appropriates: "Se produce también una despersonalización; uno es el otro ya y sólo así podrá pensar como él, hablar como él, sentir entrañablemente los golpes de vida que le son transmitidos por el informante, sentirlos como suyos" (Barnet 297).

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