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The Survival of the Feminine Figure Through the Reconciliation of Nature and Logos

Daniela Nunez

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THE SURVIVAL OF THE FEMININE FIGURE THROUGH THE RECONCILIATION OF
LOGOS AND NATURE: RÓMULO GALLEGOS' *DOÑA BÁRBARA* AND ZORA NEALE
HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

A Thesis

by

DANIELA NÚÑEZ OCHOA

Submitted to Texas A&M International University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2017

Major Subject: English

The Survival of the Feminine Figure Through the Reconciliation of Nature and Logos:
Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

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Approved as to style and content by:

Chair of Committee,	Manuel Broncano
Committee Members,	Deborah Scaggs
	Jonathan Murphy
	Irma Cantú
Head of Department,	Stephen M. Duffy

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ABSTRACT

The Survival of the Feminine Figure Through the Reconciliation of Nature and Logos (August 2017)

Daniela Núñez Ochoa, B.A. English; B.A. Spanish, Texas A&M International University;

Chair of Committee: Dr. Manuel Broncano

This work focuses on analyzing and questioning the role two feminine protagonists play in a phallogocentric social system depicted within two novels. The research will explore the narrative and outcome experienced by Doña Bárbara and Janie Crawford, from Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in a post-colonial twentieth-century American continent. Hélène Cixous' concept of *feminine writing*, which roots from her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" and her book *The Newly Born Woman* will be the philosophical lens and medium of analysis for both *Doña Bárbara* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Both women are raised in a phallogocentric society in which the feminine voice and experience is neglected. For both women to fully develop a voice of their own, they must experience a journey of hardships and repression without ever having access to education. They demonstrate strength as they face adversities, injustice and mistreatment. Yet, they eventually free themselves from the same oppressive systems that once enslaved them. Through a detailed description of two different sociocultural circumstances, both *Doña Bárbara* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* present a public realm foregrounded on patriarchal-hierarchical values in which men have the positions of power and speech which gives them the privilege of

assigning meaning to their world, culture and society. This phallogocentric social structure is based on the repression, and silence, of the feminine figure's voice and the experience of those labelled as part of the feminine. Here, voice is much more than speech, but the experience of Janie and Doña Bárbara as they live in society through the label of "Woman."

The first chapter explores a dialectic between Plato, Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous that clarifies the genealogy and meaning of both the neologism phallogocentrism and the method of *feminine writing*. Chapter two discusses the feminization of barbarism through the character of Doña Bárbara; thus, the oppression of a feminine figure who for the phallogocentric man is the definition of non-logos or barbarism. Chapter three covers Janie Crawford's life-story as an insurgent of a phallogocentric social system, and specifically analyses the way Jody Starks' oppressive voice and presence is the basis of the androcentric establishment of the public realm in the town of Eatonville.

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PROLOGUE

The investigation of this work grounds on the idea of feminine culture, precisely as part of Western tradition. The method is mainly to reflect on the feminine figure's position in two literary artifacts through Hélène Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine* or *feminine writing*. The outcome is to better understand the power-dynamic between man and woman in two stories, two different myths that follow a feminine experience, entangled through a written language that describes a phallogocentric social system. The two-literary works will be Venezuelan Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* (1929) and the American Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) which take place in a post-colonial, already Westernized, American continent during the twentieth century. In this way, both women become two important narratives that inspire and influence women in an oppressive American continent. Both environments of *el llano* and the town of Eatonville are part of the Great Caribbean which is a concept that is often exoticized and eroticized—just as the bodies of Caribbean women.

Feminine culture is quite a controversial issue since many tend to mistake the current with the essentialist idea that claims that women and the idea of a “feminine outlook” are identical to biological sex. Quite differently, this work will focus on feminine culture which traces the artistic, historic and intellectual development of women's involvement in society through their socially constructed feminine roles in two texts that, eventually, evolve and become highly influential myths for women. As anything labelled as culture, feminine culture is made and molded by both women and men. Feminine culture emerges from the engaging idea of the overplayed Western stereotypes of women: such as those of the devoted mother, the witch, the passionate-unconditional lover or even the innocent girl or ingénue. In essence, Hélène Cixous' argument wonders around this idea of feminine culture and in fact is a method that can

revolutionized femininity as a form of expression for women. That is, femininity through self-awareness and as a form of subjective expression. Despite the artificial status of gender constructions, *writing the body* is an individual's quest for her individuality. *Feminine writing* is a similar feminine version of the Nietzschean "becoming"—a becoming for woman to live without sexual oppositions nor indoctrinated, androcentric hierarchical structures. As a thinker, philosopher and poet, Cixous is interested in topics such as universality, the mistranslation and misinterpretation of language, and *feminine writing*. In Hélène Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa," and her book *The Newly Born Woman*, she explores the role of woman as one who inhabits culture by solely representing the symbols that make her a muse of "anticulture" and anti-logos (*NBW*, 67).

As a feminist thinker, Cixous appreciation of women's history extends a loving poetical rhetoric that combines the presence of the body to oral-tradition and writing. As an almost rhapsody of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and poetry, *feminine writing* creates new mythologies of strong, independent, and self-nourishing feminine figures. There are strong similarities, beyond the superficial, between the feminine protagonists of both *Doña Bárbara* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. That is, both novels present a heroine that inhabits and struggles with a society that averts at the sound of their feminine voice. Janie Crawford and Doña Bárbara portray the identity of an alluring beauty, outside the norm, of a mixed-race woman in an underdeveloped society in the great and untouched Caribbean environment. Both experience life through the climax of a woman's journey at an age considered "late" (forty years old). They portray the cultivation of a feminine voice that challenges the feminine stereotypes, but neither of them renounces to their past nor the legacy of Women's history. Both feminine figures

struggle with their body, sexuality and their age due to the taboos over-imposed on them by society, history, and the phallogocentric belief system.

CHAPTER I

SELF-AGENCY IN HÉLÈNE CIXOUS' *FEMININE WRITING*

In “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976) and *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), Hélène Cixous’ argument is that the repression of the feminine voice in Western culture is symptomatic of logocentrism. In this theory, the prioritization of the logos, or the spoken word, over the *graphie*, or the written mark, sustains a host of hierarchical dichotomies that structure the language of Western metaphysics. Hélène Cixous expands upon the deconstruction of logocentrism inaugurated by Jacques Derrida in his essay “Plato’s Pharmakon” (1972). For Cixous, the most important tool of analysis and her strongest preoccupation is to question the feminine figure’s position in phallogocentric texts that root from an outlook in which the father, the masculine figure, is the privileged voice.

Phallogocentric texts may be (but are not limited to) pieces of literary, philosophical, religious or even scientific nature in which the task of assigning, and creating, meaning is solely reserved for men and their speech. In these phallogocentric written pieces, the logos (speech, reason, logic) originate from the father—therefore, the ultimate speaker and active player of culture is masculinized. So, those outside the phallogocentric system such as writing, the mother figure, the feminine experience, and the body become part of Cixou’ approach to feminism and writing with her method of *writing the body*. With Hélène Cixous’ approach to *feminine writing*, writing allows the author to ignore the privilege that is given to logos along with the power originally assigned to the carrier of the phallus as the only creator of meaning which establishes an androcentric-hierarchical tendency in logocentrism.

This thesis follows the style of the *Arizona Quarterly*.

Cixous' main criticism of the history of thought, literature, criticism, and philosophy is that they "work in a dual, hierarchal opposition" in which every symbol, metaphor, and myth are valued or devalued based on the privilege of one term against the other (*NBW* 63-4). Generally, in every metaphor, myth, and story, the feminine figure (or Woman) is associated with the subjugated terms of the dichotomies. For Cixous, feminine is not the same as the anatomical female sex, but it is the modes of behavior that are found in women through their upbringing and the way they are influenced by the feminine culture in varying degrees according to each individual's experience and their harmony with the world. Here, *feminine writing* is the feminine figure's voice through writing, outside of the logos. The voice of the feminine figure is one in which a woman will be able to create a positive sense of self and an active rhythm in taking part in the public realm and speaking to others.

The Metaphor of the Father in Plato's *Phaedrus*

There is an in-depth dialectic between Plato, Jacques Derrida and H el ene Cixous that explains the origins, and the meaning, of phallogocentrism. Phallogocentrism originates from the way the voice of the masculine figure, the attitudes, characteristics and symbols related to masculine roles, are assigned as the supreme cultural outlooks which further establishes a hierarchical, symbolic order of male dominance. Unlike phallogocentrism, phallogocentrism specifically reflects on the priority that is given to the speech of the masculine figure because, according to Derrida's critique of Plato's metaphor of the speaker, the father is the only carrier of the logos. Simply, the connection between the three thinkers is traced through the way they use the metaphors of the mother and the father to exemplify the way meaning is created by a masculinized or feminized author. Both gendered metaphors reflect on the importance, or disadvantage, of both spoken and written language through a mirroring relationship. In Plato's

Phaedrus and Jacques Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy," the metaphors of the father explore the way the father is established as the original speaker which form a dichotomous order of myths and metaphors that repress writing, women and anything outside the concept of logos.

So then, Cixous' *feminine writing* is found on the counterpart of both the father figure and the logos. She uses the metaphor of the mother as figure of inspiration and "insurgency" for women's position in phallogocentrism/logocentrism (The Laugh 880). Maternity is then a catharsis for women through writing. She uses a different concept of maternity in which women nourish one another—generation after generation—to obtain an individual strength that surpasses the many taboos women face. Here, motherhood is not the biological bearing of a child in a woman's womb, but her ability to give strength to others through both her writing and her spoken language.

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, the paternal position is established as the prototype of the speaker, even as the writer and the holder of the truth. In the final portion of the *Phaedrus*, Plato briefly presents important claims regarding the nature of writing in relation to speech. Through Socrates, Plato denounces writing as a failed technology that invites miscommunication and that is a tool open to the misuse of the agenda-driven reader. Writing is devalued in relation to speech for its silence and its inability to defend itself in oratory dialogue.

Plato's *Phaedrus* (418-416 BCE) is set as a dialogue that takes place between Socrates and Phaedrus as they lie beneath a plane-tree outside the walls of Athens. As in most of Plato's dialogues, Socrates is the leading interlocutor, deliberating theories of love, eroticism, and rhetoric. The Platonic Socrates in the *Phaedrus* is "no longer a real man, [but] a symbol, a character in Plato's soul-drama, a hieroglyphic" that has become the basis of the Western philosophical tradition (Chapman 71). This is important because Plato's genius not only relies

upon his philosophical talent and his analyses on the truth and the just, but also on his skillful use of the written language. Plato constructed a whole new literary-world of dialogues, allegories, and metaphors that lead to a deeper understanding of society, justice and the truth. He creates a literary character out of the historical Socrates. The Platonic Socrates blurs the line between non-fiction and fiction, between the historical and the mythical. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato uses metaphors to illustrate complex rationalization regarding writing such as the metaphor of the author as a farmer or writing as sowing words (64).

Metaphors show the multifaceted nature of a subject without failing the writer's ideas with over-simplifications or superficial descriptions. Essentially, Plato uses the metaphor to reflect on "the subject of propriety and impropriety in writing" (61). As many authors, Plato often relies on the use of metaphors to describe a deeper idea that incorporates both opposite and agreeing symbols in order to reflect upon a subject's manifold nature. Metaphors describe situations, subjects, or even objects which have many characteristics that should not be judged superficially. Often, the ideas that are explored with the use of the metaphor cannot be fully expressed nor transmitted with the use of simple and practical language. Artistically, the use of the metaphor presents a vivid likeness to life which replaces the use of a literal language that provides a raw description of the nature of the subject being discussed. As Thomas S. Frenz puts it, Plato "like most rhetoricians and all poets, sees meaning in language as a function of both differences and similarities. The dominant figures out comparison—metaphor, analogy, simile, allegory, on up to myth—are all 'meaningful' because they capture similarities among differences." (257). Plato uses literary devices that show the complex reality of subjects that are composed of both alike and deferring symbols. Metaphors allow the cohabitation of opposite, identical, similar, and different characteristics that go deeper into a subject's essence. The author

uses metaphors to trace the in-between of opposing symbols. Nonetheless, an author can also condemn an aspect of the metaphor as an inferior and subordinated side of his ideas.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates uses the metaphor of the writer as the father to describe a relationship between the writer and his creation. The writer (or author) conceives the written work by carefully conjoining words and symbols to create novel or important concepts that he hopes to transmit to others. However, as soon as the author writes down his ideas, he detaches himself from the written piece (Plato 63). He has no personal role in the interaction between the written artifact and the reader. Metaphorically, the father's absence is inevitable in the life of his son; so, the written piece is represented as the son who works as an independent entity from the author and the metaphorical father-figure. Writing is influenced and created by the ideas of the author, but as soon as the piece is separated from him the meaning of the written piece changes. Logically, writing is not a child nor a living organism, but it is the inscribed imitation of the author's ideas through "letters" (Plato 62). Writing enters society as an independent form of communication, and its meaning changes depending upon the way the reader understands it. Writing's independence from the author (or thinker) is the main source of the inherent dangers that Socrates perceives in it. In an ideal father-son relation, the father is always there to nourish and protect his child from the threats of the outside world. However, within Plato's metaphor, writing is an abandoned son.

To further explain the father-son bond that exists between the author and his written creation, Plato presents a story-within-a-story, a myth, in the *Phaedrus* told by Socrates. In the discussion of the "subject of letters," Socrates tells the myth of Theuth, an Egyptian God, who is the "father of letters" and gives writing as an offering to King Thamus and the Egyptian people (62). Writing is created by Theuth for people to reflect on their ideas, memories, thoughts, to

assist them in making record, and other things such as meditation and reflection that are related to the cultivation of the intellect. Nonetheless, King Thamus instantly renounces writing and tells Theuth that he sees writing through a positive-light because he has “been led by [his] affection” for his creation (Plato 62). In this myth, Theuth, the father figure of writing in the myth, praises writing as an “elixir” or medicine for people’s memory and wisdom (Plato 62). Yet, the king says that, like any father, Theuth’s judgment of his son—of writing—is highly idealized due to his paternal affection. Exerting his supreme authority, the king dismisses writing as a “poison,” a form of forgetfulness, and only a resemblance of the truth, reality, and knowledge (Plato 62). King Thamus affirms that writing makes it unnecessary for people to use their memory making them highly dependent on it. Writing is constantly misdeemed by Socrates as a medium of communication that, due to its independence from the author, is a failed linguistic tool that endangers both the authority of the father-figure and his speech.

In this same metaphor of the author as the father and writing as the son, Socrates verbally illustrates writing as a defenseless son. Within the logic of the metaphor, the fragile child (writing) desperately needs a father who protects him from the abuses of the outside world: “when [writing] is ill treated and unjustly abused, it always needs its father to help it; for it is incapable of either defending or helping itself” (Plato 63). These “ill treatments” include the potential for the deterioration of the author’s ideas because he is not present to defend his written piece from a wrongful interpretation or commodification to serve someone else’s agenda. Writing introduces opportunities for the complete extinction of the author’s ideas along with the possibility of someone using the words on paper to justify acts of injustice. The writer is not present in his written work to defend his ideas not to clarify what he meant when writing the

piece. The author is unable to defend the written artifact from the reader's misinterpretation or tyrannical outlook.

The writer creates his artifact with certain meanings, ideas and even purposes in mind. However, oral communications in the same way as written texts are ever-evolving as the meaning of words change with the people, context and the environment. With written texts, there is always the danger of an anachronous reader and society who can misinterpret the text and the ideas conveyed in it. Per Socrates, readers (unlike listeners of the spoken word) have no access to the "authentic" ideas formed in texts by the writer in his or her present time. Not to mention the fact that the meaning of language is also contingent upon the linguistic and cultural perception of the reader.

The author's written objective is to transmit his concepts and ideas to others clearly and thoroughly, but this is almost impossible because "once it is written, every composition trundles about everywhere in the same way, in the presence both of those who know about the subject and of those who have nothing at all to do with it" (Plato 63). The written piece is at the mercy of both the knowledgeable or "those who know about the subject," and the ignorant and opinionated (Plato 63). "Those who know about the subject" can take advantage of their knowledge and persuasive skills and use the text as a proof and justification for their own ill criterion and sophist-arguments (Plato 63). While the ignorant can simply misinterpret, and even without knowing, use the text as a tool that helps them appear knowledgeable. The words of the written piece do not change nor adapt to the challenges that the reader may present. The "son," the written composition, superficially inhabits different places, times, ideologies, and even agendas which makes the misinterpretation of the composition much more likely to happen (Plato 62). Those who are ignorant on the subject that the written piece reflects upon are likely to

interpret it in a different way than what the author intended. A reader is likely to misinterpret or take out of context the ideas written down because the author is not there to speak for his written ideas. The author or writer is not present to interact and correct the reader's interpretation of the text.

Writing, as the defenseless son, is not only vulnerable in the face of a single reader, but also at the expense of the many, whether those people are "awake" or "asleep" to the truth (Plato 66). This is another danger of writing which is that persons and (more dangerously) the mob will have access to the words of a text without ever relying on the use of their memory, critical skills, or knowledge. And, like in the snowball effect, a small quantity of "asleep" and opinionated people will eventually become a larger treacherous-mass of people rolling downwards and becoming the powerful ignorant-majority. The written piece will always be unclear and uncertain for Socrates, "whether anyone says so or not; for to be ignorant, whether awake or asleep, about the nature of just or unjust and bad and good cannot truly escape being a matter of reproach, even if the whole mob applauds it" (Plato 66). The fact that the "whole mob applauds" a piece of writing does not mean that it is part of the truth and the just. At the end, the author leaves behind a piece that is unclear and sophistic in nature. These texts, at the mercy of the powerful (whether that power is social, economic, political, etc.), can be used as tools of manipulation, power, domination, and even rebellion. The reader has a tremendous power over the written piece, especially if he is a good persuader, because he can twist and play with the meaning of words to his own benefit and agenda. The ill-reader can create a whole new text in which he justifies his wrongdoings with the written language. This agenda-driven-reader can re-write the text as he pleases because (often) the reader's linguistic, cultural, and contextual environment differs from that of the author's.

Per Socrates, writing is not open to dialogue and real intellectual interaction. The written piece and its letters appear to say something to the reader, “but if you ever ask them about any of the things they say out of a desire to learn, they point to just one thing, the same each time” (Plato 63). Written words do not change nor adapt to answer the reader’s questions and oppositions. The texts are, and will always be, formed by the same letters, words, sentences, sequences and paragraphs. There is an inevitable silence between the reader and the piece, and according to Socrates, this silence not only implies the absence of meaning through phonetic sounds, but it implies the lack of the teachings that come with the interactive dialectical method. A method in which true learning and knowledge of the self is acquired in the everyday life conversation and questioning. Today, scholars call this “the Socratic method” because it is a method of intellectual conversation and interaction in which different interlocutors take part in a dialogue that includes questions, answers, and a debate between different perspectives that are in accordance with their present-context.

Metaphorically, the written piece is the inscription of the writer’s thoughts, a silenced impression that imitates his mind and intellect. Socrates says that “with written words: you think that they spoke as if they had some thought in their heads” when they do not (Plato 63). The reader is misled into thinking that writing speaks, that it is the articulation of meaning and thoughts through spoken words, but writing is always silent. Socrates challenges the value of written words as language that is not articulated through sound which, for him, implies no intellectual interaction nor learning. For him, writing is not the act of the speaker, but a *graphie*, a symbol, representing words that are originally meant to be spoken. *Graphe* is the Ancient Greek word for “symbol” or “drawing,” an imitation of speech and the articulation of language. Writing is a “kind of phantom” of speech, and as such, it is the imitation of the speaker’s knowledge

(Plato 64). While the spoken word is an imitation of the speaker's thoughts, writing is an imitation of the spoken word. The written artifact creates the illusion of visually transmitting words that are originally meant to be spoken which merely gives the appearance of knowledge (Plato 64). Inevitably, Socrates claims that writing is not true knowledge because the reader cannot engage in a face-to-face dialogue in which two or more voices and perspectives participate and exchange ideas. With writing, there is no definite conclusion, no right or wrong interpretation. Writing offers no concrete answer nor solution.

In Socrates' reasoning, the act of speaking in public, of having a breathing one-on-one dialogue with a person or an audience, makes the imparted knowledge "alive" (Plato 63). For instance, in Classical Greek society, a rhetorician was always an orator, a public speaker and a male of the higher castes. Public speaking was an essential part of the daily-life of the Athenian educated and the intellectuals, and it was a crucial part of Athenian's democracy. Socrates believes that the social interaction, the exchange of ideas and the audience's participation makes the dialectic a fruitful engagement. During Greek Ancient times, rhetoric or "the science of speaking" was mainly practiced in the public realm with political speeches and debates (86). Rhetoricians, although not philosophers and thus part of the sophists for Socrates, were active members of Athenian society. Athens was a society where politicians solved and discussed issues by dialoguing in the courts. Therefore, writing's devaluation in relation to speech is ruled by the fact that written pieces does not have the vitality that comes with spoken dialogues in the public realm. The public real is structured by the spaces that are open to everyone and that are where the political, philosophical, and social actions are performed. Writing is not part of the public and the active. Writing lacks a head, a thinking-mind, and a breathing-soul that engages in

an open discussion in a public space. Writing is part of the art of persuasion that does not include the enlightened truth of the gods.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes written compositions as speechless and fatherless to express that they do not transmit knowledge but are a mere replica of it. Written words are unchanging, unadaptable to the contexts in which they are read. Thus, writing is unable to respond and defend its ideas against counterarguments. The reader appears to give life to the written piece as s/he interacts with these “outside alien marks” (Plato 62). Socrates creates a myth, a fictitious narrative, that presents writing as an inferior tool in opposition to speech. In the *Phaedrus*, silence implies passivity (non-action), ignorance, lack of learning and no intellectual betterment within the parameters of philosophical inquiry. Now, this is where Jacques Derrida’s criticism of Plato’s evaluation of both speech and writing is appropriate to explore.

The Myth of Logos in Jacques Derrida’s “Plato’s Pharmacy”

In Jacques Derrida’s “Plato’s Pharmacy” (1972), he examines Plato’s analysis of speech and writing, and he concludes that the presence of the authoritarian father-figure, the original speaker, is directly linked to the priority that it is given to speech in Western tradition. In this essay, Derrida critiques Plato’s take on speech in the *Phaedrus* because Derrida argues that Plato’s overvaluation of speech, or the logos, as the “‘living’ discourse” is the reason behind writing’s devaluation (1709). The “question of logography” (speechwriting) is answered through its duality, measured by the benefits and ill-doings that speechwriting can cause, in order to understand whether writing reflects truth, the just, and a proper use of dialectics (Derrida 1700). For Derrida, logocentrism is the perspective that gives priority to the logos (speech, reason, thought, philosophy) due to the closeness these subjects have to the presence of the thinker and his transcendental truth. The over-valuation of the logos happens at the expense of a set of

counterpart subjects that are considered non-logos. Logocentrism is a way of thinking that represses writing in relation to speech, poetry and sophistry in relation to philosophy, and even woman in relation to man among many other examples. At the end, Plato assumes that men are the only ones who use speech and philosophy and are the only carriers of the truth while writing and women are considered the opposite.

The absence of the writer in his written work devalues the piece because it is judged in relation to speech which always includes the presence of the speaker. For Derrida, this is a simplistic way of judging both mediums of communication. Simply, writing is not speech and speech is not writing; therefore, both speaking and writing should not be judged in relation to one another as opposites. Through logocentrism, the understanding of texts happens through labels that are dichotomous in their order. This means that there is a pair of opposite-binary terms that depend on each other to convey their separate meanings. However, one term of the dichotomy is always privileged over the other, consequently, making the unprivileged side inferior and subordinated. The superior term is ultimately considered as such because it is believed to be closer to the truth, to a transcendental signifier, that is sustained by the presence of the speaker which is catalogued as a masculine figure through Plato's metaphor of the father as the speaker.

Speech (or the logos in general) survives with the presence of the father, and it is consequently privileged over writing. Derrida concludes that, in Socrates' myth of Theuth and his invention of writing, when the King receives Theuth's offering, he automatically catalogues writing as something below him, below speech, due to his inability and misunderstanding of this new technology. The king dictates writing's value as if he were an omniscient and omnipotent figure. King Thamus undermines the use of writing while giving absolute authority to the use of

speech. In a confrontational manner, Derrida argues that writing is rejected by the king because he does not know how to master it: “God the king does not know how to write, but that ignorance or incapacity only testifies to his sovereign independence. He has no need to write. He speaks, he says, he dictates, and his word suffices” (Derrida 1707). Due to arrogance, King Thamus prefers to label writing as a poison. As the supreme authority of the Egyptians, the king’s mandates are believed, praised, and labelled as truth. The king is highly independent from ever needing a tool such as writing, not only because of his use of speech, but because he has the benefits that come with having the power of being a sovereign monarch. King Thamus’ decision is based on his insecurity and his ignorance in the art of writing. He takes advantage of his power as king, as the most powerful speaker of the Egyptians, and subjugates writing as a failed technology. In short, the king labels writing as a “poison” of forgetfulness, the appearance of knowledge, and an artifact that is “repeating without knowing” (Derrida 1705). The idea of writing as a repetition presents it as an unoriginal mimicry of spoken words, and as a way of further spreading ignorance among people (Derrida 1705). By such standards, the written piece is a repetition and an impression of the original ideas of the author. Writing is not speech—therefore, it is not part of the author (the father). Writing is simply an impression of symbols on paper that mimic the thoughts and ideas of someone in a different time and space.

Derrida argues that Socrates recites the myth of Theuth in order to catalogue writing as a *pharmakon*, which is a label that shows writing through the duality of a “drug” (Derrida 1703). Now, the duality of the word “drug” can signify either medicine or a poison. The Greek word *pharmakon* can be translated into “remedy,” “recipe,” “elixir,” “poison,” “drug,” and “philter.” Derrida clarifies that it is up to the translator of the *Phaedrus* to choose which word to use when translating the myth (1703). Although, whatever word the translator chooses, at the end of the

myth the king will always renounce the art of letters as a poison for society. Writing “acts as both remedy and poison, [and] already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence” (Derrida 1703). The *pharmakon* is introduced into the discourse with contradictory-dual qualities that either doom writing as a poison or praise it as a remedy. By relying on this myth, Socrates agrees that writing can fuel rationality and intellectual stimulation, but his conclusion is that writing promotes dangerous ideas in individuals (and more dangerously in multitudes) that can be taken out of context and be in discordance with the world, society, culture, etc. of the reader.

Written pieces are not dialectics, but arguing for the sake of arguing, sophism in its core, without the openness of the interaction of different perspectives and counter arguments. As a matter of fact, “the author of the written speech is already entrenched in the posture of the sophist: the man of the non-presence and of non-truth” (Derrida 1700). The author of the *pharmakon* is introduced as a seducing sophist who uses fallacious and misleading arguments, imitations of out-of-context speeches, that are far from the just and the truth. The author does not emphasize nor imposes his presence, but he embraces his detachment from the written speech. Even the rhetoricians and politicians who write a speech to read to an audience do not engage with their audience as they read. They mechanically read their piece without adapting to what type of audience they face.

Jacques Derrida claims that Plato opposes speech (logos) to writing (the *pharmakon*) in the *Phaedrus* because he “held up the living spoken word, which infallibly conforms to the necessities of the situation at hand, to the expectations and demands of the interlocutors present” (Derrida 1709). The idea is that the logos, speech in the case of Plato’s the *Phaedrus*, is preferred by Socrates because it is untainted by an outside reader. Speech requires the presence of the

speaker (who is the father of logos) and the presence of the male-speaker makes speech the living discourse. Derrida uses the term “logos” because it derives from a Greek term that signifies “word,” “reason,” “speech,” and even the “divine word of a speaker” who has a transcendental connection with the gods. The spoken word is classified as alive because the speaker is present to adapt his language and his ideas to the demands of his debaters, audience and environment. Writing, on the other hand, is always the same. Once a piece has been written, the words part of the piece stay the same. In this way, writing is defined by a toxic opposition to speech which diminishes its value as an unadaptable dead-language. On the other hand, speech (or the logos) is, by definition, an act in which an individual pronounces words to communicate and exchange his ideas with others instantaneously. Thereby, Derrida concludes that when Plato prioritizes the presence of the father in the creation of meaning he gives an authoritarian position to the masculine figure in the hierarchies of phallogocentrism. In phallogocentrism, the ultimate, most powerful position in the hierarchy is assigned to the father and the philosopher. The logos are at the top of the hierarchy because knowledge imparted via speech, according to Plato, is defended and clearly transmitted by the father and his connection to an external divine source of knowledge (Derrida 1708).

Now, Jacques Derrida claims that the logos is not only preferred by Socrates because speech is the living discourse, but because it is the product of “the father,” Derrida says “[n]ot that logos is the father, either. But the origin of logos is its father” (1707). In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates creates a myth that depicts speech as the only righteous medium of communication and knowledge in which the father is the original speaker. Through a complex use of metaphors, Socrates assumes that solely the father is holder of the truth. Derrida continues exploiting Plato’s metaphor of the speaker as “the father of the logos” assigns the paternal figure as the only master

of a dialectical-driven argument or speech. The speaker is always in the right-place and at-the-right-time to use his critical skills, digest counterarguments and explanations, and make informed conclusions that are adequate for his situation and audience. The father is the source of logos. He is “the father who is also chief, capital, and that all at once” (Derrida 1711). The father is at the top of the hierarchical androcentric scheme of language due to the constant priority that is given to his spoken words. Inevitably, writing’s patricidal categorization makes it almost antithetical, and corrupting towards the power already assigned to the masculine figure. The father, the masculine counterpart of the mother, is given an authoritarian superiority which traces back to Plato’s myth of writing as a *pharmakon*.

The original speaker, as reflected in Plato’s metaphor of the father as the only creator of speech, is the masculine voice who innovates through cultural creations. Writing lacks the power of the phallus because the speaker, and even the own “father of letters” (author), are both absent from the interaction that happens between the reader and the text. Ultimately, the presence of the father is what gives speech the power of truth. Derrida calls this “a Platonic schema that assigns the origin and power of speech, precisely of *logos*, to the paternal position” (1707). So, if speech has ascendancy over writing, then, the father becomes an authoritarian voice/figure (and symbol) who dominates all symbols in Western metaphysics and cultural artifacts. The father glorifies his presence and his chosen symbols (which have been related to him throughout the development of culture and history). This is when it is convenient to rename logocentrism as phallogocentrism, which emphasizes the fact that in logocentrism the father, the carrier of the phallus, is the main symbol of power. Phallogocentrism is the privilege of speech, the father, and the assumption that the paternal position is the only innovator of technologies and philosophies. The neologism phallogocentrism is used to explicitly describe the way the father is the foreground of logos. As

Feder and Zakin note, “[a]s a truth-determining enterprise fueled by masculine reliance upon the feminine, logocentrism must be understood always, already to be phallogocentrism” (22). In phallogocentrism, the phallus is not necessarily the representation of the male-sex or male genitalia, but the sociocultural power that society and history have assigned to the masculine figure.

The Myth of the Author as a Mother in Hélène Cixous’ *Feminine Writing*

In Hélène Cixous’ *feminine writing*, writing allows the feminization of both the author and the speaker with the use of the maternal figure as an image of love, sisterhood and respect between women and a self-agency that will finally characterized the feminine figure. The purpose of *feminine writing* in “The Laugh of the Medusa” (The Laugh) and *The Newly Born Woman* (NBW) is to discontinue “women’s abasement” from culture, history and the public realm due to the preference that is given to the masculine figure in the logocentric tradition (NBW 65). The voice of the father, the Platonic metaphor for the speaker and author, is illustrative of the autocratic sociopolitical authority that is originally assigned to the experience of the masculine figure in phallogocentrism. Cixous concurs with Jacques Derrida’s theory that speech is privileged over writing because speech is originally established as being strongly connected with the presence of the father.

Phallogocentrism being a system that is centered around the presence of the phallus which originally established the male as the dominant and active figure (a symbol) of the narratives and myths that conform Western tradition. The “logocentric plan had always, inadmissibly, been to create a foundation for (to found and fund) phallogocentrism, to guarantee the masculine order rationale equal to history itself” (NBW 65). Phallogocentrism is a system in which the male, and the masculine gender, are the symbols of dominance and authority. A system in

which attitudes that are arbitrarily labelled, and gendered, as male or masculine are privileged and even preferred over all else. In phallogocentrism the masculine figure equals activity and the feminine figure is equivalent of passivity which creates a toxic co-dependence between the sexes in texts, art, stories—in which, men are at times obliged to prove their “virility” through willing-active acts that are often violent at the expense of a feminine (or often simply effeminate) passive-figure. Woman should not be the shadow of, who Cixous calls, a “militant male” who proves himself through manly acts that oppress others (The Laugh 880). The metaphor of the “militant male” reflects on the phallogocentric (often arbitrarily) man whose heroic acts are measured through aggressiveness, violence and war-like acts meant to subordinate “the Other.” In the specific case of phallogocentrism, history perpetuates myths, stories told and re-told throughout generations and Westernized societies that constantly perpetuate androcentric systems that assign the power of speech and the public realm—of logos—and activity to the masculine position.

The Metaphor of the Father as an Authoritarian Voice of Force

The metaphors of the father as the speaker and philosopher are both reflections of “relations of authority, privilege, [and] force” (NBW 64). These depict power relations in which man, the masculine figure, is a symbol of mastery and authoritarian privilege in relation to his son (or creation), and most importantly to woman, and the feminine image, whose position as not a counterpart, but as an opposite and almost a rival of him is consequently categorized as a subordinate, marginalized, and as a passive figure. Cixous’ claim is not that the father figure is an authoritarian dominant individual within the family unit, but that the metaphors, symbols, and couples within cultural artifacts generally assume a dichotomous relationship between men and women that label man (and the father) as superior symbols that dictate everything around them.

Hélène Cixous is not attacking men, nor is she saying that all men nor heterosexual relationships are phallogocentric. Instead, she is arguing for a sexual difference that isn't arbitrarily ruled through opposites. Cixous simply embraces accepting metaphors, human relations, and stories through their duality without making them rivals and opposites. She asks: "And all these pairs of oppositions are *couples*. Does that mean something? Is the fact that Logocentrism subjects thought—all concepts, codes, and values—to a binary system, related to 'the' couple, man/woman?" (*NBW* 64). Ideally, a couple (whether in cultural artifacts, stories or in the material world) is meant to work as an equal union without any of its two parties attempting dominion over the other nor proving an authoritarian power at the expense of the independence of the other.

For Cixous, language, art, history, culture and the artifacts that are part of the logocentric Western tradition show sexual difference between men and women in a relation of conflict and opposition. One of her examples is the metaphor of the father who is depicted as the strongest, the master, the force of the logos while he subordinates (or even ignores) woman, the mother figure, as the Other. When woman is not the opposite of man, but she is his partner, long-life friend, sister, mother, lover, ally and overall his counterpart. They both must complement each other as equals and not as opposites in order to create an utopian society of equanimity, and that continually discontinues the phallogocentric system. A sexual and gendered hierarchical order of opposition, whether subtle or not, is not the solution for a society free of gender-gaps nor sexual violence. Although these circumstances may be somewhat recurrent, a war between the sexes perpetuates a dystopian gender world that does not offer equality. War, even in the material, sociopolitical aspects, has been and is still part of the Western imperialistic side, but being part of the side that refuses to use force, violence, and domination at the expense of someone else is

not cowardice, but the ability to attempt a reconciliation with others despite the many inevitable differences that are part of every human or individual. The differences that often exist between men and woman are not the result of a war for power between these two genders. Their differences are simply existing and inevitable.

Mind/Body with Speech/Writing

In *feminine writing*, there is no division between speech and writing nor a duality between the mind and the body because for Cixous these disciplines complement one another. A woman who writes intimately about herself and the way she interacts with the world, far from the public realm, contemplates her language, thoughts, and her desires without worrying about society's judgments on her persona nor her body. Eventually, writing will inspire in her (in woman) a self-assurance and a strong intellectual self-esteem that will give her the strength to speak in public. Cixous speaks to "Every woman [who] has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away- that's how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak-even just open her mouth-in public" (The Laugh 880). The feminine author's objective is to create a text in which she records, understands and contemplates her life experiences without the toxic phallogocentric influence of society in which she is constantly tamed or exploited. Writing is a silent activity, and thus, it is a highly self-contemplative method for the feminine thinker to analyze her thoughts, and feelings as she writes and re-reads and consults her written piece. The interaction of the author and her piece is purely private and personal. For Cixous, unlike for Plato, silence is an act of a contemplative mind, an active intellect, that conjoins ideas through language and records them through her writing for the purpose of self-analysis and self-understanding.

By assuming the logocentric myth as the truth, the masculine view is acknowledged as the dominant voice while the feminine voice and the *graphie* are simultaneously neglected. As an answer to phallogocentrism, Hélène Cixous creates *feminine writing* which is the use of the *graphie* as a tool of assurgency from phallogocentrism in which women will trace the story of their body through storytelling and the creation of their own myths. *Feminine writing* is designed to incite women to create new feminine images and myths with the artistry of writing. *Feminine writing* is meant to inspire women to inscribe the meaning of their bodies, their sexualities, and to learn from the narratives of the women from the past. Cixous uses the metaphor of the mother as a source of inspiration and self-understanding in the pursuit of the feminine figure's self-agency. Within Hélène Cixous' metaphor of the mother, she introduces the feminine writer as a new counter logophile who uses written words to free the feminine body from the indoctrinated biases and restrictions that society and history have imposed on her. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous claims that "there is not that scission, that division made by the common man between the logic of oral speech and the logic of the text, bound as he is by his antiquated relation—servile, calculating—to mastery" (881). Writing and speech are not mutually exclusive; as a matter of fact, each linguistic discipline builds one another up. Writing helps the author to better understand her writing style, the understanding of her ideas, emotions, her life story, and personal philosophy. In a way, writing helps the feminine persona to polish her intellectual logic, her emotions, and the way she uses language and not only as an author, but as a speaker. This is meant to help women become outspoken individuals who erase the taboo that labels women as too maternal, too emotional, or even too passionate to participate in the public realm of society, culture and politics. With *feminine writing*, women will get to know who they

are, what they feel, and they will understand their mind, body and drives without the masculine impositions of society's rules and criticisms.

Women's Abasement from the Public Realm

The feminine body, just as writing, is an intimate subject for the feminine author. The feminine body is highly bound to the idea of womanhood. Thus, the story behind a woman's body is part of her experience with the world, her society, and her surroundings. Woman is often judged by society through the relationship she has with her body. For example, a woman who represses her sexual drives is often negatively catalogued as a "virgin" or a "prude" while the one who exploits her sexual desires "too much" is "promiscuous" or a "whore." Wrongly, the value of a woman is measured through her sexuality and the way she relates to the world with her body. In modern times, a woman who bears a child in her womb and who, after birth, solely follows the ideal of maternity is misjudged as not independent enough to have the ambition of a life outside the domestic sphere. Contrastingly, a woman who follows a career-path, who passionately dedicates her life to a profession, without ever becoming a mother is wrongly judged as selfish, "unnatural," and even "too independent." Woman "has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing or for not nursing. . .)" (The Laugh 880). At the end of the day, society assigns a woman her value (or devalue thereof) as they observe the relationship she has with her body. Phallogocentric societies constantly monitor the feminine body through judgments and social rules.

Essentially, the censorship of the feminine body comes in many forms. In both developed and undeveloped countries, women are usually blamed for showing their breast while breastfeeding their child in public. Women are chastised by their female-friends as they show too

much skin during a girl's night-out. The feminine body is censored to such an extent that when a woman accidentally stains her jeans with menstrual bleeding people react with disgust at something impossible for a woman to control. Hollywood films rarely show a woman's scarlet jeans stain while always exploiting the blood of victims of war and violence. The beauty of a woman's body is instantly labeled through arbitrary definitions and standards of beauty that are based on socioeconomic status, culture, age, and even ethnicity. With *feminine writing*, "beauty will no longer be forbidden" because women will be able to understand and love their bodies while inscribing the meaning of their body themselves both on paper and on their lives (The Laugh 876).

Writing the body means that the feminine thinker contemplates, analyses, and understands, her intellectual position in society, the way society perceives (or labels) her body, and how this is a result of the history of the women of the past and their stories. *Writing the body* is the action of a woman paying close attention to her circumstances, the systems of thought that dominate her society, and her engagement in the public realm through a continuous questioning of every aspect of her society and history. Writing is an act of contemplation and intellectual independence, the process of inscribing thoughts and analyses on a page which consequently works as a mirror of the author's mental and linguistic processes. Thus, the feminine author is able to truly record and write the meaning of her body without the phallographic influence, and consequently the nullification of women's presence from culture will only be an aspect of past histories.

In a society and its capitalist industry that constantly uses, restricts, exploits, and profits from the female body, *feminine writing* is a strategy for women to engage with the history of the women from the past while creating a new feminine image free of taboos. A woman's writing is

“a world of searching, the elaboration of a knowledge, on the basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity” (The Laugh 876). This “experimentation with the bodily functions” is the freeing act of a woman writing the meaning of her body herself without being told what to do or who she is supposed to be. By writing her body, a woman will have the freedom to love her waist with (or without) a corset, and she’ll learn to appreciate and pay attention to her sexual desires with self-agency through a deep understanding of the social rules on feminine sexuality. She’ll learn to love her body, every part of it, without becoming someone else’s object of possession or submission. She’ll choose her sexuality, her likes and desires through self-contemplation and the intellectual stimulation that writing triggers. By asking herself questions about her environment and the way society treats women, she’ll learn to pay attention to almost invisible rules that are imposed on her by her society, family, friends and even institutions. Woman will learn to understand her erotic and sexual ideology without being a feminine figure that is the result of phallogocentrism. Woman will understand her body’s reproductive and sexual drives as an essential part of the health of both her body and mind.

Metaphorically, women have been trapped by a “snare of silence” in which they are restricted from showing their sexual desires, leadership skills, speaking and intellectual abilities in order to contribute to society and culture (The Laugh 881). Often, men have more freedom to celebrate their sexuality and their body. Although men also face taboos imposed on their bodies, those taboos are not as monitored and regulated as those of women’s bodies. Cixous uses the metaphor of the mother as a form of self-nourishment for women without ever imposing heteronormative gender roles on women. The image she describes is that of a mother who

cherishes difference in women. The mother is the muse of self-love and self-agency which inspires learning with the use of the *graphie*, poetry and subjectivity.

In “the Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous uses the metaphor of the mother to explore the relationship between a feminine-author, her intellect and her body. The mother is a metaphor for an author who wishes to share her-story, and who wants to connect with other women. The mother learns from her past. The metaphor of the mother is someone that, like the narratives of the many mothers of past Western myths, loves her daughters amid a society that labels love as irrational and useless. Like Plato’s metaphor of the father as the author in the *Phaedrus*, Cixous creates a metaphor for the feminine author: “The mother, too, is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was ‘born’ to her” (The Laugh 881). Women must help each other understand the way the world perceives women. The metaphor of the mother as the writer expresses the inspiration and support that other women may feel when reading her writing. Woman “is never far from “mother” (I mean outside her role functions: the “mother” as nonname and as source of goods). There is always within her at least a little of that mother’s milk. She writes in white ink” (The Laugh 881). As a “nonname,” the mother is not a metaphor meant to be a didactic guidance for women on how to live their lives, but rather an incitement for women to create an intimate dialogue within their bodies and their cultural history. To write a story that defines their body the way they want it to be defined. By embracing the history of women from the past, by learning from their oppression, women who write will be able to become active players of public society and culture. By empowering the mother, Cixous defends and preserves the wisdom of the feminine culture of the past.

In *feminine writing*, silence does not signify passivity nor ignorance. Silence is the opportunity for the writing to self-contemplate herself and her ideas. Silence means the processing of the thinker's ideas, logic, and her/his circumstances. The craft of writing in silence requires patience, dedication, and devotion. A writer who silently writes engages herself with her intellect. Through the rigorous process of creating a piece that will satisfy her, she'll learn to overcome the "snare of silence" both in written and the spoken word. The writer will be sure of her arguments, ideas, and who she is (The Laugh 881). Woman, "secretly, silently, deep down inside, she grows and multiplies, for, on the other hand, she knows far more about living and about the relation between the economy of the drives and the management of the ego than any man" (The Laugh 1954). ¹Women are told to smile, to nod in acceptance, as they face a world that dictates their beauty, their self-acceptance, in relation to a standardize concept of mental and physical beauty that is constantly imposed on them. This passivity, per se, helps women observe and be conscious of situations that marginalizes them and restricts their body. They learn to manage their ego, in silence, and instead of shouting back with malice and rage, they learn to tactically know when it is convenient to ignore or when to fight back.

¹ This is from a different translation of the essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" by the same translators Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen which is part of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*.

CHAPTER II

THE FEMINIZATION OF BARBARISM IN *DOÑA BÁRBARA*

Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* is for Venezuela what *Don Quijote* is for the Spanish speaking world. The novel, entangled with an ongoing battle between barbarism and civilization, is the myth of an alluring forty-year old woman whose imposing character is the result of a tragic beginning. Before becoming Doña Bárbara, the protagonist is introduced as an ingénue, Barbarita. The girl is the in-between-shades of indigenous and European blood, a *mestiza*, whose job is to cook for a smuggler and his crew as they traffic alcohol and goods amid the Venezuelan wilderness. The beautiful girl is savagely raped by the crew of her guardian's boat as they voyage through the Orinoco river. Barbarita, psychologically damaged as a result of the outrageous act, eventually becomes a figure of feminine power feared by the people of the plain with the title of "Doña Bárbara." With strong sentiments of misandry, Doña Bárbara seduces men and steals their land with no clear material ambition but to never again be a vulnerable feminine body in androcentric society run by barbarous men. Doña Bárbara outplays the patriarchal social system of the plain through a masculinist appropriation foregrounded on the *centaur* which is a value system part of the plain, or *el llano*, in which the main ideal is to subjugate the land and the people that live in it. As Doña Bárbara, the people of the plain fear her and call her "The Evil Eyed" due to her ruthlessness and her apathetic attitude to everyone, including her biological daughter, Marisela (Malloy 37).

Barbarism: The Origin of Doña Bárbara's Myth

In many Spanish-speaking cultures, the diminutive name is often used to express affection towards a person as they are being called out or simply to emphasize their youth and their innocence; however, it can also be used to belittle a person. The tragic heroine, Doña

Bárbara, is introduced by the omniscient narrator as “Barbarita” which is the diminutive of the feminine name “Bárbara.” Bárbara is the feminine form of the Spanish word “*bárbaro*”² or the English “barbarous” which in both languages means savage, rude, vulgar or uncultured. In Doña Bárbara’s case, she stands for the marginalized culture that is labelled as uncultivated, savage, and overall as the product of those who are closer to the natural state of the brute and animal. Throughout the novel, Doña Bárbara epitomizes the rudimentary world of barbarism as opposed to the cultured civilization brought to the plain by her counterpart, Santos Luzardo.

Nonetheless, both the civilized and barbarian cultures reflect a patriarchal hierarchy. The civilized culture is phallogocentric and based on the oppression of women’s voices and their lack of activity in public society. As explained before, phallogocentric societies are based on the prioritization of the voice and language of the father, the patriarch, and overall the voice of the masculine figure while the voice of the feminine, of the mother, the feminine figure is subjugated and even oppressed from the public sphere of the patriarchal social structure completely. Unlike the barbarian culture, the civilized includes the use of language as a tool of domination used to establish the patriarchal structure. The barbarian culture is based on the exchange of women and their subordination through force. Though, in both cultures the voice of the feminine figure is tightly limited to the private and domestic spheres as a purely sexualized and inactive object of culture. In both the civilized and the barbaric cultures women are restricted as only part of the domestic and private realm with the roles of housewives, mothers, and lovers. This is precisely

² Both “barbarous” and “*bárbaro*” come from the Greek *βάρβαρος* and the Latin *barbārus* which stem from the onomatopoeia “bar” (OED) (RAE). Originally, the “barbarian” stuttered the “bar” sound which was a way for the “civilized” people to reject the non-Greek and non-Latin languages. To the logocentric ear, “bar” is a meaningless sound, the stammering of the Other who speaks an impure language. Being labelled as a barbarian, as an uncultured individual, is a form of marginalization in relation to a dominant “civilized” culture. In that situation, the dominant society is the one to hold the social, cultural and political power to exclude and reject other cultures and their languages.

why Doña Bárbara appropriates the voice of the patriarch, the *terrateniente* and plainsman, in order to strive in the barbaric phallogocentric society.

In Latin America, the emergence of the idea of barbarism traces back to the publication of the book *Civilization and Barbarism* (1845) by the Argentinian author Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. In said literary work, Sarmiento describes the life of the Argentinian countryside, a barbaric society, of people whose lives are led by the primitive and violent drives. Irrevocably, there is a strong implication that the barbarian possesses a regressive morality due to the angst of being exterminated in the wilderness. The barbarian lives in a place that demands physical fitness and even an awareness, and willingness, of violence. The wilderness is threatening, amoral, and physically demanding for any species that inhabits it.

Aspects of nature such as those of a storm, a carnivore animal, an avalanche or a river do not work in relation to the well-being of other organisms, nor do they follow man-made rules or social constructions. Nature exists without a sense of virtue nor the appreciation of life. Nature just is. As a result, Sarmiento believes that the barbarian creates a regressive morality that gives him/her the adaptability to an amoral and life-threatening setting. Sarmiento sees the violence of the barbarian as a psychological result of his/her vulnerability in an isolated place where s/he does not have the protection of civilization. Although highly outdated, Sarmiento's idea of barbarism paints the arbitrary combination of a hostile natural-environment, indigenous traditions and superstitions, and the imposition of a Eurocentric governmental structure. Barbarism describes the issues that came in the aftermath of colonization through the examples of the "savage towns" (*pueblos salvajes*) of Argentina and Latin America (46).

Unlike the civilized setting, a barbaric place is defined through a closeness to nature and to the animal state of man. As man is closer to nature, in an environment without streets, blocks,

buildings for shelter nor a social consensus of rules and ethics, the barbarian creates a barbarian society which is established by “la fuerza brutal, la preponderancia del más fuerte, la autoridad sin límites y sin responsabilidad de los que mandan, la justicia administrada sin formas y sin debate” (Sarmiento 33) (“the brutal force, the preponderance superiority of the strongest, the unlimited authority and irresponsibility of the masters, and an administrative justice without forms nor open debate”; Núñez trans.).³The barbarian inhabits an environment that is threatening to every organism’s life due to the dangers of the wilderness: animals, plants, and even people struggling to survive in the middle of this untamed territory. Thus, the barbarian must have the physical strength to master the other species, the flora and the fauna, and even the soil beneath his/her boots. The ambiance and territory of barbarism is far from reaching the human comfort that comes with the technological advancements and industrialization of the European civilization.

Toxic Masculinity in Civilization and Barbarism

In barbarism, “el progreso está sofocado, porque no puede haber progreso sin la posesion permanente del suelo, sin la ciudad que es la que desenvuelve la capacidad industrial del hombre y le permite extender sus adquisiciones” (38) (“progress is suffocated because there cannot be progress without the permanent possession of the soil and without the city which develops the industrial capacities of man while extending his material acquisitions”; Núñez trans.). The barbaric society is adapted and shaped through the rules of the natural world. Yes, the barbarian uses force to survive and strive in his/her land, but he does it accordingly to the established order of the natural environment. The barbarian does not use technology, intellect, nor culture to impose his/her rules on the land like the civilized man of the city.

³ These are translations by the author of this thesis.

Undoubtedly, a barbarian becomes part of the natural resources as soon as he is catalogued as primitive, uncultured, and animalistic in relation to the civilized man. The barbarian, the individual whose cultural characteristics resemble nature, becomes part of the goods extracted from the natural environment. Thus, Sarmiento's solution is for the civilized men to master, educate, and tame the barbarians. Due to their connection with nature, a barbarian, an animal, and even women are often classified as goods of exchange. This association with nature also serves for the civilized man as a justification to kill, mandate, enslave or even extinguish anyone, or anything that is labelled as not-civilized. The barbarian does not dominate nature, nor completely tries to possess natural resources of his/her territory, as opposed to the civilized man and civilization itself. Unlike the civilized man, the barbarian does not attempt to dominate nor control the soil, but he adapts to the obstacles that the primeval territory presents. Although Sarmiento's overall conclusion in *Civilization and Barbarism* is that civilization must master barbarism and vanish it, he acknowledges that the civilized people are far from perfect. The civilized man lacks the physical endurance that is necessary to survive in a hostile environment that presents prominent challenges for his survival.

Subsequently, "la naturaleza salvaje dará la ley por mucho tiempo y la civilización permanecerá débil e ineficaz" (Sarmiento 32) ("for a long time the law will be dictated by the savage nature and civilization will remain weak and inefficient"; Núñez trans.). In *Civilization and Barbarism*, the civilized man's cultivation of the intellect and his civility can only be achieved through a Eurocentric education. This makes him superior to anyone who is as close to nature, the body, and emotions. Then, the man of culture and of the city is the only one who possesses the willfulness to create a well-organized and superior society. Yet, the civilized man is sedentary, and even derogatively labelled as effeminate in relation to the barbarian.

At its core, Sarmiento's idea of a civilization is based on the assumption that it is necessary to build up a civilized society through the suppression of the environment, nature, and the resources that come from it. Resources not only include food, plants, territory, and animals, but also peoples who are closely associated with the idea of nature. As a matter of fact, this idea is also found in Western phallogocentric societies. The twentieth-century feminist-philosopher Simone de Beauvoir states that in the European civilized world "Man expects more from possessing woman than the satisfaction of an instinct; she is the special object through which he subjugates Nature" (180). Women, whether of civilized or barbarian roots are connected to the abstract idea of "nature." Undoubtedly, the barbarian is considered as almost homogenized with nature due to his "primitiveness" and adaptability to the uncultivated world. In this same way, women from both the civilized and the barbaric cultures are objects, goods, and a way for men to display their socioeconomic status in the twentieth-century. The women of the barbarian world are oppressed within both the civilized and the barbaric societies. This reflects a deep toxic masculinity within the analysis of both the civilized and the barbarian cultures which both always depend on the domination of the Other who is closely associated with nature. In both the civilized and the barbarian societies, the feminine figure is considered a commodity as a feminine body with the engraved phallogocentric idea that she solely represents the sexual and reproductive drives of both men and women.

Specifically, woman is not only related to irrationality, but also to cowardliness, to a lack of action, and to her necessary absence from the creation of culture. In the introduction of *Civilization and Barbarism*, Sarmiento claims that Argentinian barbarism is an "esfinge argentino, mitad mujer por cobarde, mitad tigre por sanguinario" (10) ("the Argentinian sphinx, half woman for her cowardice, and half tiger for her bloodthirst"; Núñez trans.). The metaphor of

barbarism as a sphinx describes women as lacking courage, and as being passive individuals in the face of danger or when it comes to making important decisions. The metaphor—or myth—of the sphinx as barbarism relates the feminine figure to a dramatized epitome of barbarism which is echoed by Rómulo Gallegos' protagonist of *Doña Bárbara*. This metaphor comes from the Greek mythology and, by definition, it is the product of the Western logocentric tradition that roots all the way back to the Greeks and Romans. Indirectly, both Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's metaphor of the sphinx and Rómulo Gallegos' heroine Doña Bárbara use the feminine figure as a personification of barbarism and the violence that results from such world.

In both *Civilization and Barbarism* and *Doña Bárbara*, the dehumanization of the barbarian results from his/her homogenization with nature, his/her place in society as an animal or even as an object that can be bought and exchanged, exploited for labor. In women's case, their presumed connection to nature comes in the form of the feminine body as an object for reproduction and sexual exploitation. In both cultures of barbarism and civilization, woman is placed in the position of an object, as part of the goods that give a man (the active player of culture) social, cultural and economic power. As a matter of fact, in the world of the plain women's position is below the male barbarian because she is oppressed, exploited, and abused by both the barbarian and the civilized androcentric cultures. In the barbarian society, Barbarita is the perfect example of this double-oppression of women within cultures because she is introduced as a sexual object that is highly valued in the eyes of men due to the chastity of her body and mind. For her "taita" (the captain of the boat), Barbarita is nothing more than the exchange of goods and the trafficked objects that can be sold within the economic parameters of the barbarian culture (Gallegos 25).

As stated by Catherine Clément in *The Newly Born Woman*, “culture, breaking its origins in paradise, introduces the exchange of women, of goods, or of words, which began to circulate at the expense of that larval exchange, silent and precious, of the primitive matrix, the original womb” (29). Within the barbarian culture, the idea of women as “goods,” as commodities that can be owned and possessed is deeply established. This is precisely what happens in the world of *Doña Bárbara*, the exchange of women and the exchange of goods is part of the *centauro llanero*, or the centaur of the plain, which blindly demands for man to dominate nature and prove a virile domination displayed through pride (Gallegos 79). Barbarita’s feminine body is raped due to the amorality and viciousness of the barbarian pirates. The rape of her body is the rebellion of barbarians: “era la rebelión que hacía algún tiempo venía preparándose por causa de la perturbadora belleza de la guaricha” (Gallegos 26) (“was the mutiny which had been brewing for some time on account of the girl’s disturbing beauty”).⁴ The matrix, the enclosure of culture, carries the symbols that present woman as a good, as something that has an exchange value. In the plain, women must face strong misogyny due the constant sentiments of violence and dominance inherited in men in order to prove their manliness, *el centauro*, as called by Santos Luzardo. In this logic, goods is an object that works as property. The one to possess said object has more power in the society.

In a conversation that Santos Luzardo has with Lorenzo Barquero, he analyses the idea of the *centaur* as he says that “el centauro es la barbarie y, por consiguiente, hay que acabar con él. Supe entonces que con esa teoría, que proclamaba una orientacion más útil de nuestra historia nacional, habías armado un escándalo entre los tradicionalistas de la empopeya” (Gallegos 79) (“the theme was ‘That centaur is barbarism, and therefore we must put an end to him.’ I learned

⁴ All translations of Rómulo Gallegos’ *Doña Bárbara* are from Robert Malloy’s translation.

then that you had stirred up a commotion among traditionalists with that theory, which pointed out a more useful direction for our national history”). This barbarism, the *centaur*, is what creates the feared witch of Doña Bárbara (Gallegos 29). Luzardo and Barquero’s theory is to civilize and overrule the barbaric life of the *llano*. It is the action of domination over anything related to barbarism including the woman Barbarita is to become (Doña Bárbara). As a matter of fact, both Santos and Barquero are the descendants of the two patriarchal families that settle the society of the plain. The *centaur* is a patriarchal, *machista*⁵ in essence, tradition in which men must dominate others through violence, sexual acts, virile rivalry, and the idealized mastery of nature. Doña Bárbara appropriates those same values and obtains power. The plain is a matrix in which patriarchal and strong sentiments of phallogocentric priorities dominate. Per Gallegos, the *centaur* has a mix foundation of European and Indigenous American peoples. Barbarism, the *centaur*, lacks the logos and is not the civilizing force of the Eurocentric intellectual tradition that stems from the praised movement of Enlightenment. In Patricia Lapolla Swier’s words, the indigenous were “portrayed as ‘culturally virgin,’ ripe for the picking for conquest, colonization, slavery, or for the image of exoticism” which is as well applies for women and the barbarian (24).

The Exchange of Women in the Plain

In the beginning, Barbarita is the girl who embodies the cherished ideal of innocence that is based on the feminine figure’s lack of sexual experience. An innocence that can only be afforded and preserved with the protection of a patriarchal protector in the barbaric-androcentric

⁵ Machismo is a form of sexism, the quality of a man being a “macho” in relation to women. Originally, the word macho was simply used to refer to animals of the male sex. Now, macho is used to describe men who have the stereotypical characteristics that are generally assigned to males (strength, dominance, bravery). A macho shows a hyper-masculine attitude of primal arrogance and pride which is meant to dominate women or others through physical, sexual, and verbal violence. Machismo is deeply rooted in gender biases (such as the belief that women are weak and passive, and thus they must be the subordinates of men). The word carries a strong animalistic connotation.

society of the plain. This chastity is noticeable as she interacts with her first love Asdrúbal, “Barbarita se deternillaba de risa; mas si él interrumpía su relato, complacido en aquellas frescas y sonoras carcajadas, ella las cortaba en seco y bajaba la vista, estremecido en dulces ahogos de pecho virginal” (Gallegos 24) (“Barbarita nearly split her sides laughing; but if he interrupted his story to dwell on her strong, fresh laughter, she would stop suddenly and lower her eyes in maidenly embarrassment.” Asdrúbal clearly has experienced the world more openly and freely than any girl (or woman) of the plain. He tells Barbarita stories that intrigue her, that make her laugh, and that make her see the world through the perspective of someone who has had the liberty to move in society and culture more openly. As a man, Asdrúbal is automatically assigned as an active player of the androcentric culture that dominates the plain. Asdrúbal introduces Barbarita to the world of the word or logos by teaching her to read and write. He is the first (and only man) to ever treat her as an equal partner. show her a world in which the only way to survive is to affiliate with the dominant side of the sociocultural structure—that of the plainmen. Constantly, the narrator emphasizes the girl’s sexual unawareness with expressions such as “maidenly embarrassment” and *guaricha* (Gallegos 77). The term *guaricha*⁶, is a Caribbean term that is used to label an indigenous girl or a *mestiza* as single and a maiden. More specifically, *guaricha* originated from a Venezuelan indigenous dialect and the linguistic group called *Pariana* (Tavera-Acosta 81). *Guaricha* eventually became not only a way to specify a woman’s mixed racial origin, but also her chastity. Undoubtedly, Barbarita’s innocence and beauty lie behind the high monetary value that is tragically assigned on her body and her.

Barbarita was never given the opportunity to choose for herself, to think, to analyze who she wanted to become. She is unable to write the story of her life and even to *write the meaning*

⁶ See Gallegos page 23, footnote 77

of her body in the Hélène Cixous' way. After the crew of the pirogue rape her, one of the men concludes that since she is no longer a virgin they can “venderséla al turco, aunque sea por las veinte onzas que ofreció antes” “sell her to the Turk, and the twenty ounces he offered will be enough” (Gallegos 32). The rape of Barbarita, the act that represents the lustful and violent barbarian, is the tragedy that conceives Doña Bárbara. The captain of the boat (who Barbarita relies on as a father figure) was already planning on selling the *guaricha* before the rape and his murder. However, the captain was waiting to receive a better offer for the girl and her body. Disturbingly, (before the rape) Barbarita's so-called-father had already offered the girl for sale the man nicknamed “*el turco*” or “the Turk.” However, the man had offered twenty ounces for the girl which the captain considered a small quantity for the girl's “value” since she was a beautiful virgin.

As a matter of fact, the Turk is described as a “leprous and sadistic Syrian” who “lived in the heart of the Orinco fastnesses, apart from men on account of the wasting disease, but surrounded by a harem of Indian girls of marriageable age who he had seized or bought from their fathers, not only to sate his lust” (Malloy 33). This explicitly describes the way the plain social structure works. Fathers can sell their daughters as if they were their owned goods. In the barbarian society, the exchange of goods includes women—specifically, young and beautiful Indigenous women who are valued through their beauty, body, and sexuality. This is part of a barbaric and patriarchal social structure that is not only part of the unwanted, uncivilized one, but that creates the *terratiente* Barbarita is to become. The barbaric environment imposes a woman's narrative through violence while the European phallogocentric tradition carried by Santos Luzardo domesticates women as passive-flowers of the home.

Barbarita becomes Doña Bárbara, the woman whose contingency with nature and barbarism rules the social realm of the plain. She represents the plain, she is the tenant of the land and the expanded terrain of Venezuela. Doña Bárbara stands for the beauty of the plain and its dangers: “La llanura es bella y terrible a la vez; en ella caben, holgadamente, Hermosa vida y muerte atroz. Esta acecha por todas partes; pero allí nadie la teme. El Llano asusta; pero el miedo del Llano no enfría el corazón: es caliente como el gran viento de su soleada inmensidad, como la fiebre de sus esteros” (Gallegos 63) (“The Plain is at once lovely and fearful. It holds, side by side, beautiful life and hideous death. The latter lurks everywhere, but no one fears it. The Plain frightens, but the fear which the Plain inspires is not the terror which chills the heart; it is hot, like the wind sweeping over the immeasurable solitude, like the fever lying in the marshes”). Rómulo Gallegos directly connects the beauty and deathliness of the plain to the novel’s protagonist. She is a tremendous force, a duality, between the marginalized culture of the barbarian and the environment and soil of the plain. As both nature and the master of barbarians she is predestined by the author to be outlawed by Santos Luzardo.

Before Doña Bárbara masters the plainsmen and the land (which results in the creation of her ranch “*el Miedo*”), there was an original patriarchal establishment in the plain, that of the Luzardos. Under the Luzardo family, the foundation of the plain’s socioeconomic structure was then the same as the one of “Altamira” (the ranch that latter in the story symbolizes the Eurocentric-progressive ideology of Santos Luzardo) and the *llanero* lifestyle. Altamira is a product of “la apacible vida patriarchal de los primeros Luzardo” (“the peaceful patriarchal life of the earlier Luzardos”) (Gallegos 15). In this “peaceful patriarchal life,” men hold the positions of power and influence in society: men oversee attending and maintaining their acres of land, of spending time with their undermen (peons or the Spanish equivalent *peones*) while leading them

in their labor. Men are the ones to handle the profits that result from the agricultural cultivation and the caring of the cattle. In Sarmiento's description they trade, they buy, they sell, and exploit the goods of the land and the labor of their undermen. As oppose to women, who are in charge of the domestic duties: "las mujeres guardan la casa, preparan la comida, trasquilan las ovejas, ordeñan las vacas, fabrican los quesos y tejen las groseras telas que visten; todas las ocupaciones domésticas, todas las industrias caseras, la ejerce la mujer; sobre ella pesa casi todo el trabajo" ("women kept the house, prepared the food, sheep-sheared, milked the cows, fabricated the cheese and knitted the coarse clothing they worn; all the domestic occupations, the house-work, was exerted by the woman; on her shoulders relies almost all the work"; Núñez trans.). Whether a landlord or an underman, men work outside of their home and settled the necessary agreements to survive and to sustain their families. In the barbaric society of the plain, the men exert the violence of barbarism and the demands of a harsh habitat, while women raise their children and worry about the well-being of their family. In other words, the public realm is a place for the voice of the masculine figure and no one else's.

Santos Luzardo leaves the plain to Caracas with his mother, doña Asunción. They leave right after Luzardo's father kills his own son (Luzardo's brother) and subsequently commits suicide. Doña Asunción escapes the barbaric life of the plain, the life of violence and the proud-primitive virility that is proven through fights and massacres Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, then molds Santos Luzardo into a refined man of culture, law, and the perpetuation of the civilizing aspects that bring progressivism. In other words, he assimilates the urban and Eurocentric education that transforms him into a civilized man. Far from the life of the plain, the characteristics in him that were once the product of barbarism almost fade away, until his mother dies, and he returns to what is left of Altamira. Bothered with the plain's situation and the

hoaxing influence of Doña Bárbara, Luzardo decides to stay and “luchar con doña Bárbara, criatura y personificación de los tiempos que corrían, no sería solamente salvar *Altamira*, sino contribuir a la destrucción de las fuerzas retardatorias de la prosperidad del Llano” (Gallegos 21) (“To struggle against Doña Barbara, symbol of the times, was not only to free Altamira, but to destroy the forces which were holding back the Plain.”). Now, in this statement Doña Bárbara is reduced to a “*criatura*” (“creature”) which caricaturizes her as the pure epitome of barbarism which is a highly-marginalized *-ism* in both *Doña Bárbara* and *Civilization and Barbarism*. So, the character of Luzardo is representative of the active force of civilization that must dominate, destroy, and eradicate barbarism from the plain (and Venezuela) in the form of a feminine figure, Doña Bárbara. Luzardo is the strict representation of the logos. Luzardo is the “*luz*” (light), the city-like mindset that will civilize the plain. He is the rightful heir of the patriarchal feudal world established by the Luzardos and Barquero’s before, Doña Bárbara, the corruption of the patriarchal barbarism took over. Here, the metaphor of the light signifies, the progress of the civilized European man.

For example, André Michalski concludes that in *Doña Bárbara*, Santos Luzardo is the re-telling of the myth of the Greek god Apollo who is always the ultimate “hero” of the story: “la identidad del héroe con el dios Sol está indicada por su nombre y apellido, Santos Luzardo, es decir, la santa, o divina luz que arde” (1021) (“the identity of the hero with the god of the Sun is indicated by his name and last name which are connected to the holy, ardent light of divinity”; Núñez trans.). Santos Luzardo is the ultimate conqueror of *el llano* and the one who must defeat the “witch” Doña Bárbara. Luzardo represents the new appropriated *mestizo* man who perpetuates the Western folklore that roots in the Greek and Roman tradition. He is the carrier of the Derridean logos. Luzardo is the preacher of the words of Plato, the equivalent of the

metaphors of the father figure, whose connection with the Greek god's gives him an authoritarian position in the civilized society. Unlike *Doña Bárbara*, Luzardo is civilized by the intellectual education of law-school in Caracas. Luzardo is the re-telling of a Eurocentric story-telling (Apollo, the father, the saint whose words dominate the narrative). These shows the complex dichotomy, and struggle, of civilization/barbarism which is dramatized through the relationship of Luzardo and Doña Bárbara.

As a protagonist, Doña Bárbara is the corruption of the laws, of civilization, and the previous patriarchal, barbaric establishment of the Luzardos. This is exemplified through the words of Antonio, one of Luzardo's worker and the *capataz* of Altamira, who in a conversation with Luzardo, expresses that there is no such a thing as a "Law of the Plain" (Gallegos 92). Ironically, Antonio mocks the idea of that the plain has civil and judicial laws in a conversation he has with Luzardo: "¿La Ley del Llano?—replicó Antonio socorronamente—¿Sabe usted cómo se la mienta por aquí? Ley de doña Bárbara. Porque dicen que ella pagó para que se le hicieran a la medida" (Gallegos 92) ("The Law of the Plain? Antonio replied insinuatingly. Do you know what it's called around here? 'Doña Bárbara's Law.' Because they say she paid to have it made to measure"). The law, as a dress especially suited with a trimmer to fit her measure, is barbarism. Then, the laws of Doña Bárbara are the distortion of the patriarchal lifestyle that was previously fixed in the plain at the hands of Santos Luzardo's ancestors. One of the crucial characteristic of Doña Bárbara is that she appropriates barbaric-patriarchal values, her demure of a *marimacho*⁷ is a reflection of her ability to act as a dominating and masculinized persona in order to enforce her power in the public sphere of the plain (Gallegos 32). A

⁷ *Marimacho* is a neologism that combines the feminine name María and the word *macho*. A *marimacho* is a woman whose demure is highly similar (or alike) to a man who displays the characteristics of a macho. An example is the virile arrogance displayed by a *macho* in relation to women, feminine (or effeminate) figures.

marimacho is often pejorative and it is used to refer to a woman whose actions and appearance display her as a man. She is aggressive, able to proudly ride a horse, lease an animal, to mandate her underman to work, and even to have sexual relations with several men out of wedlock. Despite her manly manners, men are not immune to her female charms. On the contrary, she seduces men and steals not only their property, and in Lorenzo Barquero's case (the father of Doña Bárbara's biological daughter Marisela) his will to live, too.

Although Doña Bárbara's embodiment as *el llano*, her fate as a feminine figure is not annihilated by her association to nature, yet she is able to save herself through it. As nature, as the "dark passion of the Indian," Doña Bárbara is meant to be dominated by the intellectual-patriarchal figure of the father, Santos Luzardo, yet she makes her own choices at the end (Malloy 30). Doña Bárbara is entrapped in a similar situation as described by Hélène Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" describes as Western "power relation between a fantasized obligatory virility meant to invade, to colonize, and the Consequential phantasm of woman as a 'dark continent' to penetrate and to pacify" (877). However, at the end of *Doña Bárbara*, the feminine figure chooses not to kill her daughter, and as a result, she is no longer the force of barbarism. In this power-relation, Luzardo has the assigned superiority of being a man of civilization, of the logos of a Eurocentric education, and of the dominant civilization, but Doña Bárbara writes her own story, she *writes her body* and makes the decisions that are no longer a result of the *centaur* (metaphor of barbarism) and her tragic beginnings.

CHAPTER III

SILENCING THE FEMININE FIGURE'S VOICE IN *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING*

GOD

Their Eyes Were Watching God is not only the recollected story of an empowered woman, but the tracing and gathering of the black community's folklore by the pen of a black-female anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston. The novel, set as both the narration of an omniscient narrator and the memoir of Janie Crawford, blends the history of the first established black town with the story of Janie Crawford. Her-story is one of endurance and self-love. Janie, the feminine figure, longs for love, discovers her sexuality and understand the impact of the past of enslaved women in the Old South. Janie marries three times with three different men who oppress her through different means. First, she marries due to an arrange marriage to Logan Killicks who exploits her through farming labor. Second, she marries Jody "Joe" Starks who embodies the appropriation of the morals and standards of white-upper class society. Starks is the "big voice" of the authoritarian patriarch who creates a sophisticated, yet phallogocentric social system. Third, Janie marries Tea Cake who, although treats her with equanimity and listens to her voice, steals from her. At the end, she learns to live on her own by inscribing her own story through oral tradition, and through intimate spoken words (outside of the phallogocentric system) told to her best friend, Pheoby. Words which will, eventually, become part of the public knowledge of Eatonville.

In Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Janie Mae Crawford's voice is silenced by the "big voice" of her second husband Jody Starks. No doubt, the entire novel focuses on recording the non-recorded lore that, for years, was not considered relevant to the American culture. Western phallogocentrism is very present in the society portrayed in *Their*

Eyes Were Watching God, precisely in the small town of Eatonville where the authoritarian speech of Jody Starks rules everyone and everything. Within this phallogocentric society, men assign meaning to the world, they create the social, governmental, and economic system while often ignoring the voice of the feminine. Since Jody Starks establishes the public realm of Eatonville, he also exploits Janie through her work in the town's store and her labor in the domestic sphere. Starks constantly tries to impose his voice, and ideas, on Janie and anyone at reach. Janie's situation can be an example of H  l  ne Cixous' theory of "snare of silence" in which by imposing his voice and sovereign power, a man condemns women to a passive position in society (The Laugh 881). Joe Starks even tries to control Janie from choosing the way she dresses and wears her hair. Nonetheless, Janie Crawford survives by symbolically *writing her body* through storytelling and the conciliation of language and nature as a form of feminine culture. Through self-contemplation and the understanding of the way the phallogocentric and patriarchal system works, Janie creates her own form of expression and frees herself from a marginalization.

The Establishment of the Public Realm in Eatonville

Starks is the continuity of a Western social structure in which women are not supposed to speak nor participate in anything outside the domestic. As he establishes Eatonville, Florida, which is the first black town in America, he creates a social and political structure in which men are the only ones allowed to directly participate. He appropriates the phallogocentric white-upper class culture and makes it his own. After all, since the beginning of the story his greed and ambition for power is highly visible. At first glance, Starks seems to be a sign of hope amid a bad marriage for Janie Crawford, the voiceless feminine figure, who is literally treated like a mule by her First husband Logan Killicks. He is a promising new beginning for her and he

convinces her to marry him and leave her abusive and exploitative first husband. With eloquent speeches and empty promises, Starks convinces Janie to run away with him, and finally live a life “lak a lady” (Hurstun 29).

However, Starks is the carrier of a phallogocentric way of thinking, and Janie is eventually enslaved as she believes his spoken words of greatness. In his own ignorance, Jody Starks’ promises achievements for both of them, and he fulfills them. Janie does live the life of a “lady,” but this lifestyle is one of a sophisticated form of slavery for women. Starks assigns the meaning of every little detail in the world of Eatonville. The people of Eatonville give an almost authoritative privilege to the speech of Jody Starks, and thanks to his eloquence and this same privilege granted to his voice and ideas he establishes an androcentric society. Androcentric in the sense that only the men are believed to have the capacity to be successful in the public affairs of Eatonville, while women are absent from all the sociopolitical affairs and the public decisions. Jody Starks’ strength is not physical, as assumed in assumption that men are the physically stronger of the two sexes, but it relies on the knowledge he acquired through his traveling and “workin’ for white folks all his life” (28). As a result, Starks obtains a belief system which dictates that women must be always silenced, adorned for display, voiceless housewives, while their husbands create the way the society functions in the public realm.

Jody Stark’s tyranny is the result of his ability to talk loudly in public while convincing his audience, and also on his wealth, money and the land he purchases. According to Starks, and his belief system, women must have a silenced stance in public affairs while he grants himself the ability to speak, lead, and be the ultimate authority of Eatonville. The public realm being everything that happens publicly regarding the organization of social, political, and governmental aspects that concern the common interest of the people of Eatonville. As a matter

of fact, Jody Starks is the man who lies the foundation of Eatonville's government and its future capitalistic economy. Through his porch meetings, Starks settles a rudimentary public realm in which his voice, the voice of the patriarch, is directly associated with action and political issues. Jody Starks connects this small community to the outside world as he names it Eatonville. He institutionalizes the "raw place in the woods" into an established "civilized" town (Hurston 35). Of course, civilized meaning that the town is legitimized by outside institutions, "He's gointuh put up uh store and git uh post office from the Goven'ment" (38). A government conformed of people who base their rules and laws through the rejection of the voice of the feminine figure—especially black-mulatto women—and their work and experience as both women and workers of the domestic sphere.

Starks organizes a "committee of menfolk" and builds the type of government that will help the town be recognized by other towns and cities (35). Womenfolk are naturally dissociated from matters of the public and political realms. Womenfolk are told "tuh do 'round 'bout some pies and cakes and sweet p'tater pone" without voicing their concerns publicly (44). This does not only marginalize the voice of women, but it fallaciously labels the domestic realm (and the work related to it) as a type of work that does not play an important part in the betterment of society. Therefore, the immediate superior roles in the hierarchy are those that are occupied by men, and are the positions of "action." The men work through a committee, they handle the money, the goods, and are those whose voices are allowed to make the public speeches.

In this way, Joe Starks' power is reinforced when the men of the town learn to respect and listen to him. His voice excels over the voices of the other men due to the two hundred acres of land that he buys in cash when he moves to Eatonville: "Thus Joe Starks, Mayor of Eatonville and the symbol of Black self-determination, is in fact a man who takes his values from white

societal models” (Crabtree 62). He creates models of government in which the porch is the town-hall. The porch is the public place where the important decisions are made (just like in upper-class white societies in the Old South). Joe takes the initiative to mold the town in his image, and he consequently becomes the dominant patriarchal voice of Eatonville. With an arrogant demure, he designates himself as the master of the town as soon as he gets there: “Ain’t got no Mayor! Well, who tells y’all what to do?” (35). Conveniently, Starks becomes the major authority who dictates the other men on what to do. As the father of Eatonville’s public realm, he manages and possesses the “goods” of money, property, and even of the knowledge on how institutions work. Throughout the novel, Starks enchants the people of the town with his eloquence and the knowledge he acquired through his travels. As the story advances, he becomes the mayor and principal authority of Eatonville. Meanwhile, Janie’s role is decorative by his side. Her voice is constantly silenced by the “big voice” of Starks.

An Oppressing Phallogocentric Agent: Starks’ “Big Voice”

The value of a woman in society is in relation to her husband, to a man. In a discussion Janie has with her husband Jody Starks, he tells her: “Ah aimed tuh be uh big voice. You oughta be glad, ‘cause dat makes uh big woman outa you” (46). Here, Jody Starks echoes the idea that the “big voice” of a man is the product of being imposingly outspoken and dominating at the expense of a woman’s silence. In this case, Janie being “uh big woman” is the same as being speechless and voiceless. Voiceless, in the sense of being unable to give meaning to the world around, abstaining from having any opinion, and from not having the opportunity of becoming a self-agent individual in the public realm of Eatonville. Janie Crawford is an important woman because her husband says so, and not because of her accomplishments, her work, or who she is. Stark dictates the meaning of the world around him and his wife.

Scholar Elizabeth Meese says in “Orality and Textuality in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” that the novel is “about orality—of speakers and modes of speech: Joe’s ‘big voice’ wields power molded on white culture; [and] the grandmother speaks the language of slavery time” (53). Janie is the perfect example of black woman’s situation during these crucial times for the black community in the United States. For some time, she is entrapped by her people’s past through her nanny’s teachings and the thirst for power of her second husband Joe Starks. Nanny Crawford is psychologically enslaved to the memories of her life as a slave, and as a result, she fears for her granddaughter to experience that same excruciating life. Due to this phobia, she teaches Janie Crawford that any lifestyle that is alike to the one of white upper-class women is one to be eternally thankful for—even if it is a position of passivity and domestic asphyxiation.

This idea resonates with Nanny Crawford’s metaphor of black women as the mules of society. Just as in the tales told in Zora Neale Hurston’s book of black American Folklore *Mules and Men*, mules pull and carry the weight of whatever their owner needs to transport. Mules, the hybrid offspring of an ass and a mare, have the reputation of being extremely strong (in specific labor such as load bearing). They are also considered hardworking and stubborn which highly resembles Janie’s character through her journey in the novel. “Nigger woman is de mule uh de world” because she carries the burdens passed down to her by white men, white women, and black men (Hurston 14). As mules, black women are the load bearers—the ones pulling the problems of people in higher positions of the sociopolitical hierarchy. In a way, this harsh lifestyle (which cannot be justified in any way) teaches black women life lessons that are worth listening to, keeping, preserving, and sharing. These harsh realities and lessons are taught to Janie since her early childhood through her grandmother’s oral tradition.

Oral-Tradition and Slavery

Although Nanny Crawford's ideology perpetuates phallogentrism through the oral tradition of slavery-times, and she tries to protect and to give a better life to her granddaughter in the only way she knows. She uses black oral-tradition—the word outside the written word and the Eurocentric ideas related to logos—to teach Janie a language that seeks a better life in comparison to the one she experiences in the times of slavery. Janie says that her grandma's way of thinking and seeing the world around her was completely influenced by her suffering as a slave. She “didn't have time tuh think whut tuh do after you got up on de stool uh do nothin'. De object wuz tuh git dere” (Hurston 114). Nanny Crawford is unable to understand the position of white women, a position of silence and luxurious-domestication, which is what Janie experiences when she marries Jody Starks. The sociopolitical functioning of Eatonville is based on the oppression of the feminine figure's voice and the devaluation of the private and domestic spheres. Upper class (mostly white) women are domestic slaves and pretty objects (Hurston 34). Janie's work at home and at their store is never appreciated nor rewarded. Not surprisingly, Janie's Nanny prefers for women to have the life of the domestic angel of the home because it is placed in a higher rank than the one of a slave and a black woman. Truthfully, Janie's lifestyle as the mayor's wife is a luxurious form of domestication because she becomes a pretty doll, without a voice and a passive life. Janie, like a doll, is displayed on a corner-shelf while being dazzling to the eyes of the town with her beauty and her expensive dresses. Janie becomes this pretty doll and acts the part of the “Mayor's wife” while also advertised as “the bell-cow” followed by the other women of the town who “were the gang” (Hurston 41). For some time, she is tamed by the lifestyle of the upper white society, and, as a result, she is unable to truly voice her ideas. Janie's voice and desires are overshadowed through her position as the wife of the mayor of Eatonville.

Nevertheless, women (whether black or white) are not allowed to participate in the management and decisions that are made in the public sphere which in this novel is presented as the porch. Jody Starks is a product of the governmental systems that he was exposed to in the past. In the same way, Janie's nanny admired the lifestyle of the rich women she worked for, Jody Starks blindly idealizes and desires the highest position in the hierarchical system of society and imposes his voice in Eatonville (which is far from equalitarian and just). This is a system that is not only based on the oppression of a specific demographic of peoples, but that has been deeply rooted in a tradition in which women are inactive in the political and public affairs.

As a husband and individual, Starks is shallow and never truly tries to communicate nor understand Janie. There is a strong codependence between his roles as mayor, husband, and his individuality (or his lack of it thereof). There is never an intimate relationship between Jody and Janie because he is "always talkin' and fixin' things" while Janie is passively "markin' time" (Hurstun 46). He never allows "Mrs. Mayor Starks" to speak up because he says that he did not marry Janie for her to have intellectual and leadership roles, but for her domestic abilities and physiological functions as one of the female sex. Starks says: "mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (Hurstun 43). Joe over-imposes the phallogocentric over Janie. He silences her voice before Janie ever spoke a word.

As Wendy J. McCredie puts it, "Janie accepts her position as Starks' wife, becoming a speechless, protected possession who bows down to his authority in the same way the rest of the town does" (27). This is a phallogocentric way of thinking engraved in Starks mind, and in his idea of a "civilized" society. He ignores the injustice he is perpetuating to women because he truly believes that a woman's place is in the home. Beyond his limited understanding, he tries to

give Janie the life of a “baby-doll” that is meant to “sit on the front porch and rock and fan” while others admire her (Hurston 29). The history of the town of Eatonville and the way the institutions in it are organized and work, the entire system works at the expense of women’s oppression and disregard of their work in the domestic. Starks is taught that women are not meant to speak nor to participate in public matters. He assumes this is true, and he never questions the position he assigns to his wife.

Overall, Hurston’s narrative shows that there is an injudicious assumption that dictates woman as unable to comprehend eloquent speeches or ideas. This is illustrated through Hicks’ voice, after he meets Janie and Starks for the first time, he says that women “loves to hear [him] talk because dey can’t understand it” (Hurston 36). Dazzled by Janie’s beauty, both Hicks and Coker comment that “pretty women” are expensive to maintain. Obviously, this statements implies that, as a woman, she is completely dependent and possessed by the masculine figures. Janie as reliant on her husband further abstains her feminine voice from obtaining autonomy. The masculine voice, and the authoritarian and powerful position it carries, is implied by both Starks and Hicks as they over-imposed their voices without expecting a reply from their female partners. They want to be heard, admired, and never questioned. Chiefly, they do not care to be understood by their wives nor are interested in creating a dialogue with women.

Janie’s Voice

Janie obtains a “voice” until later in the novel: “if the argument rests on the assumption that ‘voice’ is more than speech, a ‘state of mind’ or a positive sense of self, then Janie shows no inclination or desire to share [because] she is at the budding stage of her initiation into self-autonomy” (Al-Khazraji 1435). Here, the word “voice” is not only the sound of an individual’s speech, but it carries traces of their story, ideology, and biases. In Joe’s case, his voice carries the

trace of a European phallogocentric system of thought that blindly assigns the masculine as the only one with the “active tempo” of the two-genders (*NBW* 67). Chiefly, Janie fully obtains self-autonomy after she finally falls in love with Tea Cake, and faces the pain of losing him when he dies. Until she is able to come back to Eatonville victoriously, “wid dem overhalls on” that embraces her femininity and her freed voluminous hair (Hurstun 4).

Janie’s story is the product of a harsh life and the oppression of a phallogocentric system. However, the very aspect that her-story is told by future generations of women and collectively transmitted in Eatonville (as a result of the words Janie tells her intimate friend Phoeby Watson) suffices to demonstrate a new type of language and feminine culture flourishing. Janie chooses to *write* her own story with the praised selective-memory of a woman. As stated by the narrator at the beginning of the novel: “women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly” (Hurstun 3). Janie learns (from the constant attempts of others to overwrite her narrative and body) that the only way for a woman to thrive in a system that does not support her, she must first understand them. Janie learns to understand her grandma, her often misogynistic society, and even the husbands that rarely appreciated her. Janie *writes her body*, her life-story, and her sense of self through a journey of difficulty. Zora Neale Hurston creates a feminine figure whose body and sexuality evolves and is described through several metaphors of nature.

Janie is initially introduced in retrospect by the narrator through the metaphor of a tree: “Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Down and doom was in the branches” (Hurstun 8). Janie’s life story is one that illustrates endurance. In several occasions, she shows strength and stability in the face of

injustice just like a tree that has strong roots. None of her three husband, Logan, Straks, nor Tea Cake are able to fully control her destiny. A tree with strong roots is stable, and it is firm to rip-off from the ground. Despite the town's constant judgment on her age, Janie's vitality and beauty is defined through imagery and metaphors of nature.

In an act of insurgency, Janie *writes her body* through a language veiled by the image of a pear tree, always in full bloom and with strong branches. She acquires the independence to live on her own by inscribing her own story through oral tradition, and through intimate spoken words told to Pheoby which will, eventually, become part of the public knowledge of Eatonville. "Now, dat's how everything wuz, Pheoby, jus' lak Ah told yuh. So Ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisions" (Hurston 191). Janie, no longer adapts to the opinions of the towns' people. She frees herself from their constant criticism. Thus, she no longer cares to hear their opinion about the way things worked with Tea Cake, her overalls, her age, and even her return to Eatonville.

Janie expresses her disillusion with her husband's constant imposition and overwriting of her persona. Joe Starks "took the bloom off of things" because he did not consider asking his wife whether she wanted to make a speech. He never bothers to know if Janie wants to directly participate in public matters and create a voice of her own (Hurston 42). Hurston uses the term "bloom" to express the impossibility for Janie to bear the fruit of her own voice and agency. Joe Starks is rich and powerful, but he is not a nourishing person. He is the toxic side of culture. Joe Starks is a phallogocentric self-admiring culture in which there are no opportunities for subjectivity, poetry and woman.

CONCLUSION

Culture is the allegorical cultivation of the collective's progress through language, recorded history, the arts and oral-tradition among many others. In a way, culture is an overall symbolic database of shared wisdom through language and images. Language carries myths, metaphors, images and the stories of admirable women and men that create Western culture. Through language, people carry the valorizations and de-valorizations of symbols and ideas. A dichotomy that roots from phallogocentrism which is also prominent in *Doña Bárbara* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the idea of nature as a strong opponent of culture. Generally, this dichotomy relates women and nature as dual-symbols that work in opposition to men and culture. Here, nature is considered as everything culture is not. Nature is formed of that which is born inherently, randomly and due to the unpredictable—and mechanical like—rules of the environment. Culture is everything that is man-made. Simply, culture is a product of the decisions made by men and their civilization.

As any dichotomy, the binary of nature versus culture creates a sharp division between nature and culture which influences any other ideas or symbols that are directly—or indirectly—associated with them. Generally, this dichotomy relates woman, the mother, and nature as symbols that work together in opposition to man, the father and culture. Because man is predisposed as the original speaker and the only allowed figure to assign meaning, he is assumed as the only creator of culture and civilization while woman is part of non-culture. As an illustration, the abstract idea of “nature” is often reflected in different cultures as a semi-divine entity, a cherished myth of feminine culture, that co-relates maternity and the natural world with the feminine figure. Coincidentally, the semi-divine entity that co-relates maternity and the environment is illustrated through the pancultural figure of “mother nature.” Through

language—through the traditional used of the term *logos*, or simply, the word—nature is constantly the veiled-signifier of femininity and vice versa. In the traditional Greek sense, *logos* is positioned as “reason” or the “word.” As the word, *logos* is the language which often carries the history, genealogy and continuation of the traditions and values that result from Western culture. With language and within culture, women’s sexuality is explored and described with imagery of flowers, bees, land and even with whole natural sceneries.⁸ Metaphorically, natural imagery works as a veil that covers—but does not completely hide—the feminine figure’s sexual role in society. By using metaphors, imagery and myths of nature to describe women’s bodies and their sexual drives, the authors implicitly examine feminine sexuality in contexts and societies that carry strong taboos and restrictions on the female body. The idea of nature is a product of culture and language. In both novels, the authors allow the protagonists to *write the body* by associating their persona, body and sexuality to nature which gives them self-reliance and self-agency. Both Doña Bárbara and Janie free themselves from being a deterministic product of a phallogocentric social and cultural system. Through the reconciliation of the word, or *logos*, with the idea of nature, the feminine figure obtains a voice that gives her the opportunity to speak, sense and think outside the hierarchical dichotomies shaped by phallogocentrism.

Rómulo Gallegos and Zora Neale Hurston gently describe their protagonists’ sexuality, body and independence through metaphors that relate them to nature. This is a brilliant strategy that opens the possibility of empowering women while not creating an objectified feminine body out of the protagonists. The authors’ pen creates a feminine figure whose identity is as powerful, alive and nourishing as that of a pear tree or the open field of a plain. Both women *write the body*

⁸ For a possible example on woman’s cultural relation to nature consult Sherry B. Ortner’s essay “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” which explores the connection of maternity, nature and woman.

by exercising their critical thinking and awareness of the world around them. Doña Bárbara and Janie Crawford choose to be more than their past and who their society and culture expects them to be. As any metaphor, the feminine body as part of nature serves as a tool that helps the protagonists avoid simplifications and orthodox roles of passivity often stereotypical of feminine women. By relating the feminine body to nature, the protagonists' sexuality and body are described as part of something more than a plain image, afar from a shallow erotization nor the category of being part of the market goods, and are instead described as women who know who they are and what they want. The two women, although different, construct a role in society that flourishes through a strong relation between their body and their mind. Doña Bárbara is often described as an Amazon—an extension of the wilderness of the Plain. She is *la llanura* which is beautiful, deathly and frequently amoral. In Janie's case, she *writes her body* through a language veiled by the image of a pear tree and the branches that grow from it. She learns to live on her own by *writing her body* and her-story through an oral tradition that roots from the times of slavery—through the intimate spoken words told to her friend Pheoby—which will eventually become part of the public knowledge of Eatonville.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie learns to let go of her past, the memory of her husbands, the teachings of her grandmother and the constant criticism of the people of her town. The people of Eatonville judge Janie for marrying a younger man, for wearing her overalls and her abundant hair down while feeling beautiful and in full “bloom” just as when she was sixteen years old which was when she experienced her sexuality for the very first time (Hurstons 11). As an author, Hurston highlights the importance of literacy and critical thinking for a woman's development and self-understanding. Hurston presents a feminine figure of oral-tradition through writing. The novel itself becomes the precise example of what a woman can accomplish through

writing outside phallogocentrism in relation to the advancement of other women. The text is the example of a femininity that is based on the voice of someone who, like the idea of maternal love, nourishes others. In the case of *Doña Bárbara*, the protagonist stands for a woman who appropriates the voice of the patriarch and enforces dominion over her society. Nonetheless, while Doña Bárbara repeats the masculinist attitude of the plainsman, she paradoxically represents the plain and the abstract idea of nature. At the end, she chooses to set aside her appropriation of patriarchal-barbaric values and forgoes her deterministic destiny as a product of barbarism. Wild and ungovernable by culture and Santos Luzardo, she decides to vanish from the plain and finally allow a maternal love for her daughter Marisela to flourish. However, in the case of Marisela (Doña Bárbara's daughter), her connection to nature illustrates her patriarchal prison. She becomes the typical housewife, "the flower of Altamira," who lives at the expense of her husband Luzardo. As a flower, she is passive and inactive in the public realm while her only role is that of the domestic sphere (Malloy 271). In Marisela's situation, her connection with nature as a decorative flower is a product of the cultural oppression that comes with her lack of activity in naming the world around her. Not only is Marisela burdened by her lack of logos, but by her conformism of staying in the same place the system originally places her to be in. As opposed to Doña Bárbara, who frees herself from both barbarism's patriarchal social structure and of Luzardo's phallogocentric ideas of educating and "civilizing" her.

Doña Bárbara surpasses the traumas of her past by *writing the body* while becoming a self-conscious and self-agent woman. The man-eater (*la devoradora de hombres*), Doña Bárbara, chooses her path, writes the narrative of her persona and body while experiencing a journey in which there is no influence of others on her decisions in life. Both narratives of Doña Bárbara and Janie Crawford are examples of the fact that a woman can *write the body*, her-story, through

the same symbols, metaphors and myths that once served as justifications and tools for the oppression and silence of the feminine figure.

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VITA

Name: Daniela Núñez Ochoa

Address: 310 E. Travis., Laredo, TX 78040

Email Address: daniela.nunez@dusty.tamtu.edu

Education: B.A., English Language & Literature, and Spanish Language & Literature,
Texas A&M International University, 2015

M.A., English, Texas A&M International University, 2017