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The Mythology of Grotesque Women in the Short Stories of Rosario Ferré and Elena Garro: "It's Not Me, It's You"

Yomira Jatzin Varela Guadiana

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THE MYTHOLOGY OF GROTESQUE WOMEN IN THE SHORT STORIES OF

ROSARIO FERRE AND ELENA GARRO:

“IT’S NOT ME, IT’S YOU”

A Thesis

by

YOMIRA JATZIN VARELA GUADIANA

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

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2020

Major Subject: Language, Literature, and Translation

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August 2020

Major Subject: Language, Literature, and Translation

ABSTRACT

The Mythology of Grotesque Women in the Short Stories of

Rosario Ferré and Elena Garro:

“It’s Not Me, It’s You” (August 2020)

Yomira Jatzin Varela Guadiana, B.A., Texas A&M International University;

Co-Chairs of Committee: Dr. Jose Cardona and Dr. Manuel Broncano

The short stories of Latin American writers like Rosario Ferré and Elena Garro are molded by the frameworks in which they have been constructed. Literature, far from being disconnected by the impositions of borders, geographical or otherwise, remains allied to the frameworks and ideologies that paved the way to its inception. In particular, countries in what is known as the Global South share parallel histories and are thus linked by the structures they have in common. The literature of the U.S. South, for example, is connected not merely to the nation itself, but to other entities outside of it like the Caribbean and South America. As evidenced by Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom* and Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, some of the recurring themes set forth in their writing are not isolated by their place in the world, but rather, by the ideologies and frameworks which they imitate.

Among the central concern of these literatures is “unperception” among many levels, but for the purpose of this paper, I refer to the unperception of the femme (anything associated with women and femininity, including gender and sexuality but not confined to it). In particular, in Ferré’s and Garro’s stories, we witness how the structures in which they write—which are similar, if not the same, as the ones in Faulkner’s and Hurston’s novels—are used but vindicated, ridiculed, and at times, rendered useless and unreal.

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INTRODUCTION

The portrayal of irreverent and transgressing “Others” in the short stories of Rosario Ferré and Elena Garro mythologize the grotesque characteristics of women, the indigenous, and Afro-Caribbeans as an essential element of their existence within an ideological framework which constantly works to erase them from literature and history. Ferré and Garro’s writing is reminiscent of Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom* and Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as the worlds they create reveal the transnational characteristic of parallel universes. In particular, the geographical and ideological division between U.S. North and South which sparked the Civil War is closely linked to the “Global South” of the other colonized Americas. As I delve into the complexities of the Global South—still commonly known as the “Third World”—the focus lies “in a post-national sense to address spaces and peoples negatively impacted by contemporary capitalist globalization” (Mahler 1). The history of Mexico, the Caribbean Islands, and other strategic regions along South America facilitated the purchase and exchange of human lives, and the subsequent propagation of slavery across the Americas. Faulkner’s and Hurston’s fiction explores these distinctions of racial multiplicity, gender, and what I call *unperception* as a part of U.S. and Southern American history. The U.S. South, I argue, is very much a part of the Global South, and is therefore affected by and similarly affective *to* the literature of the Hispanic American world.

In this thesis, I will define and demonstrate the reality¹ of unperception as a mechanic in which hierarchical societies organize in my comparative analysis of these works. Unperception is not the same as misperception or erasure. Rather, it is a stratagem in which a privileged or

¹ This thesis follows the model of *The Comparatist*.

powerful class attempts to (re)create the Other according to their own conceptions of difference. In other words, it is the negation of perception, the ability to mold the subaltern's material reality; it is the historic, social, political, and institutional act of overwriting. The Other is acknowledged only in so far as they can be "made" within the exploitative, virulent frameworks of capitalist alienation, supremacist ideology, authoritarianism, and patriarchal obedience. Thus, they are not erased, for they "exist," and they are not misperceived, as they are seen, but the subaltern is unperceived as a grotesque, alternate version of themselves that can only be written or created by those with the power to marginalize them to the peripheries of society.

I have chosen to distinguish unperception as exceptional in the literatures of the Global South because it is a valuable facet of alienation in the Americas. In particular, I have undertaken this task in order to contribute to a larger work of intersectional and comparative studies. My specific focus for this thesis will be show how unperception plays a role in the creation of women as grotesque and (un)desirable Others in Hispanic American literature that has been influenced and is parallel to the works of Global South authors like Faulkner and Hurston. By analyzing the short stories of Rosario Ferré and Elena Garro, I will present why the mechanisms of unperception are necessary in the marginalization of the femme characters. I will argue that a character is defined as "femme" by its' resistance to "femaleness" as defined by Andrea Long-Chu, in which the female is an object that expresses "the desires of another" (36). By so doing, I will also disambiguate the relationship between literary representation and material reality. It is important for me to make this connection because the purpose of this research is not merely academic, but practical; in an attempt to understand the mechanics of oppression across the Global South, I am also ultimately working to undo marginality and the alienation of the Other.

I will be analyzing Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, I will focus on the femme narrative voice of Rosa Coldfield as it actively tries to emerge from below Quentin Compson's patriarchal revisions of her story. The "struggle of reconstruction" which John McClure refers to is rampant throughout the novel (98). The recreation of Thomas Sutpen's rise and fall is incomplete, as Quentin consciously overrides Rosa's narrative, and Rosa herself privatizes the account as a personal vendetta against the patriarch, Sutpen. Moreover, I focus on *Absalom, Absalom* because of the dynamic between Rosa Coldfield and Clytemnestra, Sutpen's illegitimate slave daughter. The relationship between the two women is one which exemplifies unperception in action, as Rosa unperceives Clytie as a shadow to the man, Sutpen's sinister double. Faulkner's representation of their changing relationship during the Civil War is thus a move towards the disavowal of oppressive hierarchies but does not quite reach that goal; Clytie still remains silent, and the gaps in Rosa and Quentin's knowledge of her are insurmountable.

I will also be examining Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The main character, Janie, is an example of narrative and authorial prowess. Her journey throughout the novel is told in her own way, to the point in which the narrative voice eventually becomes Janie's voice. I will dissect how Janie is unperceived by the public—in this case represented by the townsfolk of Eatonville and the Everglades—and by her romantic partners Logan Killicks, Joe "Jody" Starks, and Tea Cake. Freud's essay, "Civilization and its Discontents," is used because of his analysis of Nature and human constructs in conjunction with Patrice Jones' "Eros and the Mechanisms of Eco-Defense." I will argue that Janie, as a representation and the figure of Nature, is unperceived by the world as grotesque; her femininity, her sexuality, and above all, her propensity for freedom makes her an Other in the eyes of the American South and the plantation system

keeping hierarchies of race in place. In particular, as I discuss Freud's essay and Jones' article, I will be arguing that Janie, as Nature, is at constant odds with institutions of power because her mere existence is a thread to the hierarchies imposed upon society. Above all, I will examine how the creation of the State is the sociological reaction to fear of Nature as the Other, and the way that Janie fits into this category as she seeks out the mysteries of freedom.

In Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, the author demonstrates the fate of the unperceived through Clytie, Sutpen's illegitimate daughter, who throughout the novel remains an enigma within an enigma. Our second-hand narrator, Quentin Compson, is unable to capture Clytie's interior; he is only able to imagine Clytie according to Rosa Coldfield, whose narrative is one of white womanhood threatened by the fall of the South during the Civil War. In contrast, in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the protagonist Janie, as subaltern, repossesses her agency through dramatic and narrative action. In order to escape the fragmentation of her inner self and outer self—that is, of self-consciousness and material reality—she actively works around the unperception which American systems of power impose on her. Despite these essential differences of treatment towards the othered subject, both novels capture the intimacy of material reality as it upsets a primordial, metaphysical truth: the nature of the Other as oneself.

Furthermore, I will be utilizing Rosario Ferré's short stories, "Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres" and "La muñeca menor" to examine the frameworks of hierarchical, capitalist, patriarchal subjugation as they migrate across the Global South and through time. In "La muñeca menor," I will be examining the figure of the youngest niece as it begins to deteriorate under patriarchal impositions of womanhood and non-existence. I am interested in the representation of women as grotesque and inanimate Others who are exploited by the men they form relationships with. In contrast with Hurston's Janie, the protagonist of "La muñeca menor" does not self-

actualize or live freely but is confined to the patriarchal home until her ultimate objectification, the act of becoming a doll. In my research of said phenomenon, I will be applying Joseph-Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics to Ferré's writing. Particularly, I will explore what the condition of the slave which he writes about is susceptible to a "triple loss" of agency which facilitates the Other's "expulsion from humanity altogether" (Mbembe 21). In "Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres" I will analyze the relationship between the two Isabels who are separated by race, class, and patriarchal violence. The role assigned to each Isabel—Isabel Luberza as the epitome of Eurocentric standards of beauty and Isabel la Negra as the stereotypical vision of the downtrodden black woman—is upended by the death of Ambrosio, Isabel Luberza's husband and lover to Isabel la Negra. The death of the patriarch destabilizes each woman's position in the newly emerging capitalist Puerto Rican society. In my analysis of how unperception is attributed to both Isabels, I will be using Nietzsche's dialectic of the Dionysian and Apollonian, as well as Lacan's analysis of courtly love. The Madonna-Whore Complex which is rampant throughout the story is to be taken into consideration in terms of how women are unperceived by the male gaze not just individually, but systemically. As in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, I will be making comparisons between the power of the State and the power of the people as it presents itself through the form of a nation (Puerto Rico) and tribalism (the *pueblo*).

Similarly, I will also be analyzing Garro's short stories "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" and "El robo de Tiztla" in terms of how western canons are presented, used, and ultimately deconstructed. For "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas," I will inspect the relationship between the femme protagonist, Laura, and her husbands. In my examination of Laura's relationships, I hope to highlight how Garro decolonizes Time in order to examine the unperception of femininity in

the Hispanic American sphere. More specifically, I will be tackling the fear of *lo malinchista* in Garro's work as an expression of prejudice in Mexican society with deep biblical roots. I will also be complimenting my analysis with Camus' definition of the absurd as "the primitive hostility of the world [which] rises up to face us across millennia" (11). In regards to Time, I will apply Camus' rhetoric to how civilizations denote productivity, value, and holiness to linear Time as a measure of human life. In "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" Time is not linear, but cyclical. The nature of Time as a constant, never-ending cycle is significant to my interpretation of "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" and Garro's portrayal of Laura and her first husband as traitors. In "El robo de Tiztla," I will also analyze this vision of betrayal as it filters through the writing via the femme characters. They are painted as grotesques, for they are aligned and unperceived as unnatural and alien. The character of Lorenza is likened to witchcraft through her indigeneity and her "inherent" wickedness as a woman, at least according to the Catholic mythos of original sin and gender roles. Like in the previous texts, I will also be drawing comparisons between the femme characters of this story—Evita and Lorenza—and their dynamic as it is translated by the nature of the "crime" which is not a crime. More importantly, however, I will argue that "El robo de Tiztla," through the unperception of Lorenza, is above all a metaphor for colonialism. Andrea Long-Chu's book, *Females*, will be used to build a connection between "femaleness" (as opposed to womanhood) and the common existential fear of a patriarchal society which struggles to visualize itself as valid in the face of inconsistency. This will reveal the relationship between the mysterious, supernatural theft in Tiztla during the Mexican Independence Day as Garro's allusion to the invention of the Americas as, indeed, an invention, and not a discovery.

The short stories of Latin American writers like Rosario Ferré and Elena Garro capture the parallel histories of the Global South. Unperception, the overwriting of the subaltern, is a common phenomenon in the literatures of the grotesque, the marginalized, the silenced. Specifically, the femme characters partake in a constant struggle to be recognized not as objects of another's desire, but as independent subjects. The narrative importance and authorial power of the subaltern resides even within the oppressive frameworks instituted by capitalist, patriarchal, and imperial agents and States. I've decided to focus my thesis on *la voz que contesta*, the character who speaks for themselves, in an attempt to clarify the role of unperception and alienation in the short stories of writers like Garro and Ferré, who are themselves the result of violent structures and traditions. The Global South, rather than a geographical area, is taken into my research as conceptual, the meetings of peoples across history by the ideologies they espouse, rather than the inflexible impositions of borders by war, famine, and genocide. Thus, I will examine the texts as patterns to a larger question—the question of visibility in a world set to obfuscate undesirables—in order to *see* past what I was taught to see, and eventually, to understand the role of community and camaraderie in the task of decolonization.

I THE POLITICS OF UNPERCEPTION IN *Absalom, Absalom* AND *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

I would like to begin my analysis of unperception with Faulkner's novel. *Absalom, Absalom* is a perfect example of narrative silences. The novel, told by Quentin as he is made to listen to Rosa Coldfield, follows the myth of the Sutpen empire and its subsequent fall from grace. In Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, the interactions between the white and black characters highlight the forced unperception of the othered character (as Thing) which refuses said objectification. When I write about "unperception," I refer to the particular proclivity of dismissing the Other as agent of their own life. Unlike misperception, the act of misinterpreting the Other, unperception is the denial of the Other's abruptly recognized autonomy. The terministic screen ascribed to the Other (usually through dehumanizing slurs, i.e. "nigger," "injun," or any derivative therein) posits and creates a conception of the Other which is momentarily disturbed by recognition of their personhood. Rosa Coldfield narrates her story of love lost and bitter affronts without providing explanations; there are gaps of silence left unbreeched in which her voice and Quentin's are in direct opposition to each other. She does not entirely stop narrating, "the voice not ceasing but vanishing into and then out of the long intervals like a stream" (Faulkner 2), at which point Quentin sees himself filling up these narrative voices and actively opposing them. When Rosa's voice begins to fade, it is Quentin who conjectures the "man-horse-demon... Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table" (2-3). Akin to both translator and executioner, Quentin's job as the second-hand narrator of *Absalom, Absalom* is to *sanitize* Rosa's account of events and make "sense" of the madness which the fall of Sutpen's Hundred inspired.

In addition, Quentin's choice of words in this manufactured, pre-packaged version of the tale is reminiscent of colonization and pilgrim narratives. For instance, when Rosa chooses to describe Sutpen's arrival and history in Jefferson as "[tearing] violently a plantation," Quentin instead opts to say that he "built a plantation" (Faulkner 3), thereby changing the connotation of that particular account. Similarly, Quentin tells us Sutpen "begot a son and a daughter" while Rosa interjects by claiming he "without gentleness begot [them]" (3). Quentin then, through the editing of Rosa's story, acquires an authorial voice that goes beyond the realm of narration, for he actively works in opposition to Rosa's recollections in order to interpret her narrative quietness and "re-write" her in accordance to his own white, heteronormative, and patriarchal conception of the world. Hence, it is not entirely unsurprising that what makes *Absalom, Absalom* a novel about unperception is not merely the dramatic and tragic irony of Sutpen's downfall, but also the structure of the novel itself. Here we have a character simulating centuries of American tradition by writing himself into Rosa's narrative and denying her the authorial voice which he has usurped. He conquers, he controls, and he imposes his own voice "in the silence of notpeople in notlanguage" (3), attempting to bring reason and clarity to the savage inhumanity of what he perceives to be the uncivilized, othered feminine. Like the colonizer, the settler, and the patriarch, Quentin struggles against Rosa's narrative, thereby establishing a perpetual tension and suspense that follows the reader until the very last page.

While the narrators battled against each other for authorial narrative power, the drama unfolds at much the same pace as it decays. Faulkner's writing encapsulates the nostalgia which eats at these characters and makes ghosts out of them. As John McClure writes, the syntax of decadence that Faulkner utilizes in his novels highlights the white, Southern preoccupation with a past they can't quite confront. According to McClure, "their voices reveal them as tormented,

angry beings, obsessed with a past they can neither repudiate nor recapture, bent not so much on getting at the truth as on getting away from it, in spite of their protestations” (97). Faulkner’s characters, as white southerners, cannot disavow their history or claim it as ideal. Painted as traitor and cowards, in the psyche of the white southerner—be it men or women—the Old South was a time in which power unambiguously belong to them. Now, in the midst of its ruins, they cannot bear to embrace their defeat for to do so would be indeed to allow national unperception, as they see it, to dictate their lives. Although Faulkner attempts to weave a tale in which the bereaved white southerner becomes an object of utmost grotesqueness and humanity, the glaring absence of the black voice in a novel primarily about the Civil War and slavery highlights the conundrum faced by today’s reader. To be unaware of the Other’s inner narrative voice is a form of historic erasure. And yet, it is perhaps by tracking the voicelessness of the subaltern that we can find the difference between empowerment and marginalization within power hierarchies. Rather than adhering to a flimsy “middle-ground” which contributes to unperception and alienation, we must read these stories as incomplete pieces to a greater puzzle of literature, history, society, and politics.

In Faulkner’s work, this historic metaphysical erasure is particularly telling in the interactions between the white narrative voice and the objectified black Other. The multiple narrators in *Absalom, Absalom*, primarily Rosa Coldfield and Quentin Compson, are caught up in “a struggle of reconstruction, the difficulty of knowing. It indicates, too, a contradiction... between a desire to resolve past mysteries and a desire to take refuge in them from a desolate present” (McClure 98). As representatives of the Old South and the New South, respectively, Rosa and Quentin struggle to reconcile the outrage and fear of their wounded regional pride with their intermittent want to escape from a present where they are considered denizen Cains. The

South, no longer an economic or cultural mecca for the U.S. after 1865, reinforces what little ownership of itself it still possesses by reifying the border which separates it from the North. In order to redefine himself or herself, the white southerner grasps at past insecurities, and unable to resolve them, chooses then to wear them as armor against what they envision to be historic revisionism of the Civil War courtesy of the northern states. Therefore, unperception in the context of *Absalom, Absalom* is demonstrated through both its content and structure.

Structurally, the two narrators are always in direct opposition to each other's one, Quentin as the symbol of the New South, masculine systems wretchedly trying to hold on to the American myth of power through patriarchy, and Rosa as the symbol of the Old South, of white womanhood bitterly engrossed in what is deemed to be a fall from aristocratic grace.

In addition, when we speak about Quentin's role in usurping Rosa's narrative and authorial prowess, that is by no means an admission of her trustworthiness as a storyteller. After all, both Rosa and Quentin are privy only to the Sutpen downfall through second-hand experience. Rosa, for instance, despite experiencing Sutpen's legacy is only able to reconfigure bits and pieces of the past without the major clues needed to complete the truth. She recounts Charles Bon's death, for example, despite having never met him: "[she] did not love him; how could [she]? [She] had never even heard his voice, had only Ellen's word for it that there was such a person" (Faulkner 151). Rosa's only interactions with Charles Bon are through Judith, and she is only vaguely aware of what he looks like because of her sister, Ellen, and a photograph she spied in her niece's room. As she relates to Quentin the experience and non-mourning of Charles Bon, we note that her story idealizes a certain notion of chivalry and girlhood which she lost during the vestiges of the Civil War. As a prior Lady, Rosa enjoyed the privilege of the idealized white woman as object.

According to the medieval courtly notion of womanhood, the desirability of Rosa laid not in her ability to work, toil, and produced (as enslaved black women were valued), but rather in her ability to adorn the patriarchal home and perpetuate the lineage of aristocratic southern whitehood. Even though her duty was to be but a mere vessel, Rosa prefer to go back to this state of being than to assimilate and adapt to the new industrial role of women under the post-Civil War era. Rosa becomes the “polymath love’s androgynous advocate” (151), the mediator between Judith, Charles Bon, and even Henry, because of her insistent need to reclaim others’ narrative as her own and imitate the role of the courtly Lady as the vessel of patriarchal desire. Ultimately, Rosa’s narrative technique “indicates as well a more radical impulse to retreat from reality, an “almost perverted” flirtation with the relief afforded by ultimate closure” (McClure 98). As her whiteness pervades the tale of Sutpen’s downfall with the idealization of southern conceptions of girlhood, Rosa negates her social and political reality within the home of the patriarch. She chooses to “forget” materiality as she weaves a tale in which the fall of the Sutpen empire revolves primarily around *her* and the ways other characters like Judith, Clytie, and Charles Bon contribute to her narrative and dramatic importance. In essence, Rosa’s narration perpetuates a tradition of All-American unperception stemming from the singularity and subjectivity of the white narrator.

Through the framework that Faulkner portrays in Sutpen’s journey from the U.S., to the Caribbean, back to Mississippi, the reading of Latin American literature can also be evaluated as an extension of the U.S. South, which is reminiscent of the patriarchal and colonizing influence of Spain (primarily) and other European countries also on a quest to “own” the Americas. In the short stories of Rosario Ferré and Elena Garro, the presence of unperceptions and the grotesque mythology of the *othered* demonstrate a narrative structure which critiques the role of capitalist

ideology in supremacist and hierarchical societies. Rosa's retelling of the Sutpen empire is a fragmented narrative that encapsulates how unperception and grotesque interpretations of the Other as a mythical object perpetuate the power dynamics of colonialism and white, capitalist supremacy. Primarily, I hope to explore the inner machinations and behavioral processes of subalterns like Faulkner's Rosa and Clytie, and Hurston's Janie as they are confronted with the facticity—and therefore plasticity—of social power within political hierarchies of citizenship and belonging. In so doing, I attempt to disambiguate the framework of alienation politics that both authors establish. Once this framework has been explored, I will then analyze and interpret how unperception is written into the short stories of Latin American authors like Rosario Ferré and Elena Garro.

Particularly, I introduce the term “unperception” as the metaphysical struggle of those historically inhabiting the top of hierarchies of power across the American hemisphere. I use unperception not as a lack of awareness or ignorance of a topic/person, but rather as the willful rejection and dismissal of that “thing” which is momentarily and briefly perceived. Unlike erasure, what (or rather, who) is unperceived--the Other--remains present and unchanging despite efforts to deny the existence of a consciousness. The power of unperception lies *with* the Other as the white character and narrator tries, unsuccessfully, to return to a time in which they were not aware of the othered subject as a person. The characters whose backgrounds coincide with historically powerful classes undergo a moment of *anagnorisis* in which they recoil away from the initial recognition of the Other as subject. The white character sees, for the first time, the subaltern's personhood, realizes the many bonds which are shared between them, and through this realization becomes conscious of his/her social power as a mere construct.

This dialectic of master against slave, power against disenfranchisement, whiteness against otherhood, and citizenship against unbelonging is best treated in Hegelian terms. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the encounter between two people is treated as the abstract and contradictory struggle between self-consciousness. The struggle to overcome the objectified Other results in a struggle between consciousnesses, in which the subject and the object intend on the death of the other; to the subject "his essence exhibits itself as that of an other; he is external to himself, and he must sublimate that being-external-to-himself. The other is a diversely entangled and existing consciousness; he must intuit his otherness as pure being-for itself or as absolute negation" (112). If the subject exterminates the other, Hegel writes, there is an absolute "abstract" negation of the subject's own consciousness and perceived subjectivity, as he is no longer able to measure himself as self-conscious through the recognition that the Other provided. Yet, the subject cannot truly and wholeheartedly validate itself as a subject without the Other's presence affirming its own existence and reality. In this primitive tangle of cognition and *recognition*, the subject and the object become immersed in a "natural" state of strife. Similarly, in Faulkner's works we often see this contradictory desire in the interactions of his diametrically opposed characters. Across the spectrum of race and gender, the subjective white narrative voice, like Rosa Coldfield's, is always at odds with the objectified Other. The objectified Other in *Absalom, Absalom* is not mainly Charles Bon, though his story is indeed an important demonstration of violence and tragedy; rather, the character with the most dramatic significance in my analysis of unperception is Clytemnestra, Sutpen's slave daughter, who is none other than Judith's older half-sister and Rosa's niece.

Clytemnestra, unlike Charles Bon, never gets any inner monologues courtesy of Quentin and Rosa's imagination; she is merely an ever-present void that Rosa feels fearful of and

repulsed by. We encounter in the act of not-naming her beyond her relationship to Sutpen an immediate repudiation of the “sameness” which the narrator has perceived in her marginalized counteroart. The “absolute negation” which Hegel posits is best represented in the novel by the institution of slavery. While in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the narrative voice metamorphoses into a unified femme “I,” in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom*, we have no such unity of voices. The white protagonist, Rosa, recoils as if struck, and in an attempt to hold on to her socially constructed “realities” and the liminal power which it concedes her, she forces herself to *unperceive* the Other, Clytie, thereby reducing her to the role of a phenomenologically and materially enslaved object. There is an acute repudiation of a unified voice present in which the Other’s own voice is encountered by the white self and unperceived. In the context of *Absalom, Absalom*, Faulkner demonstrates this primarily through the encounters between Clytemnestra and Rosa Coldfield. Through a careful analysis of the interactions between these characters, we are able to discern how the framework that Faulkner imitates in his writing differs from that of Hurston’s, and most importantly, how this structure is then adopted by Latin American women authors in their own writing. Hence, rather than simply looking at “American literature” or “American myths” as strictly confined to the U.S., we are also ultimately linking history and politics outside the borders which complicate full analysis of certain literatures.

In speaking about these borders, the intersections of gender and race often highlight the significance of profit within the larger context of American politics. Simulated value, i.e. capital, condones social stratification and creates a narrative which it adheres to in order to propagate ideology, the ideology of power. The propagation of this ideology in the South, much like everywhere else, is endorsed through hierarchies of gender, race, and class. Sutpen’s story is the story of the Southern businessman. The establishment of his legacy and the rule of the patriarch

constitute the basis of his “history” in Yoknapatawpha County. He’s the self-made man who, following a long tradition of conquerors and colonizers, sets out to make a name for himself out of the nothingness that his last name brings. By Quentin’s own admission, it is impossible not to be privy to the Sutpen myth for it was a “part of the town’s—Jefferson’s—eighty years heritage of the same air which the man himself breathed” (Faulkner 6). The regional identity of the southerner in this area is tied to the myths and legends he believes. Quentin, because he represents the New “disenfranchised” South, holds on to the inherited memory of Sutpen’s capitalist venture as a form of identity and common folklore. He is not only a character and narrator but a body, a vessel, “an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth” (6). As the repository of southern myths of wealth and grit, made even more obvious by Rosa’s decision to pass on her ghosts to him, Quentin is bound to unperception and power. He must believe in Sutpen’s legacy, for his own existence is validated by it.

Before we look exclusively at the relationship between Clytie and Rosa, we must first delve into the creation of Sutpen’s empire and myth. Sutpen’s tale, despite guarantees of its almost mythic nature, strays from the typical vision of the Southern gent that Rosa visualizes. He arrives in Mississippi “with a horse and two pistols and a name which nobody ever heard of before, knew for certain was his own anymore than the horse was his own or even the pistols, seeking some place to hide himself” (Faulkner 9). Besides the horse and his guns, Sutpen only has his name and his whiteness to rely on. Typical of imperial accounts of conquest, the narrative of the rise and fall of the Sutpen family is painted as the story of one exceptional man. According to James Baldwin, it is the fantasy of exceptionality that the southerner cannot let go of: “like all other Americans, he must subscribe to [...] the Constitution; at the same time, these beliefs and

principles seem determined to destroy the South” (212). The contradictory desires of the white southerner wreck havoc on his conceptions of the world, which results in the haunting of the Old South evidenced in the years after the Civil War. Baldwin critiques Faulkner’s obsession with the aesthetic of gallant ruin cultivated by the defeated Southerner. He reminds us that this contradiction is uniquely owned by the ideology of whiteness and power, as “slaveholding southerners were not the only people who perished in the war. Negroes and northerners were also blown to bits” (212). Therefore, to focus on the rise and fall of Sutpen as a traffic tale of chivalry and destiny particular to the conquered white southerners like Rosa and Quentin is akin to erasing the experiences of all the othered and undesirable subjects, like black, indigenous, and Hispanic women whose narratives were buried beneath the vestiges of the war.

Sutpen’s tale, despite guarantees of its mythic nature, is tainted by the presence of “a herd of wild beasts that he had hunted down singlehanded because he was stronger in fear than even they were in whatever heathen place he had fled from” (Faulkner 11). The presence of his slaves complicates Sutpen's status as "exceptional" for it highlights the use of exploited and unpaid labor performed unwillingly. Moreover, it hints at a double-life, a past which the reader later finds out is set in the midst of the Haitian Revolution. In the eyes of the southern narrator, Haiti occupies a space of transgression and perversity, as the borders of slave-master are radically erased. Hence its nature as “heathen” place, where the white Christian God and the so-called natural state of slavery are abolished. The fact that Sutpen arrives in Jefferson with the children of the revolution shackled to his will determines his eventual fate at the hands of his two unrecognized offspring—Clytie and Bon. I will focus explicitly on Clytie because unlike Bon, who is visibly white and fathered into the bourgeoisie by virtue of his mother’s, Eulalia’s, side of the family, Clytie is an unambiguously black woman, and the child of an actual enslaved woman,

making her visibly alien and an inheritor of slavery courtesy of her father. Sutpen's legacy is not the result of individual prowess but of institutionalized power. I will briefly discuss how slave women are subjected to labor conditions which explicitly hinge on their status as slaves *and* women. It is in this intersection of status, race, and gender where unperceptions arise thereof.

As Angela Y. Davis writes in her book *Women, Race, and Class*, the suffering endured by the female slave was one in which her value relied not only on labor production, but on *reproduction*. Slave women produced both labor and the means to double and/or multiply said labor: “when it was profitable to exploit them as if they were men, they were regarded, in effect, as genderless, but when they could be exploited, punished and repressed in ways suited only for women, they were locked into their exclusively female roles” (9). They were producers whose labor consisted of profit through the land they toiled and the children they bore. Yet, in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom*, the slave women does not merely fit into the English model of race and segregation, but must also adopt to the colonial Spanish standard of womanhood and productivity. The only enslaved black woman with any prominence in the novel is Sutpen’s illegitimate daughter, Clytemnestra. Her mother, one of the original slaves brought to Yoknapatawpha with the rest of the “herd,” is never mentioned by name in the entirety of the novel. Clytie, the product of Sutpen’s power over his slave woman, is portrayed as a silent shadow to the father, an overseer to his kingdom, and is therefore privy to some “privileges” not afforded to other slaves. Clytie is raised by Sutpen right by Judith’s side, allowed to play with the same toys, and sleep in the same room. She is not merely his slave, but is treated, to a certain extent, as his family. Hence, Clytie behaves like a Sutpen, despite—or because—of her condition as a slave. As Davis writes, “if Black women bore the terrible burden of equality in oppression, if they enjoyed equality with their men in their domestic environment, then they also asserted their

equality aggressively in challenging the inhuman institution of slavery” (16). Clytemnestra’s mythologically-inclined name is in itself a remnant of rebellion as it establishes an association with royalty, treason, and power. Clytemnestra bespeaks of kingdom, oligarchies; it alludes to, perhaps ironically, the cradle of the so-called “Western civilization.” The influence of Greek mythology and Biblical allegories in the novel brings to the forefront a notion of power dynamics and politics as our narrators, Quentin and Rosa, recall Sutpen’s ascension to the top of the social hierarchy.

Did Sutpen name his illegitimate sons and daughters? As a slave owner, it was typical of the master to name his slaves. And yet, Sutpen does not exactly fit into the typical image of the master. On the contrary, it can be said that Sutpen is the antithesis of everything the Old South stands for. A nobody, a poor white who in childhood and adolescence was perceived by slaves as different than the masters: “he stood there before that white door with the monkey nigger barring it and looking down at him in his patched made-over jeans clothes and no shoes... [and was told] never to come to that front door again but go around to the back” (Faulkner 242). Sutpen had neither the class privileges nor the education that the classic “Southern gentleman” did. Instead, he grew destitute, under a shingle roof and walls made of thin wooden planks. The man that Sutpen is written after, Francis Terry Leak, was in fact both a learned banker and lawyer whose contributions to the Confederacy were backed up by a solid ideology and a capitalist philosophy which excused the use of slave-labor. As Sally Wolff writes in her article, “William Faulkner and the Ledgers of History,” Terry Leak’s diary formed the basis of many of Faulkner’s novels and short stories.

As Faulkner skimmed through Leak’s records, he “encountered in these ledgers an entire world of philosophies, theories, ideas, concrete images, stories, facts, and cultural details of life

in the antebellum South. From these volumes Faulkner seems to have drawn some of his most powerful ideas and themes” (3). Among the ideas and notions that the author encountered in Leak’s diary included the names and ages of his slaves, from whence Faulkner was inspired to create his own characters. Wolff’s research demonstrates the author’s deliberation when choosing his character’s names. The legacy of the McCarrol/Francisco family is in many ways the backbone for Faulkner’s fascination “because of their longevity in one home, their participation in plantation life and slavery, and the effects of the Civil War on their lives and community” (3). The McCarrol’Francisco family and their estate solidified in Faulkner a representation of ambivalence and decadence which he later emulates in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Yet, within the novel, Faulkner’s Sutpen retains only the mere image of Leak. Nothing can be found of the patriarch’s original background as an enterprising inheritor of Southern wealth. Faulkner’s Sutpen, although white, lived in a separate, poorer reality until he was fourteen or fifteen; the only reason the adolescent Sutpen ever left town for the Indies or even knew the islands existed in the first place was through his limited contact with education. His father, a sharecropper, sent him to school “for about three months one winter... [out of] probably mere vindictive envy toward one or two men, planters, whom he had to see every now and then” (Faulkner 251). Sutpen’s time in school was not a deliberate move on his father’s part to secure a better future for him, but simply the reactionary consequence of a sharecropper’s vengeance against the wealthy masters. It was through this interaction with education, and particularly the act of being read to, that the young and illiterate Sutpen “learned that there was a place called the West Indies to which poor men went in ships and became it, it didn’t matter how, so long as that man was clever and courageous” (252). The allure of becoming the master— becoming the wealthy landowner— spurs the young Sutpen’s imagination into action. Sutpen is therefore

introduced to exploration, enterprising, adventure, conquest, colonization, and capitalist fantasies as a frenzied and escapist tendency to assimilate into power, to be seen and perceived, to play the card of whiteness and arrive at exceptionality's door. Sutpen, who as a teenager "had not then learned to read [his] own name; although [he] had been attending the school for almost three months... knew no more than [he] did when [he] entered the schoolroom for the first time" (253) is only able to overcome some of the barriers of ignorance and innocence through the second-hand knowledge he briefly encounters in the classroom. As an illiterate poor white, the young Sutpen sets out for the West Indies to emulate the enterprise of the self-made white capitalist.

Unsurprisingly, throughout the course of the novel Sutpen remains illiterate in the subjects, themes, and ideas unrelated to his rise to power. He knows nothing of letters, culture, mythology, love; it is only in his self-interest to learn the bare minimum necessary to establish his legacy and steal what he cannot. He learns *patois* and French only to understand the Haitian locals and "oversee the plantation" (Faulkner 258) during his stay in the Indies, and after running away from the inconvenience of his "mistake" with Eulalia, he arrives in Jefferson with a French architect and stolen slaves to do his work for him in his new attempt to start over again. Sutpen's cultural and literary repertoire is vacant, as the man himself is only concerned with the material benefits that education can bring. Hence, it is strange to think that Sutpen would name any of his children after mythological, literary or religious figures. In particular, Clytemnestra's name stands out as extraordinary, given the overwhelming Christian undertones of the novel. Clytemnestra, the name attributed to Agamemnon's wife in the *Iliad*, carries the weight of female power and treason which visibly subverts Clytie's reality as a slave.

Finally, we arrive at the most important moment of unperception in *Absalom, Absalom*. We have already discussed the significance of the narrative structure, and so I will not like to

dedicate some time to analyzing the dramatic content of the novel. In the tragic narrative of *Absalom, Absalom*, there are several dramatic lines which eventually intersect: male, female, black, white, wealthy, poor, ambiguous, and so on. Particularly interesting is the way in which these lines meet through Rosa and Clytie. Rosa, who is often referred to by the author as “Cassandra-like,” repeatedly foresees in Clytie something sinister and grotesque. As a child she is aware of Clytie as an “Other” whose presence in the home goes beyond that of mere slave and servant. She fears and imagines her to be the instrument of destiny, an Oedipal extension of fate. Rosa describes Clytie as “rocklike and firm and antedating time and house and doom and all... created in [Sutpen’s] own image the cold Cerberus of his private hell” (140-141). As Sutpen’s illegitimate daughter, Clytie is represented as the phantasm of the patriarch; by virtue of being older than Judith, Henry, and Rosa, as well as occupying the insecure status of “slave,” she is not considered to be a woman in the traditional Eurocentric way. According to Rosa, Clytie is instead a frightening miscegenated substitute for Sutpen, fulfilling the authoritarian role under his roof while he is gone. In essence, Rosa perceives her to be not just an Other, but also a double for Sutpen. Hence, when our narrator speaks about Clytie, she disregards her as an individual by equating her to her oppressor and objectifying her into the role designed for her as subaltern, the one who resides in the margins of Southern colonial, capitalist life.

Throughout the novel, Clytie is pushed towards the periphery by virtue of being an enslaved visually-black woman. Just like Judith, Ellen, and Eulalia, Faulkner’s women are often referred to in relation to their relationships with men and bloodlines. When Rosa speaks about Clytie and Judith, for instance, she pointedly refers to them merely as “Sutpen faces” (Faulkner 26), small fragments of the man. This tendency to view women merely as accessories to male authority is best defined by the commodification of the femme only in so far as their bodies

produce cultural and capital value. The body of the subaltern in Faulkner's fiction is shown to be "read" and "written" by our narrators through the framework of power and hierarchies which they have been nurtured under. In particular, Rosa subjects Clytie to "perception catastrophes," always viewing her from behind a curtain of white enshrouded femininity gatekeeping and overseeing definitions of sexual purity, womanhood, and citizenship. The significance of subalternity as both, legal status and metaphysical erasure in *Absalom, Absalom*, is beholden to the material reality of the Southerner as it crashes down and is dismantled during the Civil War and after.

As a representative of the Old South, Rosa Coldfield is witness to the fall of an empire which owes its power precisely to those it considers expandable and *alien*. The labor performed by the Other is commodified; race essentialism dictates the ideology of the South as it posits the "natural" binaries of masculinity-femininity, and hierarchies of race. The South, having been borne off Spanish colonization and later British, French, and Portuguese resettlement and conquest, constantly attempts to reify itself in its own historical and political ledgers as an isolated empire, owing nothing to the Old World but its perceived purity of blood. The "inter-imperiality" that Laura Doyle suggests in her analysis of capitalism, empire, and dialectics establishes a transnational and transcontinental relationship between the histories of different geographical and ideological worlds. The term implies a certain amount of fluidity and establishes a "political and historical set of conditions created by the violent histories of plural interacting empires and by interacting persons moving between and against empires" (Doyle 160). Relating to the early colonial period of the Southern states, I want to emphasize the historical interactions of the Spanish, British, and French empires, power wars over resources and land, slave importations, and indigenous displacement.

At its core, my focus on Doyle's theory of inter-imperiality relies on the historicity of exchange and warfare as the already-mentioned empires fought to superimpose themselves of the competitor, thereby establishing paradoxical congruences and incongruences in which the border attains particular significance; the border, by virtue of its nationalizing function, was at this time and place malleable, and yet it defined the consciousness of the region's inhabitants. Hence, the "study of empires first of all helps to explain the genesis and functioning of nation-states by revealing the ways that interacting empires have undergirded nation formation and shaped national political discourses" (161). Therefore, to speak and write about the South in my analysis of alienation politics and unperception is not only to talk about Anglo-America, but to interpret the Southern consciousness as part of the Global South along the Caribbean and Latin America.

In both, Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the emulation of imperial consciousness and capitalist decadence contributes to the performance of citizenship that the main characters resort to. Particularly, the patriarchs Thomas Sutpen and Joe Starks, in defining themselves through the acquisition of capital and institutional authority, define the feminine subalterns—Clytie and Janie—as the mythic, the grotesque, the noncitizen. Their imperial consciousness commodifies the subaltern as thing, unperceiving them as objects in their bid for power. In the case of *Absalom, Absalom*, Sutpen and Rosa disregard Clytie merely as an extension of supremacy through her relation to the white capitalist patriarch. She is described as "the face without sex or age because it had never possessed either: the same sphinx face which she had been born with, which had looked down from the loft that night beside Judith's" when Sutpen fought his male slaves in a ritual of dominance and authority (Faulkner 141). Clytie is depersonalized of a complex human identity while represented as the mythic riddler residing outside the outskirts of Thebes; she is, in essence, a mimic, a distortion and "a

figure for [their] essential displacement” (O’Connor 19). The unchanging and grotesque nature of Clytie unsettles Rosa, who has always been aware of her as Judith’s sister-slave and Sutpen’s shadow. Her blackness and her womanhood are contradictory, ungraspable; to Rosa, Clytie is unfathomable, precisely because she represents the culmination of Southern violence.

Clytie, standing upon the stairs as Rosa runs into the Sutpen mansion to look for Charles Bon’s body, looks *down* at Rosa “with no change, no alteration in it at all [...] the face stopping [her] dead (not [her] body: it still advanced, ran on: but [her; herself], that deep existence which we lead” (141). Rosa, now positionally inferior to Clytie as her self-consciousness is suddenly confronted with the subaltern’s alien body, begins to break down, thereby introducing us to the key moment of unperception in the novel as it unravels at the seams. Rosa cries “not to someone, something, but through something, through that force, that furious yet absolutely rocklike and immobile antagonism which had stopped [her]—that presence, that familiar coffee-colored face, that body” (141). Rosa, as a white woman, suddenly becomes aware of Clytie’s “presence,” the opposing self-consciousness of the Other, which is no longer a grotesque and mythic fantasy but a solid body, housing the history of violent oppression and unperception as human receptacle of lonesomeness and hope and desire. The power dynamic reverses, with Clytie now “not looking at [Rosa] but through [her]... a brooding awareness and acceptance of the inexplicable unseen inherited from an older and purer race than [hers]” (142). I want to emphasize the dramatic element of the confrontation, with the performance of the “meeting” isolated from the peripheral events of the novel. Despite emerging at a crucial moment in the novel—the death of Charles Bon—Faulkner decides to focus on Clytie and Rosa’s exchange, and not Judith, who is alone with Charles Bon’s body and should by all means, if we are to assign dramatic and narrative

importance to character interactions, at the very least get some “screen time” for the audience to witness Judith’s grief or lack thereof.

Instead, Faulkner dedicates the time and space to accommodate both Clytie and Rosa as the latter rushes into Sutpen’s Hundred, wanting to see with her own eyes Charles Bon’s body only to be met with Clytie, the object of her repulsion. In this moment, it is Rosa, running up the stairs but shaken, that is unperceived by Clytie. She is physically and spiritually stopped: “[her] entire being seemed to run at blind full tilt into something monstrous and immobile, with a shocking impact too soon and too quick to be mere amazement and outrage at that black arresting and untimorous hand on [her] white woman’s flesh” (143-144). Finally and irrevocably, Rosa becomes terrified of the sudden realization of Clytie’s agency, attempting to deny her personhood as grotesque once again in order to categorize her as merely an extension of Sutpen’s will, but ultimately falling into despair, asking her: “And you too? And you too, sister, sister?” At long last, Rosa has become painfully aware of Clytie not as subaltern, the noncitizen alien hiding at the margins of social life, but as a sister, as women joined together under the roof of the violent patriarch’s authority.

The culmination of unperception in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom*, is later followed by the unification of the femme narrative voice, as Rosa Coldfield makes space for herself beyond Quentin’s interruptions. However, because we still have Quentin as the interjecting patriarchal narrator and we are missing Clytie as a narrative and authorial voice, unperceptions continue to arise, and the femme is once again characterized by Faulkner as a mythic grotesque which he emulates in his framework of power and empire. In Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, however, we have a different phenomenon. The femme character and narrator coalesces into the discourse of alienation through convergence and singularity. By imposing herself over those who

attempt to overwrite her, Janie, our narrator and subject diverts from unperception and establishes a decolonized narrative of womanhood and belonging.

Whereas Faulkner's Clytie, Eulalia, and even Charles Bon suffer from the mythification of their personhood and are thereby enslaved to the trope of the tragic mulatta/o, Hurston's Janie is "in an incessant dialogue with the meaning of 'colored,' of which she is not in control" (Blau DuPlessis 79). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie gains narrative and authorial prowess over her own story in order to dispel local, regional, and national unperceptions of who she is. Janie's story bears witness to the desire of black people to argue, live, love, and die in a place of their own creation and to center themselves in a universe independent of the tyranny of manmade states of oppression" (Hubbard 100). With Faulkner, we are confronted with the anonymity of black women—such as Clytie's narrative silences and her mother's unnamed nature—but in Hurston's work we have an emphasis on the creative power of black communities, and above all, the growing freedom of black women who must suffer from political and social hierarchies across all levels of life. In my analysis of Hurston's novel, I will focus specifically on unperception as contingent on power hierarchies, the Freudian authoritarian eroticism assigned to Janie as a symbol of wealth and desire, the eros which Jones disambiguates, and the process of unmaking the script she is forced to play as she "writers" herself.

The power hierarchies displayed in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are very similar to the ones found in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*. After all, the Southern framework from which they write is informed by colonial American systems of power with roots deeply entrenched in the history of wealth and capital. The *casta* system, which posits the establishment of religious and political control at its core, functions mainly as a double movement. The practice of communication, interpretation, and translation is carried out through signs, and these signs are

thus internalized by the body. For instance, in the case of the Spaniards who perpetuated the castas there is a double movement which outlines the “postulate of difference [as] the feeling of superiority [and] the postulate of equality that of indifference” (Todorov 63). The reading of signs as magic in indigenous and African communities is directly correlated to prophecy, to control, to power.

In order to eradicate said power and truly conquer the Other, then the *casta* system serves as a stratification technique which facilitates assimilationism and the settler-colonial complex. The hierarchy of race, color, and class thereby established by the Spanish produces incomplete subject, which objectified, fall under the status of intermediaries. Meaning, that for those in the lower strata of the castas (anyone below the label of mestizo) his/her value is determined by their role “of producers of objects, artisans or jugglers whose performances are admired—but such admiration emphasizes rather than erases the distance between them and himself” (130). People are attributed value according to their role as producers, which is itself determined by their color. Darkness is commodified, fetishized; by elevating whiteness to the level of purity and aristocracy, the inherently colonialist hierarchy places value on the “colored” as creators of profit and performance. Hence, the production of various hierarchies first established by the Spanish, then carried out by generations upon generations of subalterns constantly relying on this hierarchy as a means to escape their realities, complicates the search for self-expression, freedom, and individuality that Hurston’s Janie desires.

Janie, in her quest to escape the confines of racial, gendered, classist, sexual, and essentialist rules, is the victim of unperception across several spheres. As a black woman, she is restrained to her identity, or rather, what the sociopolitical framework assigns as her identity. From the beginning of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie is at odds between her desire for

freedom—expressed in her connection to Nature—and her inability to escape power dynamics—portrayed by the polyphony of the civilized. She discovers the chanting bees upon the pear tree, “the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight” and refers to her discovery of beauty through nature as a marriage (Hurst 11). Hence, Janie becomes aware of herself in union with Nature, which leads her to discover and explore her naturalness. In encountering the natural world and embracing it as an essential part of her development as a young woman, Janie seeks to know more about the pear tree, the bees, the blossoms, always “waiting for the world to be made” (11). Janie’s relationship with the natural world is semiotic for she assigns meaning to phenomena that she later interprets as essentially metaphysical. The pear tree, the blossoms, the singing of the bees all serve the function of symbols, of signs. Janie dialogues with the world around her in order to create herself, reading in these symbols deeper spiritual meaning. From the start, Janie’s journey is at odds with civilization. Her grandmother, Nanny, forces her to marry Logan Killicks in order to secure a decent, safe, and modest life for herself, thus killing her girlhood desires: “Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman” (25). Janie is forced to conform to socially constructed notions of womanhood, rejecting what Nanny, and by extension society, views as primitive promiscuity. Nanny fears for Janie’s future because she is projecting her failures as a mother and old-forgotten dreams of security, warning her off about becoming “de mule un he world” (14). Nanny thinks about the hardships Janie must one day face as a black woman and wants to provide the protection she wished she had had available to her when she was a slave, and later a mother. She wants Janie to be definable in accordance to the norms of “civilized” society. Modesty, monogamy, marriage, humility, virginity—Nanny wishes to preserve Janie’s “good” womanhood in the face of the power of a man’s world. Unlike Janie, who is in

communion with Nature and is similarly attached to it down to her identity, Nanny views herself as part of a community displaced from civilization which is actively trying to breach it, to join it: “us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways” (16). By viewing herself as a part of an uprooted diaspora, Nanny exposes her longing to belong to civilization through any means possible. In this case, the means to the end is to forego Nature and imitate the Western colonial model of life. The “branches: without roots cannot survive misplaced and unwatered, and so Nanny believes that in order to make her home elsewhere, she must part from Nature to become independent from it. Janie, on the other hand, feels as if Nature, through the pear tree, is an extension of herself: “Janie asked inside herself and out. She was back and forth to the pear tree continuously wondering and thinking” (23). The pear tree becomes a fixed point in her self-consciousness, reifying its hold on her as the place of self-reflection. In communion with the natural, Janie becomes further ostracized from the manmade world and its hierarchical structures.

Janie reads the signs of Nature in spite of the hierarchies of civilization, measures time through the changing seasons, leans to read the language of the trees, and even gains knowledge of the world through totemic interpretations of Nature as the divine; she “waited a bloom time, and a green time, and an orange time [...] she knew things that nobody had ever told her. For instance, the words of the trees and the wind. She often spoke to falling seeds [...] because she had seeds saying that to each other as they passed” (25). Janie, by learning to speak with Nature, starts to gain a self-concept of herself as the vehicle of creation and translation. Furthermore, she is acquainted with the world as “a stallion rolling in the blue pasture of ether” (25). The horse as totem makes of the world a borderless paradise in which the god-icon roams freely through the Earth. Thus, by becoming attached and likened to Nature, Janie is diametrically opposed to the

civilized and the constructed. She yearns to be free—of Logan Killicks, of uncertainty, and of those who seek to impose themselves on her as her superiors.

Therefore, Janie is assigned as *taboo*. She is considered erotic, and because of this eroticism she is viewed as grotesque and mythical. Particularly, tension arises between the public as it actively tries to trespass into Janie's interiority, and Janie, who wishes to keep her self-consciousness from outside contamination. The public sphere, signified in Hurston's novel by the black communities of Eatonville and the Everglades, represent an authoritarian civilized society that writes Janie as erotic and simultaneously vilifies her for it. I want to exclusively focus on Freud's notions of Nature, civilization, and the erotic in my analysis of unperception for Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In "Civilization and Its Discontents," Freud writes about the suffering experienced by man as a social animal. He identifies three sources: "the superior power of nature, the feebleness of our own bodies, and the inadequacy of the regulations which adjust the mutual relationships of human beings in the family, the state and society" (735). The suffering of the collective lies in its inability to control and conquer Nature, feeling helpless in the face of our own mortality. In order to combat this fear, humans form highly-regulated societies. The individual transforms into plenty, for in numbers we feel like we can breach and exploit the natural world. However, "we shall never completely master nature; and our bodily organism, itself a part of nature, will always remain a transient structure with a limited capacity for adaption and achievement" (Freud 735). Precisely because the individual acknowledges their powerlessness in the face of Nature, they then seek to recreate themselves within the civilized world as omnipotent. Thus, "civilization" creates a social contract that institutes expectations, regimes, and hierarchies that create "power" as we know it.

The functionality of civilization and the construction of power depends on belief and strict adherence to social order. Beauty, order, and cleanliness become associated with the civilized in Freud's interpretation of social constructs, and in turn, "we extend our demand for cleanliness [and others] to the human body too" (739). The hygienic, clean body stands in sharp contrast with the "eroticism of young human beings" (743), who are still natural, having not yet developed enough to understand the taboos of their societies. For instance, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the citizens of Eatonville structure their community to imitate the cities of "the white man;" a strong emphasis on material culture, lights/whiteness, and order, Eatonville (under the guide of Joe "Jody" Starks) emulates the wealth historically associated with the white, land-owning patriarchs. In its descriptions of the cultural and legal wealth Eatonville has accumulated, Jody's funeral becomes the epitome of the cultured and civilized: "the motor hearse, the Cadillac and Buick carriages [...] the gold and red and purple, the gloat and glamor of the secret orders, each with its insinuations of power and glory" (Hurston 88). Even Jody's house itself, with its "porches, with banisters... [was] a gloaty, sparkly white" that bespoke of order, cleanliness, and status (47). Eatonville, ruled over by Jody as Mayor Starks, the first beacon of so-called civilization to have arrived in town, is now consistent with the values of white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy, as Janie (and women generally) are pushed off to the margins and expected to oversee the private sphere, the home. Beyond Freud's archaic psychoanalytic notion of the erotic, however, is Janie as woman of the Americas; Janie as a black woman, Janie as an agent of her own freedom. As Jones writes, "rooted in patriarchal pastoralism, globalized via colonialism, serving the aims of capitalism, and furthered by slice-and-dice-style science, the hegemonic economy of (re)production and consumption is the catastrophic antithesis of exuberant eros" (139). Eros, or the sensual, that Janie demonstrates does not align with

patriarchal standards of “femaleness.” The “female” reproduces, has children, sustains the home, supports the patriarch; the femme, with its emphasis on queer eros as resistance to the “femaleness” it has been assigned, is the expression of femininity in which reproduction is not an end-goal. Janie, despite having been married, never has children, a fact which does not go unnoticed in the novel. Because she has no children after her second husband’s death, that means she herself is the heir to his wealth, and is thus free to use it as she pleases. Since “plenitude rather than scarcity is the norm in nature” (Jones 146), the expression of eros is *queered* as a form of not of (re)production, but of play. Therefore, when Janie is pursued (and similarly pursues) by Tea Cake, the disapproval of her townfolks lies in Janie’s “nerve” to play, rather than be another “female,” or as her grandmother told her, another “mule uh the world” (Hurstons 14).

Specifically, Janie is ostracized from the rest of the Eatonville populace because Jody has a certain vision of her as the Mayor’s wife which she must not tarnish. She must be the Mayor’s wife first, and Janie last. Hence, following his example, the townspeople begin to regard Janie in accordance to her station. They become “civilized” through the adoption of hierarchies and power dynamics put in place to keep the social order. As Janie observes, Joe’s preoccupation with holding on to power “keeps [them] in some way [from being] natural wid one ‘nother” because they must play the part of Mayor and Mayor’s wife (Hurstons 47). Joe’s answer to Janie’s concern for their life together is to tell her he aims to be a “big voice,” and that she should be happy, as this would make a “big woman” out of her” (47). Jody’s disassociation from Nature is striking to Janie, for she feels displaced and neglected in their relationship and the promise he made her before their union. In addition, she fears the silence that she is being pushed towards. She fears the vacancy of the “big house” which she has to oversee, and most

importantly, fears the unnatural; and civilizing force of order, power, and control that suddenly assails her in Eatonville. Now looking at herself through the lens of the civilized and digesting her womanhood through such outlook, Janie, as the embodiment of Nature, is forced to hide because she is deemed erotic and taboo by her society. Jody orders her not cover her hair: “her hair was NOT going to show in the store [...] he had seen the other men figuratively wallowing in it as she wen about things in the store [...] she was there in the store for him too look at, not those others” (55). Clearly perceived to be nothing else than a possession, Jody attempts to control Janie and by extension Nature. After his death, Janie is free from his rule, and yet she is still trapped under the power of Eatonville. When Janie becomes romantically involved with Tea Cake, Eatonville unperceives her as an ungrateful, immoral, and foolish woman. They seek to restrain her in her newfound independence because she is a woman who has acquired the wealth of her late husband, the Mayor. The authoritarianism of Eatonville is reactionary, as the townspeople are reacting based on their prejudices against women who hold measures of power like capital. This highlights civilization’s concern with what is views as subversive—in this case, Janie’s naturality and eroticism as a free woman. Deemed to be uncontrollable and resistant to the will of the masses, Janie is constantly unperceived because she is a woman who rejects being thought of as an accessory to men. Hence, Eatonville, a community made up of men and women emulating the hierarchies of power set forth by the patriarchy, capitalism, and whiteness, is always judging Janie as someone in need of being possessed, owned.

The process of unmaking unperception is a difficult one. I will focus specifically on Janie’s voice as narrator and author of her own tale. The process of writing herself into the story as her own author relates to her insistence to show her truth and dispel any misconceptions about her character. Moreover, the creative power that Janie develops is the tool she uses to escape the

sociopolitical alienation she was born into, which constantly displaces her from humanity and deems her an alien Other. As Sigrid King writes, “the namer has the power; the name is powerless. For the powerless, being named carries with it the threat of limitation, reduction and destruction” (116). Throughout her life, Janie is object to what other people call her, and therefore how they perceive her. In her relationships with men, she is neatly placed in categories of gender which disable her voice as subject and reduce her to the inevitable alienated subaltern. Before she was “Janie,” she was Alphabet because “so many people had done named [her] different names” (Hurston 9). Like Nanny, who remains nameless and tied down to her role in society as a perpetual servant to whiteness, Janie is at first referred to as Alphabet because of her lack of an acceptable identity. They—the Washburns, and by extension the white overseers of cultural capital, i.e. the “civilized”—cannot yet name her because they have not defined what her role in their world is. It is not until she “looked at de picture a long time and seent it was [her] dress and [her] hair” that Janie realizes she is black (9). After this realization, she becomes Janie, although the origin of the name is unclear.

Janie grows into her new name as she develops. In her adolescence, she encounters the pear tree and Nature, and is then forced into “womanhood” as defined and enforced by the agents of the patriarchy like Nanny, Logan Killicks, and Joe “Jody” Starks. For instance, when she marries Logan Killicks, Janie feels unsatisfied and disappointed by the lack of mutual love; she “wants to want him sometimes. [She] don’t want him to do all de wantin’” (23). Janie’s desire for mutual fulfillment and reciprocity is the product of her relationship with the natural world. She wants marriage to be an equal “union” like the the bond she shares with the pear tree. When she brings up her concerns and desires to Nanny, however, she is humiliated and attacked, called a foolish and insipid child: “Dat’s de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love!

Dat's just whut got us uh pullin' and uh haulin' and sweatin' and doin' from can't see in de mornin' till can't see at night" (23). Nanny disapproves of Janie's desire, finding it unrealistic to survive under patriarchal, white America chasing the shadow of Love's specter. She wants to protect Janie from what she views to be the delusions of youth, and she decides to marry her off to Logan Killicks so she can survive the capitalist, patriarchal ruthlessness of a society that perceives black women to be less than human. Nanny wants Janie to avoid becoming the "mule of the world" (14). And yet, she inadvertently pushes her granddaughter under the servitude of man. By trying to work with the system, Nanny projects her girlhood fantasies on Janie, and ultimately condemns her to a life of hardship, marginality, and exploitation.

As Logan Killicks' wife, Janie is no longer Janie, but an extension of himself and a piece of his property. He refers to her as LilBit and insists she works his homestead the same way his first wife used to. He tells her: "mah fust wife never bothered me 'bout choppin' no wood nohow. She'd grab that ax and sling chips lak uh man. You done been spoilt rotten" (26). Killick's and Janie's relationship is based on changing definitions of property and freedom. When she was single, Janie used to be free but also alone and nameless, at least according to notions of citizenship and belonging set forth by the patriarchal, capitalist America. When she marries Logan, Janie is afforded economic security but is also now indebted to her husband as chattel. Historically speaking, "marital status affected a woman's legal position. On marriage, a woman became dependent, under the coverture of her husband... during marriage, for certain purposes, a woman's legal existence was suspended" (Crawford 153). The legal existence of women as citizens, and therefore participants, of a community and its politics, regimens, and expectations becomes null when they enter a union with a man. Marriage becomes a contract in which woman are alienated from the public sphere as their own persons. In much the same

manner, Janie becomes part of Logan Killicks' property. While her social status has somewhat risen, for she has married "up" into land ownership, she is nonetheless no longer free.

Janie's diminishing freedom is best observed when Killicks compares her to his first wife and calls her spoiled. He expects her to conform to her role as wife and follow his every directive. She must toil under his roof as Killicks seeks to "make somethin' outa [her]" (Hurston 30). Their relationship is based off Killicks' wish to mold Janie to his liking because he feels entitled to her body and her identity. Once married, Janie "lost all bodily autonomy. Legally, no wife owned her own body. At marriage, husband and wife became one flesh and body, and that body was the husband's" (Crawford 159). As soon as Janie marries Killicks, she becomes Janie Killicks, indicating her subordinate place under her husband's name. She is denied sovereignty over herself, and is thus transformed into an alien, marginalized Other under her husband's command. Killicks wants to create her, "make" her someone. He seeks her only as an accessory to his desire, the patriarch's desire to conquer and rule. He tells her she "ain't got no particular place" in society beside "wherever [he] needs [her]" (Hurston 31). Their union crumbles, for Killicks oppresses Janie daily with his wanting, his pining, his entitlement. He unperceives her as alien(ated), a young, orphaned black girl who can easily be discarded in a society that devalues blackness and femininity. Thus, when Janie finally confronts him, she forces him to *see* her, truly see her, for the first time: "youse mad 'cause Ah don't fall down and wash up dese sixty acres uh ground you got... youse mad 'cause Ah'm telling you what you already knowed" (31). Once Janie forces Killicks to admit to his unperception, he becomes violent and unwilling to view her as her own person before finally succumbing to despair as he loses her to Jody.

Similarly, Janie's relationship with Joe "Jody" Starks is one that, as previously mentioned, finds the patriarch attempting to "create" Janie. Jody too wishes to play God and

“make” the girl into a homunculus of “woman.” When they meet, he makes a promise to her: “Janie, if you think Ah aims to take you off and make a dog outta you, youse wrong. Ah wants to make a wife outa you” (29). Like Killicks, Jody desires to own and make Janie into his vision of a woman. Making the subaltern into an object, making a woman out of Janie, making a puppet out of a God; “their” eyes—the agents of the system, of the patriarchal, classist state—are forever glued to Janie as they impose themselves on her and her self-image. Like Sigrid King writes, “as Janie develops in the novel, she experiences the oppressive power of those who name her, the growing potential of being renamed, and finally the trying experience of being unnamed” (117). When we track Janie’s trajectory and growth as both character and narrator, we realize that her narrative voice and her dramatic voice gain singular coherence. They—the Janie which feels and the Janie which speaks—merge as she becomes the divine embodiment of the natural. Janie, through the confrontations against her husbands, forces them to admit to the unperception they have shackled her to. She forces Jody to stop fantasizing, revealing something to him about himself that shatter his conceptions of Janie as “his” woman, and more importantly, his existence as the patriarch. As Janie recounts the first time he hit her, she tells us, the watchers, that it was then “she knew... she stood there until something fell off the self inside her... It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams” (Hurst 171-172). Janie experiences the disillusion and recognition of her. As Jody’s wife, she has forsaken Nature; her insides have been hollowed out, carved into pristine halls of lined shelves, an empty house like an altar of the civilized. There are no longer “blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man” (72). Her conception of Jody as her pear tree has shriveled up in the vacant corridors of her spirit. She is an empty house full of white shelves, now tumbling into the ground as she recognizes that she, too, has been immersed in the fantasy

of society. It is only after this moment of recognition—Janie’s own recognition—that she realizes she has “an inside and an outside” that no one can take away from her (72).

In their final moments as husband and wife, Janie once again confront the patriarch as she defends her identity; her identity as a woman made in her own image, and no one else’s. She accuses Jody of being nothing but the projection of a “big voice” (79) and reveals that although he has attempted to make her *less*, he is no more a man for it. She “robs him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish” (79), belittling him as the decadent patriarch he has become. This breaks Jody, and eventually leads him to perish in his bitterness towards her now that she has unshackled herself from his iron grip. Hence, as Janie overpowers the patriarch through her creative growth as the proprietor, creator, and god of her own genesis into the world, she kills parts of the Old World represented by Killicks, Jody, and even Tea Cake. In so doing, “she becomes once again unnamed. She has actively ended her role as wife, which leaves her an option to name her own roles” (King 125). Thus, Janie grows as the narrator and protagonist of Hurston’s novel, setting up a framework of self-ownership in the face of unperception and alienation politics.

Rather than be evicted from human society as a grotesque, mythological noncitizen, Janie wields the destructive and redemptive energy of “God.” They—civilization—is purged by the literal and metaphorical storm. Nature rages against humanity. Before God can forgive them, she must first abandon that which gnaws on her reality. When Hurston writes *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, I find the act of watching particularly important to unperception, belonging, and the politics of alienation. In the opening scenes of the novel, we are privy to the arrival of the new God, Janie, in Eatonville: “So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet. She

had come back from the sodden and the bloated; the sudden dead, their eyes flung wide open in judgment” (1). The civilized have perished in eternal watch over her. As she walks away from the ever-seeing dead, she arrives back in Eatonville to once again be the spectacle of the town. Eatonville is infested by the “lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment” (1). Throughout the novel, Janie advocates for her identity and the existence of her self-consciousness as ungovernable. *She* is making herself as a survivor, as a fighter, as the embodiment of Nature and the divine. Hurston establishes a narrative voice which not only avoids dispelling the protagonist’s humanity, but actively allows her to be in full liberty of the authorial, creative process. It is precisely this framework of reification and deification that abolishes the unperception of the powerful towards the subaltern. By analyzing the complicated dimensions of disposability attributed to the marginalize Other, I now hope to evaluate the machinations of unperception and alienation politics in the short stories of Latin American authors.

II MARGINALITY AND THE FEMME BODY AS GROTESQUE

Under the hierarchical imposition of power set in motion by capitalism, the politics of alienation that thereby arise from the byproducts of unperception and unbelonging imminent in the propagation of wealth also make the marginalized disposable. The role that unperception plays in the short stories of Latin American women writers contributes to our understanding of alienation and disposability. The grotesqueness of woman as a separate social being from man is ironically portrayed in the works of Rosario Ferré and Elena Garro. For this chapter, I will focus on Rosario Ferré's stories "Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres" and "La muñeca menor." I will analyze the suffocation of the subaltern within the imperial, patriarchal, bourgeois home, the marginalization of the (un)desirable woman of color within the political underworlds of Latin America, and the exploitation of women's bodies as they attempt to ascend systems of power.

Rosario Ferré's writing is informed by the ideologies and criticism of both French and North American feminists, primarily, and the budding presence of unrest in her native Puerto Rico (and by extension all of Latin America) during the time she publishes *Papeles de Pandora* in the 1970s. As Suzanne S. Hintz notes in her research of Ferré's feminist theory, in her works "feminist literature represents a search for identity within the bounds of the androcentric, patriarchal world in which men repress women and subjugate them... this search may be an individual or a collective one" (34). This is a reflection of the time's increase of women authors, particularly as they engaged in conversations of *l'écriture féminine* that Cixous coined in her 1975 essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa," one year before Ferré published *Papeles de Pandora*. Ferré's femme characters are always in constant conversation with the world around them as they envision themselves as non-men. Her characters, in dialogue with the otherness of the outside world—that which is not their body: the uncanny—must explore the margins in which

they have been placed. More specifically, Ferré's femme characters exemplify the hybridization of the Latin American subject as global Southerners. The global South is, per excellence, the geographical regions of the world struggling against colonialism, warfare, imperialism; the Global South occupies "a dependent and subordinate position in the political economy of the world system" (Nilsen 277). In terms of the relationship of the Americas to each other, I am therefore speaking more specifically about the disastrous meeting of the Old World and the New World. The arrival of the Europeans and their ideologies created the chimera of "America" as an interconnected network of colonialism, slavery, and imperialism.

The vision of gender that the Old World immortalized through historical representations of the Virgin-Whore dichotomy emphasized the emerging racial ideologies within colonized countries such as Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico, existing in a state of limbo in which its nationhood remains to be recognized by the imperial power which "owns" it, is subject to the disenfranchisement of its cultural repertoire. In "La muñeca menor," the unified femme "I" within the protagonist's consciousness establishes a link between materiality and metaphysics. Through a continuous process of construction, the femme character steps away from the hierarchies that isolate her beyond the peripheral social world. Her social reality is juxtaposed against ideal notions of an "I." The literary representation of alienation, disposability, and unperception in Ferréian fiction exposes the ills of Latin American underworld as it assimilates its "inferior" place in opposition to the Global North.

Ferré's "La muñeca menor" is narrated by an unnamed spinster, aunt of one of our protagonists. The story paints a picture of one of Puerto Rico's bourgeois family, in which the spinster's youngest niece lives until she is married off to a city doctor's son. The spinster aunt, as a result of being bitten by a "vicious chagarra" (1) in her youth, dedicates herself to creating life-

size dolls of her nieces as they grow up. Each doll she makes replicates the nieces as they pass from childhood, to adolescence, to adulthood. When the youngest niece—also unnamed—is married off to the doctor’s son, our narrator gifts her one last doll as she moves on from her old family home to the big city: “El día de la boda la menor se sorprendió al coger la muñeca por la cintura y encontrarla tibia [...] las manos y la cara estaban confeccionadas con la delicadísima porcelana de Mikado” (6)². The doll, as a reflection of the youngest niece on the day of her departure from home as she is “exchanged” between patriarchs, is made with the usual leanings of luxury; adorned with jewels and riches which the aunt uses to “fill in” the vacuousness within the doll. The niece, like every character purposely misnamed to fulfill the didactic trope of the archetype, then takes this piece of home, belonging, and individuality with her.

When the husband takes the youngest niece away from home and brings her into the new capitalist mecca—the metropolis—the couple’s life as newlyweds demonstrates the dominance of male greed as it ultimately entombs the spinster’s niece into the patriarchal home and makes an object out of her. Her husband dictates what his new wife must do, what she must live like. He takes her to the “pueblo, a una casa encuadrada dentro de un bloque de cemento. La obligaba todos los días a sentarse en el balcón, para que los que pasaban por la calle supiesen que se había casado en sociedad” (6)³. The husband unperceives the youngest niece solely as an object, an accessory of status much like Isabel Luberza. Her function is *to seem*, not *to be*. Therefore, the niece is objectified and robbed of her status as active protagonist, for she is no longer a subject. She is confined to the new patriarchal home as wife, as woman, as thing; she suffocates in her own oppression. As she sits on the front porch, “inmóvil dentro de su cubo de calor, la menor

² “On the day of her wedding, the young girl was surprised by the doll’s weight and temperature... its hands and face were crafted from the most delicate Mikado porcelain.”

³ “To the town, to a home secluded within a concrete block. Every day he forced her to sit on the front porch, so that those who passed by the street would know that he had married up.”

comenzó a sospechar que su marido no solo tenía el perfil de silueta de papel sino también el alma” (6-7)⁴. The youngest niece is aware of her husband’s cruelty and neglect. Controlling her, manipulating her, displaying her like a thing, she is made to feel inhuman through the treatment that has been meddled down by the patriarch. The youngest niece is conscious of a slow, depersonalized effort to make her into a malleable husk, into a “wife.”

The “right” of the patriarch to govern is the same as the right of the sovereign, the power of the state to dictate and mandate through laws. The patriarch’s “natural right” over his wife is in essence the right of the sovereign, “expressed predominantly as the right to kill” (Mbembe 16). In the case of Ferrérian fiction, the male’s “right to kill” is demonstrated in the effortless assassination of woman’s autonomy. The youngest niece, like many Latin American women brought up idealizing marriage, is shackled to her husband as property. He kills the parts of her which make her human and unique, and he similarly “sells” the final product which he conceives. Symbolically, in “La muñeca menor,” the husband begins to break down the niece’s gift—her doll and doppelgänger—into smaller, palatable, profitable pieces: “un día él le saco los ojos a la muñeca con la punta del bisturí y los empeñó por un lujoso reloj de cebolla con una larga leontina. Desde entonces la muñeca siguió sentada sobre la cola del piano, pero con los ojos abajo” (Ferré 7)⁵. The doll, as the niece’s double, is picked apart by the husband in his bid to gain luxury or capital. He unperceives her as disposable, thereby reinforcing the power dynamics between men and women that attribute disposability to the feminine.

In Joseph-Achille Mbembe’s research of post-coloniality, the subaltern, and Foucault’s notion of biopower, we find the ultimate measure of power in the ability to decide who lives and

⁴ “Unmovable in her personal hell, the youngest niece started to suspect her husband not only had the shadow of a paper silhouette, but also a paper soul.”

⁵ “One day he removed the doll’s eyes with the edge of a scapel and he pawned them off in exchange for a luxurious watch. Since then, the doll has been sitting at the piano’s end, but with downcast eyes.”

who dies. As Mbembe writes, “to kill or to allow to live constitute the limits of sovereignty, its fundamental attributes. To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power” (11-12). Mbembe looks beyond Foucault’s conceptions of “biopower” as the state of exception and the state of siege. In order to grasp the nuances of power as it exercises biological political prominence, the author coins the term “necropolitics” in his discussion of modern states. Particularly, Mbembe discusses at length the role of the state in class and racial manifestations of violence. He writes:

In many respects, the very structure of the plantation system and its aftermath manifests the emblematic and paradoxical figure of the state of exception... in the context of the plantation, the humanity of the slave appears as the perfect figure of a shadow. Indeed, the slave condition results from a triple loss: loss of a “home,” loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status. This triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether). (21)

The slave, because they are reduced to voicelessness and compelled action, is first of all bought as property, displaced from the homeland or their mother, and lastly object to a total loss of autonomy exemplified in their lack of freedom and citizenship. They are forcefully unperceived as not-people and see themselves victims of marginalization and alienation. Under the plantation system, the darker slave sits at the bottom of a racial and classist hierarchy that commodifies them. Similarly, under both capitalism and the patriarchy, women are objectified as “wives” and exchanged like property. In Ferré’s “La muñeca menor,” the youngest niece is subjected to the necropolitics of her native Puerto Rico as it transitions from the old bourgeoisie to new industrial, capitalist world.

The porcelain doll, as the last remnant of the niece’s old life, her life before marriage, represents the inheritance which she has been left by her aunt; the doll is her doppelgänger, a perfect representation of a past femme “I.” It is also the only piece of private property she owns

as a woman. Thus, when her husband begins to break down the doll into smaller pieces, taking and taking and taking, pillaging the bejeweled eyes of the idol like a conquistador ready to display his discoveries to his king, so too does the niece begin to lose coherence, to be slowly killed. The husband, a young doctor, asks her about the doll when he notices her absence one day because “una cofradía de señoras piadosas le había ofrecido una Buena suma por la cara y las manos de porcelana para hacerle un retablo a la Verónica en la próxima procesión de Cuaresma” (Ferré 7)⁶. His interest in the doll is purely materialistic, for he wishes to obtain value from the parts he can sell. What is more, he is willing to sell the doll’s part for a variety of reasons: from buying a watch to getting cash from the local Catholic groups. This demonstrates the patriarch’s willingness to sell femme autonomy as the slave-master sells his slaves. Hence, through the profit of the doll’s mitigation, the young husband is by extension subordinating, ostracizing, and depersonalizing his wife as a lesser, “non-citizen” item.

In “La muñeca menor,” the objectification and alienation of the young niece is exacerbated by her husband’s power over her. Not only is she made to be a thing, a husk of a woman, but she is actively forced to be the doll her husband envisions of his wife. When her husband seeks out her property to sell it off, the youngest niece says: “las hormigas habían descubierto por fin que la muñeca estaba rellena de miel y en una sola noche la habían devorado... en este preciso momento deben de estar quebrándose los dientes, royendo con furia dedos y parpados en alguna cueva subterránea” (7)⁷. The youngest niece explicitly speaks about the doll’s whereabouts in grotesque terms. The force of nature, in this case represented by the

⁶ “A congregation of pious women had offered him a hefty sum for the doll’s face and hands because they wanted to make an altarpiece of the Veronica for the next Easter celebrations.”

⁷ “Finally, the ants had discovered that doll was filled with honey and in one night they had completely devoured her... at this moment, they must be breaking their teeth, gnawing with fury on fingers and eyelids in some underground cave.”

ants, carries away her doll into the metaphorical Cave, where it may rest away from her husband's tyranny. Like Antigone, who is doomed to die in the darkness of the Cave but who chooses death over injustice, the niece condemns her doll to nonexistence rather than slavery. As an extension of herself, then, the doll is a symbol for the youngest niece's metamorphosis, from less than human to a mythical grotesque exercising the ultimate power: power over one's own life. As time advances, her husband becomes a millionaire and the niece a little more mechanical, more artificial; he has monopolized the pharmaceutical business in the city and played up his role as someone from the upper-class: "se había quedado con toda la clientela del pueblo, a quienes no les importaba pagar honorarios pare poder ver de cerca de un miembro legítimo de la extinta aristocracia cañera" (7)⁸. Through his union with the niece and the social connotations of the marriage as an ascension in power, the niece's husband is able to scale the new industrial, capitalist world while maintain the old bourgeois ties to the plantation system.

It is only when the husband has reached the top of the political, capitalist hierarchy that he begins to notice something peculiar about his wife. Much like Hurston's Jody Starks, the husband silences his wife into submission. He unperceives her as an extension of himself while she loses value, autonomy, and direction: "La menor seguía sentada en el balcón, inmóvil dentro de sus gasas y encajes, siempre con los ojos abajo" (7)⁹. The husband, through the exploitation of the land in his quest for power, also ravages the feminine body. Beyond his appropriation of the doll, he eventually exploits his wife as "non-citizen." He unperceives her as inhuman to the point that she *becomes* the doll. She shows grotesque signs of replacement: "Cuando los pacientes de su marido... se acomodaban cerca de ella removiendo los rollos de sus carnes satisfechas con un

⁸ "He'd kept the entire town as his clientele, people who did not care to pay extra if it meant they were able to see a legitimate member of the extinct plantation aristocracy."

⁹ "She remained seated in the balcony, unable to move inside her gown and corset, always with downcast eyes."

alboroto de monedas, percibían a su alrededor un perfume que les hacía recordar involuntariamente la lenta supuración de una guanábana” (7-8)¹⁰. The doll, as a symbol of a decadent bourgeoisie, is also a signifier for women’s objectification. Ferré utilizes the mythification of woman as grotesque to exemplify this metaphysical suffocation. The parallelism between the doll’s function as a relic of entertainment for guests of the house—forgotten in a corner and whose use highlights materiality—is reflected in the metaphysical change of the niece. She becomes a doll since she has always lived through simulacra; because she is a woman she was born a doll, and the doll that the aunt gave her on her wedding day was nothing more than a mirror in which the child saw herself through the eyes of the others, the mirror which facilitated her own Othering. The doll represents a patriarchal and bourgeois tradition of reification, of adorning women as an idealized "lady." Her feminine "I" does not exist, since at the end of the story she becomes a doll by seeing herself with the same eyes and the same perspective with which her husband, her family, and society see her.

In “La muñeca menor” the mythic grotesque takes the form of the gothic reincarnation of the feminine in a cyclical loop of dispossession. The niece’s husband is perturbed by her youth, as he now notices that she has not seemed to age. He notes that while he continues to get old, “la menor guardaba la misma piel aporcelanada y dura que tenía cuando la iba a visitar a la casa cañaveral” (8)¹¹. Unlike him, the young niece has kept her desirability through the preservation of her whiteness and her youth. However, instead of being elated that his love-object has remained pure, the doctor is unnerved. He watches her in her sleep: “noto que su pecho no se movía. Coloco delicadamente el estetoscopio sobre su corazón y oyó un lejano rumor de agua.

¹⁰ “When her husband’s patients came near her, waddling through the crowd with their corpulent, coin-adled bodies, they could perceive a strange aroma surrounding them which, unconsciously, made them recall the sensuous scent of soursop.”

¹¹ “She maintains the same elastic porcelain skin she has had since he met her at the plantation house.”

Entonces la muñeca levanto los parpados y por las cuencas vacías de los ojos comenzaron a salir antenas furibundas de las chagaras” (8). The youngest niece, through the long ordeal of depersonalization and unperception which alienated her as inhuman and non-citizen, ultimately becomes the doll which her aunt had created, thereby reifying the cycle of suffering that women undergo within patriarchal and capitalist hierarchies.

While in “La muñeca menor” the femme protagonist is debased and depersonalized until she is fragmented and doomed to a cycle of oppression, in “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” the mythic grotesque is exemplified by the plurality of the femme narrators and characters as they become one Isabel. The notion of gender that shifts along the lines of the Virgin-Whore dichotomy exposes the nation’s interest in defining itself as a sovereign power through a measure of racial purity. Based on a Lacanian analysis of the Virgin as Lady and a demonstration of the relationship between Nietzsche’s Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy to race, it is possible to understand how the gender-race affiliation is subverted in Ferré’s story in order to create an ideal—perhaps utopian—character that encompasses the whole of Puerto Rico within it.

In “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” Ferré’s concern for the social calamities of Puerto Rico is revealed through her use of the unified femme narrative voice and reification of Puerto Rican popular culture in the literary world. The story revolves around Isabel Luberza, wife of the recently diseased Ambrosio, and Isabel la Negra, Ambrosio’s mistress and a prostitute from an impoverished neighborhood. Isabel Luberza, as a representative of Puerto Rico’s bourgeoisie, must cope with the fact that her husband, upon his death, decides to leave Isabel la Negra half of his inheritance; a move that does not pass unnoticed by her upper echelons of society or the common people. As the Virgin and the Lady, Isabel Luberza embodies

an Apollonian element of delusion while Isabel la Negra symbolizes a Dionysian component through the racialized lens ascribed to the “Whore” in Puerto Rican society. Ferré creates a tension between the protagonists in which they initially wish to overpower the other so as to demonstrate how the Virgin-Whore dichotomy, by the idealization and animalization imposed upon the Lady and the Prostitute, is nothing more than a socially-constructed binary which impedes synthesis and self-actualization.

The narrative voice of a “plural” Isabel facilitates the reading of the story as a chronicle of the trials and tribulations of Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra. This “plural” Isabel, the unified femme narrative voice, speaks from a future point-of-reference in which she looks back at their trajectory, from Virgin and Lady to Whore and Prostitute. Through this synthesis of Being, Plural Isabel pinpoints the origin of the tension between Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra. According to them, it is Ambrosio, head-of-the-household as well as a leading bourgeois figure in the sociopolitical context of their Puerto Rican village, that creates the confusion of identities between the two women: “Fue cuando tu te moriste, Ambrosio, y nos dejaste a cada una mitad de toda tu herencia, que empezo todo este desbarajuste [...] la habilidad con la nos habias estado manipulando para que nos fueras fundiendo” (Ferré 23)¹². Upon his death, the symbolic “division” of Ambrosio’s inheritance, primarily the home, represents the power that the patriarch has, even after death, to control the lives of both the white upper-class woman and the black lower-class woman. Similarly to the popular *plena* of the same name, the women compete for Ambrosio’s legacy through the symbolic representation of the “cuatro velas” which they light “por los rincones para ver quien ganaba” (22-23). The women are constantly at odds with each other, for even though Ambrosio has died and no amount of folk magic will resuscitate, the ghost

¹² “When you died, Ambrosio, and you left each of us half of your inheritance, everything began to fall apart [...] the ability with which you had been manipulating us so that you could mold us.”

of the patriarch is still felt by the mere existence of his imperial home. Hence, in mimicry of a historical, social, and political legacy, Ambrosio is to Isabel what powerful men are to women: agents and enforcers of patriarchal and supremacist ideology.

The fate of Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra is one that hinges upon the male figure and the public gaze. As a representation of the changing Puerto Rican society, Isabel Luberza—the wife—and Ambrosio portray how the relationship of subjugation and power between women and men depends upon Eurocentric ideals of womanhood that come in contact with the rising ideologies of a relatively “new” nation. Particularly, it is the repression and control of women’s sexuality through the Virgin-Whore dichotomy that exacerbates the tension between Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra. The notion of shame, specifically, serves as the driving force behind this dichotomy, which according to Bareket et al in their study “The Madonna-Whore Dichotomy: Men Who Perceive Women's Nurturance and Sexuality as Mutually Exclusive Endorse Patriarchy and Show Lower Relationship Satisfaction,” functions as a deterrent for women to exercise their basic right and need for sex. As Bareket remarks, “shame about sexual desire reduces women’s sexual agency and puts women’s mental, physical, and sexual health at risk” (Bareket et al 520). This shame is, of course, not an inherently biological response to desire, but rather the result of social conditioning. Under the Virgin-Whore dichotomy, the public controls perception and recognition. To be recognized as a “whore” is to have a bad reputation; and in a world where we are compelled to socialize and form relationships, the word of the people and the role of reputation within society holds the same value as a form of exchange. In Ferré’s story, the foreboding presence of the *pueblo*¹³ looms over the characters as the truth of Ambrosio’s relationship with Isabel la Negra comes to light, producing an

¹³ Town, village, city.

“escandalo girando por todas partes como un aro de hierro, restrellando tu buen nombre contra las paredes del pueblo” (23).¹⁴ The eyes of the village within the story highlight the surveillance of the heteronormative relationship as an element of legitimacy within the public sphere. In the case of Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra, the matter of legitimacy in the public and private spheres comes to fruition under the Virgin-Whore dichotomy.

However, the Virgin-Whore dichotomy that Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra are subject to incorporates a measure of control over women *regardless* of whether they align themselves with either category. The public sphere, with its hierarchically organized structure, executes the unperception of the feminine as grotesque precisely because it is *feminine*. Even though the notion of “assertive female sexuality represents a potential source of power over men: As gatekeepers of heterosexual activity, men fear allure as a manipulative tactic” (Bareket 520); female sexuality in *itself* (that is, the mere existence of “female” sexual organs) is rendered as something dangerous and inconvenient. In this story, it is clear that both women, Isabel Luberza as the Virgin and Isabel la Negra as the Whore, irrespective of the degree of their sexual prowess or lack thereof, are prisoners to Ambrosio’s machinations and face different repercussions because of his actions. They are treated differently by the unscripted, hidden rules of the Latin American underworld in accordance to their assigned “grotesqueness.” This difference in the Virgin-Whore dichotomy is one that is reinvented in the New World; colonial conceptions of race and class superimpose themselves over the identity of both protagonists.

For Isabel Luberza as a white woman and Isabel la Negra as a black woman, the degree to which they are lauded as prudish or promiscuous is affected by the Puerto Rican notions of race that developed under Spanish colonialism *and* U.S. imperialism. Isabel Luberza, as the wife,

¹⁴ “A scandal spinning like an iron ring, slamming your good name against the town walls.”

represents the Virgin in terms of the traditionally-white Madonna; she is “Isabel Segunda la reina de España, patrona de la calle más aristocrática de Ponce... la pintora de los más exquisitos detentes del Sagrado Corazón, goteando por el costado las tres únicas gotas de rubí divino capaz de detener a Satanás” (Ferré 25).¹⁵ Alluding to the Spanish colonial beauty standards, which embraced the Virgin as the ideal of womanhood and placed women on a pedestal, Ferré institutes Isabel Luberza as the traditionally beautiful and desirable woman. Luberza is described in canonically Catholic terms in order to bring to light Ferré’s concern with Puerto Rico’s colonial past, present, and future. Luberza, as the legitimate wife and therefore *dama de sociedad*¹⁶, must then confine herself, because of this intervention of the public (the *pueblo*’s judgement) in the private realm, within the imperial and patriarchal home. Similarly to the highly idealized Lady of the feudal period, “she is, strictly speaking, what is indicated by the elementary structures of kinship, i.e., nothing more than a correlative of the functions of social exchange, the support of a certain number of goods and of symbols of power” (Lacan 147). As such, Ferré’s representation of Luberza as the Virgin serves to highlight not only the link between the figure of the Virgin as Lady, but it is also an attempt at exposing the cannibalistic nature of the bourgeois family in Puerto Rico. After all, the portrayal of the nature of desire for a publicly sought-after woman constrains said woman to an impossible standard because the author draws parallels to the fall of the bourgeois family under the rapidly changing conditions of Puerto Rico as an industrial and capitalist mecca. It is, in essence, Ferré’s living, changing, morphing representation of unperception as a woman is made disposable and *alien* as she loses “value” and becomes undesirable.

¹⁵ “Elizabeth the Second, queen of Spain, patron lady of the most aristocratic street in Ponce... painter of the most exquisite devotional scapulars of the Sacred Heart, her side stained by three solitary drops of divine ruby capable of stopping Satan.”

¹⁶ The Lady, or the high-class Lady. A socialite.

As a writer concerned with the cultural, artistic, and literary legacy of the colonized, pillaged, and delegitimized Puerto Rico, Ferré utilizes the characters of Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra to portray the drastic changes taking place on the island. The author captures how a change in fortune—the death of the patriarch—does away with previously established categories of belonging. At the beginning of “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” Isabel Luberza’s duty is to be a part of the public sphere; she is an accessory to her husband that must fulfill the duties of the *dama*, such as attending balls or charities, and being an object of entertainment through desire. She is forced to open her home to the public, to expose and dissolve what little of the private she is afforded in order to accommodate the gaze of the people: “el pueblo entero vaciándose en la casa para asistir a las fiestas y yo de pie junto a ti como un jazmín retoñado adosado al muro, rindiendo mi mano para que me la besaran, mi pequeña mano de nata”¹⁷ (Ferré 28). The symbolic gesture of giving up or surrendering her hand to the roaming eyes and lips of the town is Luberza’s only option. As the Madonna, she is expected to renounce all sexual want, and yet, as she is still woman and on top of that, a white ideal of beauty, she must compromise by giving the *pueblo* access to her hand, the body part which allow us to express ourselves in the absence of a voice. Hence, Luberza as “the feminine object, is introduced oddly enough through the door of privation or inaccessibility” (Lacan 149). The hand that she extends to those who enter her home links the world of the public to Luberza’s private realm, and as such, the symbolism behind yielding it so that it can be kissed is one that facilitates the performative character of her role as the Lady. Yet, with the rise of a different social and political movement looming menacingly in the horizon of the island comes the fall of the *familias burguesas*, Isabel

¹⁷ “The entire town emptying into the house to attend parties and I by your side like blooming jasmine attached to the wall, surrendering my hand so they could kiss it, my small hand like cream.” Ferré uses the word *rindiendo* (v. *rendir*) which has a double-meaning of *performing* and/or *surrender*; a performance in her act of surrender.

Luberza is consequently forced into a position where the *pueblo* repudiates her and confines her to the private realm as an undesirable. But why and how does the *pueblo* now deny its Madonna a spot at its altar? And what role does Ambrosio play in this social death?

It is no coincidence that the Virgin, the Madonna, represented in art, and most importantly in Catholicism places utmost importance of the Virgin Mary and her “immaculate conception,” as the figure of a Lady, a woman whose youth, serenity, and beauty are intertwined. After all, the Virgin is the Mother of all sanctity within the Catholic imaginarium, and as such, represents an image devoid of frantic, animal passion. Thinking, then, about the significance of this figure, and linking it to Nietzsche’s conception of the Apollonian may be ironic, but not totally incorrect. For Apollo, “as the god of all shaping energies, is also the soothsaying god. He, who is the ‘shining one,’ the deity of light, also rules over the fair appearance of the inner world of fantasies...the deep consciousness of nature, healing and helping in sleep and dream” (Nietzsche 3). The Lady is an object of desire, that as Lacan states, “is emptied of all real substance” (149). Therefore, Isabel Luberza, as Madonna and Lady, acts as a mirror which projects all conscious and subconscious desires; she is the *tabula rasa* in which the *pueblo* projects its desire for legitimacy through whiteness. The *pueblo*’s sudden dismissal of Luberza stems from this shattered illusion, which makes its presence known subtly during her married life, until it culminates in her decision to repudiate her whiteness after Ambrosio dies.

Ferré’s descriptions of Luberza’s body—of its whiteness—and of her innate obsessive saintliness is reminiscent of Hawthorne’s Arthur Dimmesdale and Sophocles’ Antigone: the body is an obstacle or an inconvenience, and to reach a higher ideal, to purge, it must be punished or disregarded. Luberza takes it upon herself to purge the stain of Isabel la Negra from her body, purging what Ambrosio has transmitted—the confusion, the ambiguity, the guilt and

desire embroiled within the darkness of Pandora's box—in an attempt to regain who she is. Like Faulkner's Rosa Coldfield, Isabel Luberza views the blackness of her double as a personal affront. Whereas Rosa unperceives Clytie until she is literally forced to face her after Charles Bon's death, Isabel Luberza willingly submits herself to the task of overcoming her unperception. She lashes out against her white body to redeem and eventually becomes the Other, to will herself to truly perceive her doppelgänger, to become Isabel la Negra: "yo, que la amaba cada día más y más, comencé a mortificar mi carne, al principio con actos menudos e insignificantes, para hacer que regresara al camino del bien"¹⁸ (Ferré 36). Luberza's self-flagellation, however, is never referenced as something wild or abnormal; instead, it is described as a rational, even necessary, event. There is an element of "measured limitation, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that philosophical calmness of the sculptor-god" in her procedure (3), which Nietzsche uses to describe the Apollonian.

Luberza, in her attempt to wash away any impure Dionysian elements that Isabel la Negra might have "transmitted," relies upon her dream of "saving" the prostitute so that she can become "good." As a consequence of her actions, the *pueblo* denies Luberza public recognition because her martyrdom is an act—however peculiar and misguided and insecure—of goodwill towards an undesirable Other. Luberza renounces her Madonna status, and by extension whiteness, through the performance of changing (or trying to) color: "esa piel que yo siempre he protegido... para poder exhibirla en los bailes porque es prueba fidedigna de mi pedigrí, de que en mi familia somos blancos... exponiéndome así por ella, al que dirán de las gentes"¹⁹ (Ferré

¹⁸ "I, who with the passing of the days loved her more and more, began to lash against my flesh, at first with small and insignificant acts, in hopes that she could return to grace."

¹⁹ "The skin/flesh which I have always protected...so that I could display it at balls because it is trustworthy proof of my pedigree, that in my family we are all white... exposing myself for her, exposing myself to the people's gaze." The last phrase, "el que diran de las gentes," directly translates to "the 'what would they say' of the people." It is a very colloquial phrase, but the main words of v. *decir* (to say) and n. *las gentes* (the people) work in conjunction

36). Luberza post-Ambrosio's death falls from the *pueblo's* grace because she begins to move within the public sphere not as Lady or as accessory, but as an independent consciousness, and in doing so, simultaneously exposes her flesh to the sun—in a way, emerging from the shadows of the Cave—in order to gain proximity to Isabel la Negra. Isabel Luberza, like Hurston's Janie, has learnt to live within and outside the margins of society in her own distinct way.

What at first was a definite and solid hatred for her husband's mistress eventually morphs into something much more complicated. The relationship between Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra is one raft with tensions, in which they constantly try to substitute the other. In Isabel Luberza's case, this confusion between love and hate for the Other eventually becomes a confusion of self-identity. As Rosario Mendez-Panedas mentions in her article "'Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres': El Doble como Metáfora de un Mundo Intratextual," Ferré's use of language and her ability to demonstrate the perpetual struggle between the Virgin and the Whore enables the creation of a plural Isabel that is the synthesis of the Lady and the Prostitute. According to Mendez-Panedas, "la relación secuencial entre las dos mujeres se desarrolla a través de un proceso visual—metonímico—convirtiéndose en figuras de contigüidad" (315)²⁰. The *visual* nature of their interaction is imperative to the formation of this plurality. Unsurprisingly, it is through *color* that Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra begin to bleed into each other, culminating with the creation and synthesis of a new identity, the unified femme.

Earlier, we referred to Luberza's performance in her act of surrender when she bridged the gap between the *pueblo* and the private through the symbolic gesture of the given hand.

with her preoccupation over appearance. Thus, instead of translating it as "the people's word," I've opted to use "the people's gaze."

²⁰ "The sequential relationship between both women develops through a visual process—metonymic—which converts them into figures of perpetuity."

Color is recalled by Mendez-Panedas as a “superposición metonímica”²¹ (315), which facilitates the metaphysical changes that the characters undergo. It is significant to note that the element of color is one mentioned by Ferré through the shared nail-polish that Luberza and la Negra share: Cherries Jubilee, the brightest, loudest red. Since before Ambrosio’s death, the knowledge that he had a mistress had wedged the beginnings of a peculiar desire within Luberza; she felt “una marea de sangre que me iba subiendo por la base de las unas, cuajandome de Cherries Jubilee toda por dentro”²² (Ferré 28). Just as Luberza renounces her whiteness and status as Madonna through self-flagellation, she also appropriates Isabel la Negra’s clothing and image of beauty, paying careful attention to color-schemes in order to establish a connection between the two.

Aware of the implications related to sharing anything which may be linked to la Negra, Luberza still decides to surrender her hand to the *pueblo* with the Cherries Jubilee shade in full display. Despite the strict distinction that the Virgin-Whore dichotomy imposes on women, which established racist standards of beauty within the context of colonized, imperial Puerto Rico, Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra know that said categorization is nothing but a construct. As Luberza recalls, “nosotras, tu querida y tu mujer, siempre hemos sabido que debajo de cada dama de sociedad se oculta una prostituta... [y] cada prostituta es una dama en potencia, anegada a las nostalgia”²³ (24). For both the Virgin and the Whore, this dichotomy is nothing more than interchangeably meaningless words. The meaning which they derive from it is purely social, for they are aware that regardless of whether they recognize the dichotomy as artificial, society is structured to follow this distinction. Despite initially hating each other because of this dichotomy and Ambrosio’s role in their lives, Luberza and la Negra eventually come to love each other

²¹ Metonymic superposition.

²² “A tide of blood that had climbed through my nails, soaking me in Cherries Jubilee inside.”

²³ “We, your lover and your wife, have always known that beneath every Lady hides a prostitute... and every prostitute is a potential Lady, overwhelmed by nostalgia.”

precisely because their differences create a sense of unity and belonging. By forming the beginnings of a community of women who love and aid other women like themselves—marginalized, vulnerable, rebellious women—Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra make the previous patriarchal home into a femme haven for those society has deemed disposable and undesirable, those who cannot belong.

If Isabel Luberza's trajectory throughout the story is one in which she is metaphorically entombed at home, then Isabel la Negra's path is one that subverts the narrative. As a black woman and a prostitute, Isabel la Negra is originally constrained to the private sphere. Her existence as a social undesirable, as a "whore," is the result of the *pueblo's* judgement. For the village, and particularly, for powerful men like Ambrosio who come to her and even bring their children, Isabel la Negra represents a Dionysian element that must be hidden away, a body that receives and gives, the one "girando su vientre de giroscopio en círculos de bengala dentro de los ojos de los hombres, meneando para ellos, desde tiempos inmemorables"²⁴ (Ferré 26). Passage into "manhood" is only possible through a ritual of admittance, in which Isabel la Negra controls, or rather, enables the liberation of sexual desire. The trait of drunkenness which Nietzsche ascribes to the Dionysian encompasses the relationship that Isabel la Negra has to the townsmen. Under the influence of "body-magic" and feminine power, Isabel la Negra manages to "destroy the individual and redeem him by a mystic feeling of Oneness" (Nietzsche 5). The ritualistic element of her relationship with the boys that visit her is one constrained to the privacy of her abode, for to be seen in her presence would produce and enable rumors that may ruin their standing in the town. She is forced to live under these conditions by none other than Ambrosio,

²⁴ "Her gyroscope belly swaying in circles like the lights of a firework within men's eyes, shaking for them, since time immemorial."

who shackles her to prostitution because, like Isabel Luberza, Isabel la Negra's body as a woman is also body as an object, as a product.

Hence, Isabel la Negra is pushed into the sex industry under deplorable conditions, living in a "rancho de tablones con techo de zinc, condenada a pasarme los días sacándole los quesos a niño ricos, a los hijos de tus amigos que tú me traías"²⁵ (Ferré 30). In this marginalized space, Isabel la Negra is expected to comply to Ambrosio's rule and submit to him and other men. Ultimately, she recognizes that the only reason as to why she is forced to initiate young men into their sexuality is because of her womanhood, her blackness, her marginality, and her poverty. Unlike Isabel Luberza, whose entire existence revolves around a notion of desire reliant on its own impossibility, Isabel la Negra knows that men have no such qualms when it comes to her; she is disposable because she is black, woman, and poor. During her contact with these men, something within her—her Self-Consciousness—springs forth: "algo muy antiguo... enseñándolos a enloquecer conmigo... porque no es correcto que a una niña bien se le disloque la pelvis, porque las niñas bien tienen vaginas de plata pulida y cuerpos de columnas de alabastro" (Ferré 31)²⁶. Just as she recognizes that the only reason she is used is so that men can spare white women like Luberza any pain that might be inflicted upon them, she also notes that deep within her, some "ancient" feeling of Oneness takes root. This feeling enables her to think of Luberza as her double. She is not alienated, she is a unified femme "I." Like Hurston's Janie, Isabel la Negra "owns" her sexuality as she ascends the power hierarchies of the new industrial, capitalist world.

²⁵ "In a ranch with a zinc roof, condemned to spend my days making rich boys cum, the boys, sons of your friends who you brought to me." Interesting to note is the way that Ferré uses language to characterize the different Elizabeths. For Isabel la Negra, she uses a lot of "vulgar" colloquialisms and regionalisms, while for Luberza she uses somewhat antiquated idioms and imagery. By the end of the story, when Plural Isabel makes their appearance, the language too morphs to accommodate this synthesis.

²⁶ "Something very ancient... teaching them to go mad together... because it is not right to dislocate a rich girl's pelvis, because the good rich girls have vaginas of polished silver and bodies made from alabaster." The term *ninas bien* is used to mean "good/rich girls" and "good/white girls."

She assigns herself material and metaphysical value while she rejects the very notions of productivity and belonging which now seek to make of her a commercial product. More concerned with establishing a community of fellow sex-workers in the half of the home which now belongs to her, Isabel la Negra works to demystify the “grotesque” woman as an object of unperception.

Through this feeling of Oneness, la Negra eventually comes to look upon Luberza in the same way she looks at her, aware that they are both “difuminando[se] una sobre la otra como una foto vieja colocada amorosamente debajo de su negativo, como ese otro rostro desconsolado que llevamos dentro... cuando nos paramos frente a un espejo”²⁷ (Ferré 24). When both women finally meet, years after Ambrosio’s death, the element of desire springs forth uninhibited by outside forces; Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra admire each other’s beauty without resorting to the intervention of the Virgin-Whore dichotomy, aware that now, when Ambrosio is gone, they can finally see each other as they truly are by shedding the unperception of Virgin-Whore. Isabel Luberza, although at first punishing her body to fulfill her Christian duty of “saving” the prostitute, eventually acknowledges that her true desire is to be with la Negra and understand her: “Ahora voy a enfrentar por fin ese rostro de hermosura perfecto al rostro de mi desconsuelo para poder comprender. Ahora me le acerco porque deseo verla cara a cara, verla como de verdad ella es”²⁸ (Ferré 37). Through this newfound desire, Luberza and la Negra overcome the Virgin-Whore dichotomy and synthesize unto something new, a person neither black or white, that culminates into what they describe as their most “sublime acto de amor”²⁹ (Ferré 24).

²⁷ “Bleeding into each other like an old picture delicately placed atop its negative, like that despairing face which we carry within ourselves... when we stop to look in the mirror.”

²⁸ “Now I am finally facing that absolute beauty against my despairing one so that I can understand. Now I start to get closer because I desire to look at her face-to-face, look at who she really is.”

²⁹ “Sublime act of love.”

By overcoming the Virgin-Whore dichotomy which characterized them as Global Southerners, Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra achieve a state of unity through ambiguation in which their identities as black and white women are no longer a hindrance for mutual understanding. Luberza, through her repudiation of whiteness, and by extension, her status as Lady, manages to go beyond the Apollonian by incorporating Isabel la Negra's Dionysian, and vice-versa. This final overcoming of the social constructs which constrained them—race, gender, and sexuality—allows for the creation of a uniquely ambiguous and even utopian Latin American character which Ferré utilizes to represent a potential image of what Puerto Rico could one day be. Through the amalgamation of Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra into one sole person that negates any notions of Lacan's courtly love analysis through the union of Apollonian and Dionysian elements, Ferré rejects the racial and gendered calamities that plague her community, thereby establishing a utopian vision of nationhood on par with what many other Latin American writers of her generation were striving for.

III BETRAYAL, NATIONALISM, AND POWER

Elena Garro, much like Rosario Ferré, writes about the realities of Latin American women as they struggle to thrive in social, political, and economic policies that devalue them as non-citizens and enable their unperception. In her writing, Garro encapsulates the Mexican woman's vision and voice; through the representation of the absurd, she grants her femme protagonists and narrators the power to rewrite history and decolonize notions of their "grotesqueness." For the purpose of this chapter, I will be exploring Garro's short stories "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" and "El robo de Tiztla."

Western conceptions of the absurd are the result of ideological and political insecurities. With the advent of the World Wars, mass genocide, and advanced technological warfare, philosophers like Nietzsche and later, Camus, engaged with the idea of a godless and chaotic universe. Camus, most often cited as the father of Absurdism, refers to his philosophy as "the revolt of the flesh" (10-11). Man is subject to his body, subject to his own mortality. Since the moment he realizes his finiteness, the absurdity of life becomes apparent. Man "admits that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy" (11). Hence, Man is born into the slavery of unperpetuity, beholden to the will of Time, and the absurd lies in people's ability to recognize the futility of existence. Coupled with capitalist definitions of citizenship, belonging, and productivity, Time acquires the status of control currency. People are made to define themselves in accordance to the limitations of Time; women must marry young to produce children, children must go to school daily so they can graduate and attend college, men must work every day of their lives while they are young if they hope to retire with Time... in essence, Time is weaponized against identity by capitalism, by the patriarchy, by the settler-

colonial complex. It becomes real and measurable, fixed and inflexible; it is the meter-stick by which we measure our lives. Above all, it is a reminder for the femme, the young, and the working-class that they, like cogs in a machine, can easily be replaced.

Civilization masks its inadequacies with illusions of power like order and beauty. And yet, “at the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman [...] the primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia, for a second we seize to understand it because for centuries we have understood in it solely the images and designs that we had attributed to it” (Camus 11). The absurdity of the social constructs set up in an industrial, capitalist world is heightened in brief moments of recognition. We recognize the façade, the pantomime, and through this realization we are assaulted by the absurdity of the western world and its canons. In Garro’s writing, the absurdity of the West, capitalism, and the patriarchy are critiqued as the colonial resolution to Enlightenment thinking, which posits the elevation of logic and secularism at its zenith. Instead of perpetuating imperial thinking, however, Garro *decolonizes* the absurd through her femme narrators and characters. By breaking down the “logical” order of the system, and simultaneously subverting absurdity beyond the suicidal, existential concern that Camus defines, Garro affirms the power of the grotesque as a tool against unperception and alienation.

In “La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas,” the protagonist Laura arrives home one day with her white dress shredded, dirty, and bloody. She is let inside her home—or rather, her husband’s home—by her maid, Nacha. As she sits down at the kitchen table, Laura narrates her story to Nacha. She tells Nacha “la culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas”³⁰ as she recounts a story of betrayal, love, and loss that fluctuates throughout time to before *la conquista*³¹ (Garro 9). Laura narrates how her first husband, an indigenous warrior whose community she belonged to and betrayed,

³⁰ “The guilt belongs to the Tlaxcaltecas.”

³¹ The conquest.

comes to her because they must await the end of Time. The story culminates with Laura and her husband's elopement away from the colonial present, and with Nacha's immediate disappearance from the home.

Garro treats the passage of Time as absurd. When Laura arrives home, Nacha observes she is still wearing "el traje blanco quemado y sucio de tierra y sangre"³² (9). The soiled white gown represents the corruption of the "present," and by extension whiteness, by the "past." The whiteness of the dress is a symbol of capitalist, bourgeois, criollo Mexico, while the blood and dirt it has been stained by is the residue of our pre-Hispanic history and its violent erasure. Garro writes her audience into the story through Nacha, who listens to Laura as her tale unfolds. Moreover, Laura's story only ever gains validity because of Nacha; after every episode, Laura turns to her in order to confirm aspects of her story. Because Nacha is the present-day reality of indigenous women as domestic workers, Laura's story can only be confirmed through her. Thus, as Laura speaks, Nacha revises her narrative for the historic silences of the marginalized, edits for any omissions which may have been decided upon and verifies the veracity of the tale.

Laura's story is verified by Nacha as initially taking place in Cuitzeo, on her way to Guanajuato with her mother-in-law. It was in this instance that Time had catapulted into the past—*her* past. Garro uses color and its denigration to write about the absurdity of linear Time. Laura belongs to the Mexican upper-class, and has married into a capitalist, political family. Her mother-in-law is scared of "los caminos vacíos y los ojos de los indios"³³(11), for example, which highlights the Mexican bourgeoisie's negation of the land, Nature, and indigeneity. When their car breaks down and Laura's mother-in-law leaves to look for help in the closest town, Laura is left alone "en la mitad del puente blanco, que atraviesa el lago seco en fondo de lajas

³² "The white dressed burnt red by blood and muddy."

³³ "Empty paths and Indian eyes."

blancas”³⁴ (11). In this white, empty crossroads, Laura experiences the metamorphosis of linear time. A white light accosts her and splits into “varios pedazos hasta convertirse en miles de puntitos y empezó a girar hasta que se quedo fija como un retrato. El tiempo había dado la vuelta completa [...] así llegué en el lago Cuitzeo, hasta la otra niña que fui”³⁵ (11). The light gyrates until it arrives at the “opposite” end of Time, at her linear pre-Hispanic past. She returns to her beginning, to her Otherness as a tribal girl, as a *malinchista*. Akin to the dividing white light which displaces her, her thoughts also become “mil puntitos [...] en ese momento mire el tejido de mi vestido blanco y en ese instante oí sus pasos”³⁶ (11). Laura’s present identity is connected to the whiteness of her dress, and the national Mexican identity is mirrored by Garro’s descriptions of whiteness as pivotal to the architecture and geography her environment. The continuous use of whiteness emphasizes Laura’s past as a traitor. It’s whiteness, like the scarlet letter, is a marker of her crime as it follows her into the “present.”

Laura’s changing perceptions regarding whiteness is the result of the sudden change of her notions of Time. As she confronts her past as traitor, she realizes that her present whiteness is a reflection of colonial, western “Time.” It is time itself, as the result of colonialism, which is absurd. Laura recovers the past because “el tiempo se cerró alrededor de [ella], se volvió único y precedero”³⁷ (11). As she witnesses for the first time the unravelling of the present, she is captivated by a past that never dies because the past and the present are not linear and fragile, but are rather the eternal perpetuation of memory. While thinking about the unrecognizable old god of her pre-Hispanic past, Laura remembers what her elders taught her: “Alguna vez te

³⁴ “Midway through the white bridge, which traverses through the dried up lake.”

³⁵ “Various pieces until it turns into a thousand dots and starts to spin until it freezes like a portrait. Time had done a complete 180... that is how I arrived at Cuitzeo Lake, to the other girl which I used to be.”

³⁶ “A thousand dots [...] at that moment I saw the threads of my dress and heard his footsteps.”

³⁷ “Time closed around her, it became singular and perpetual.”

encontraras frente a tus acciones convertidas en piedras irrevocables como esa... la Piedra se solidificaba al terminar cada palabra, para quedar escrita para siempre en el tiempo”³⁸ (11). Time is solidified through the cyclical task of remembering, and in Laura’s specific case, the remembrance of her treason against the Mesoamerican world.

Garro utilizes the betrayal as a reappropriation of genesis. As a tale which has played a pivotal role in the development of the Western role and woman’s relations to society, Garro adopts this tale to speak about her protagonist’s authority and autonomy. As she rewrites history with an account of her past, Laura is giving new life to genesis through the archetype of *la mujer malinchista*. Laura’s journey through time is Garro’s attempt to decolonize the absurd through the biblical, western notions of women as grotesques. Treason is used as a marker of “femaleness,” in which the “female” is the perverse, the grotesque, the unperceived. As Andrea Long Chu writes, “a female is one who has eaten the loathing of another, like an amoeba that got its nucleus by swallowing its neighbor [...] the process of internalizing itself, the Self’s gentle suicide in the name of someone else’s desires, someone else’s narcissism” (35). “Femaleness,” then, is something beyond the biological and essentialist vision of the sex-gender binary; it is the existential *raison d’etre*, the projection of desire unto the Other. To be female is to be made the object; it is to be unperceived as something other than citizen. Thus, Laura is “female” and not femme, not the queerly feminine. She exists as displaced between the past and the present, between the old world and the new world, between Mesoamerica and America. Laura proves her “femaleness” in the colonized, western, biblical interpretation of the word; she is the Judas shadow, Eve’s progeny. Temptress, responsible for the fall of mankind, seductress, race traitor to an empire of warriors; Laura becomes the inferior other, the subaltern, the “female.” Her meeting

³⁸ “One day you’ll find yourself face-to-face with the consequences of your actions turned into inevitable stone like the One... The Stone solidifies at the end of every word, forever inscribed in Time.”

with her first husband (who remains unnamed throughout the story), initiates the upheaval of her “femaleness” as a grotesque. This upheaval is the result of time, for as he husband reminds her, they share a destiny: “dibujó dos rayitas paralelas que prolongó hasta que se juntaron y se hicieron una sola”³⁹ (Garro 4). He foretells of their eventual fate as one being, unified past Time’s end. However, rather than advocate for the erasure of “femaleness,” Garro tackled the universal femaleness of the world as the human condition to define oneself in accordance to another’s objectification. After all, “the patriarchal system of sexual oppression therefore existed not to express man’s maleness, but to conceal his females” (Long Chu 58-59). Therefore, in “La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas,” Garro first of all makes a pantomime out of Western and biblical definitions of the female as wretched, and secondly, immediately subverts gender-sex essentialism by creating the genderless, nonbinary possibility through the destruction of Time.

To being with, Garro rewrites Genesis into “La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas” by highlighting the relationship between the “female” and treason. Laura is written to Eve’s likeness through her association with imperialism. When her first husband meets her, he comments on her skin: “Esta muy desteñida, parece una mano de ellos”⁴⁰ (Garro 13). He refers to her “colorless” and faded skin as similar to theirs, the enemies’, the Spaniards’. As a result of her early betrayal, Laura’s marker of treason lies in both her whiteness and her femaleness, for it signifies cowardice and weakness. She is “como ellos: traidora”⁴¹ and must subsequently face the consequences of her actions even in her modern life (10). As a “female” of the present, in the post-colonial world, Laura has learnt “a no tenerle respeto al hombre”⁴² (14). She no longer defers to male authority but actively asserts her will over men when she sits fit. Thus, Laura is

³⁹ “He drew two parallel lines that were extended until they met and became one.”

⁴⁰ “It is too pale, like one of theirs.”

⁴¹ “Like them, a traitor.”

⁴² “Not have respect for men.”

able to look at her first husband without flinching or positioning herself as lesser than him in a hierarchy of power of gender; she is able to kiss him, and she is able to demand caring and understanding from him.

In addition, because Laura is unafraid of men, she begins to disregard her second husband, Pablo. Gradually, she understands her displacement in the world and Mexican society more specifically. She starts to shed her “femaleness,” achieving a queer in-betweenness between neither pre-Hispanic femme and post-colonial femme. When she is with Pablo, she notices that he speaks not with “palabras sino con letras”⁴³ (Garro 17). Pablo’s indoctrination into the western ways of language and “culture” is defined by his inability to *create* with words, the inability to speak life unto the abstract, much like a religious recitation or a curse. Instead, he can only pronounce letters without semantic or symbolic attachment. Hence, Laura discovers with Pablo the emptiness of the post-colonial, modern men as they become objects, who must therefore attempt to prove his power and masculinity by attempting to forsake the “female” from every sphere of life. Because Pablo follows the myths of the western world, his fear of the female is projected unto Laura. He is suspicious of her loyalty, which once again emphasizes Laura’s role as woman in modern Mexican society, who is labeled treasonous and grotesque. After all, “to be female is, in every case, to become what someone else wants” (Long Chu 74). Thus, Laura is forced into femaleness by her second husband, who enforces whiteness, the patriarchy, the State, and the myths of colonial hierarchies.

Garro utilizes cyclical time to write about Laura’s metamorphosis from traitor and grotesque to femme and nonbinary. The gender—sex essentialism of male-female is subverted through the decolonization of love, as shown in the relationship between Laura and her first

⁴³ “Words but with letters.”

husband. In Garro's story, "women are not so much fighting for the freedom to be women [...] as for the freedom to be fully human" (Eagleton 24). Ideas of what constitutes womanhood or "femaleness" are discarded not because they do not hold merit, but as demonstration of their flexibility. Womanhood as a metaphysical form of identity, and not a sexual determinant, is shown in "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" through Laura and her first husband's union. While she grants authorial and narrative significance to women, Garro simultaneously decolonizes our ideas of gender as fixed or synonymous to sexual difference. Hence, "if the binary opposition between "man" and "woman" can always be deconstructed—if each term can always be shown to inhere parasitically within the other—then just the same is true of the opposition between those other virulently metaphysical forms of identity" (Eagleton 24). The gender binary is subverted *through* the exploration of gender as mutable, and as separate from sex. Indeed, it is almost like Garro's literature is sexless; only platonic ghosts and shadows inhabit it. As I previously discussed, Garro uses Western canons and myths to her advantage, and rewrites the lore of her country and continent in order to deconstruct it.

The creation of the *nonbinary* is thus facilitated through the decolonization of woman's grotesque. Laura, as a traitor to her people, is portrayed as weak and cowardly in order to further the vision of "femaleness" as the inferiority of the marginalized Other. However, this is merely the rudimentary imitation of Western dogma. After all, despite Laura's treason, her first husband does not resent her; he tells her: "siempre has estado en la alcoba más preciosa de mi pecho"⁴⁴ (Garro 14). Their relationship is not marked by the tension of binary opposites that merely *tolerate* one another. On the other hand, Laura and her husband are joined together as a destined pair who must one day overcome Time; they are the "rayitas paralelas"⁴⁵ inscribed unto the sand,

⁴⁴ "You've always occupied the most precious chamber of my heart."

⁴⁵ "Parallel lines."

waiting to finally be joined together (14). Contrary to the biblical mythos of a tense coexistence between men and women rooted in the unperception of the femme, Laura and her husband understand each other as two parts of a unit in an equation where love, caring, and resilience build a sense of community. It is precisely through this mutual understanding of one another, empathy for the Other and acknowledgment of a difference which does not posit inherited inferiority that enables the unification of the Other as an essential part of the Self. By so doing, Garro evades reinforcing Western hierarchies because her “feminist analogy is exact: if women speak the discourse of the body, the unconscious, the dark underside of formal speech—in a word, the Gothic—they merely conform their aberrant status; if they appropriate like Wollstonecraft the language of radical rationalism, they are no different from men” (Eagleton 34). Garro’s femme character dismantles the grotesqueness assigned to her “femaleness” by the male, western fear of the Eve, and perhaps more importantly, by the national Mexican hatred of malinchistas. Hence, when Laura’s husband says that their eventual unification signals “el final del hombre”⁴⁶ (Garro 15), Garro refers to the end of Time as the destruction of unperception through the disavowal of hierarchies that dictate binaries of maleness and femaleness.

Similarly, in “El robo de Tiztla,” Garro writes about women’s reappropriation of power. In this case, however, she makes the connection between the grotesque and criminal nature of the story coupled with religious undertones. By recovering femme authorial prowess, Garro writes about the crime-scene in the small Mexican pueblo of Tiztla as a metaphor of colonialism and the absurdity of state power. “El robo de Tiztla” takes place in the remote Southern village of Tiztla, where the estancia of Antonio Ibanez is located. It is in this space where the mysterious nature of “el robo que no era robo”⁴⁷ takes place (135). The town is characterized by uncertainty

⁴⁶ “The end of man.”

⁴⁷ “The theft which was not a theft.”

and fear; as a rural, desert community, the people of Tiztla are more afraid of the sun and conjured ills than of the night. Tiztla's history is marked by *el robo*, which remains as mystery until our narrator, Evita, unearths the secrets of that night as a grotesque account of a non-invasion through marginally anti-grotesque realities. In particular, Evita recounts how Lorenza, one of her family's domestic workers and a witch's daughter, played a role in *el robo de Tiztla*.

"El robo de Tiztla" is comprised of a cacophony of femme voices speaking out against the authoritarian force of the patriarchal police-state. In order to investigate the crime and possible theft of Antonio Ibanez's home, local authorities question the working women of the household to understand the events that occurred in the prior night. When the crime occurred, "las mujeres veían en la luz resplandeciente, algo que los hombres no veían. Por eso, en la mañana posterior del robo, las autoridades se enseñaron con las criadas y olvidaron a los hombres de la casa"⁴⁸ (123-4). Women's experiences are treated as imperative to the unmasking of criminality and are thus central to the development of the investigation. Earlier, I referred to "El robo de Tiztla" as a metaphor for colonialism. In the story, the police unit interrogates the women about the crime, and they receive subjective, "incomplete" accounts of the previous night, to the point that the authorities question the validity and the trustworthiness of the women's accounts. "El robo de Tiztla," as the crime which is not a crime, refers to the perspective of the downtrodden and marginalized as they engage with agents of the state whose role in society is to unperceive them as grotesque and undesirable noncitizens. Hence, the short story becomes a metaphor for colonialism, and by extension, other hierarchies of oppression because "the law of political power works best when it is invisible" (Eagleton 33). *El robo que no es robo*, the theft which is not a theft, the genocide which is not genocide, and the history

⁴⁸ "The women could see something in that brilliant light that the men could not. Hence, the morning after the theft, the authorities went with the maids and completely forgot about the men in the house."

which is not history refers above all to the canons of the Americas as they were created and institutionalized. Told through the subjective, first-person accounts of the household workers and the youngest daughter, Evita, our story serves as the representation of colonialism and oppression in America.

As the authorities question the maids and other domestic workers of the house, they receive various accounts about the crime. The common denominator revolves around a large group of “hombres blancos, con ojos de lumbre, que andaban muy despacito en el jardín. Cada uno llevaba una antorcha en la mano”⁴⁹ (Garro 124). The working women of the house all agree that these foreigners carried machetes with them as they moved about the garden and entered the father’s bodegon. When the investigative team moves into the family’s garden to inspect the damage, they find it destroyed and trampled over: “los arboles mostraban huellas profundas de machetazos; los plátanos estaban por tierra; los tulipanes destrozados a cuchilladas; los helechos, como caballeros tirados en el suelo... era como si hubieran entrado en la casa para acabar con el verdor del jardín”⁵⁰ (128). The destruction of the home’s idyllic garden is reminiscent of the European’s arrival to the Americas. Just as the thieves ransacked the environment in their wake for the mysterious item they stole, so too did the settler-colonists arrive in the Americas in their hopes to acquire the gold and other riches Columbus described in his travel logs. Columbus characterizes his stay in the continent as the arrival of the civilized world into the garden of Eden. He describes America as a land of abundance and tame peoples, “islas muy verdes y fértiles y de aires muy dulces, y puede haber muchas cosas que yo no sé, porque no me quiero

⁴⁹ “White men, with eyes like brimstone, very slowly roaming across the garden. Each one carried a torch.”

⁵⁰ “The trees demonstrated deep gashes; bananas littered the ground; tulips laid destroyed beneath us; ferns, like knights defeated... it was as if it they had entered the house to do away with life in the garden.”

detener por calar y andar muchas islas para fallar oro”⁵¹ (Colon 36). The islands—what we currently refer to as America—are fertile spaces with ample, bountiful resources. Columbus and his legacy of conquerors and colonizers, like the mysterious thieves of “El robo de Tiztla,” have come to plunder, subjugate, and expand their empire via the quest for gold and other treasures. It is obvious from his description of islands that America has been likened to the garden of Eden in the European, patriarchal, imperial imaginarium in order to craft a narrative of destiny, settlement, and evangelization. Hence, Garro’s story alludes to this colonizing tradition, to the history of the “New World” as it is deemed discovered and owned.

“El robo de Tiztla” uses the crime-scene, in which something has been taken but cannot be identified, to more specifically demonstrate the role on indigenous femme voices in the (re)telling of this story. The destruction of the garden—literally and historically—constitutes the destruction of indigeneity. As Patrick Wolfe writes, “so far as indigenous people are concerned, where they are *is* who they are, and not only by their own reckoning [...] settler colonialism destroys to replace” (388). In Garro’s tale, the investigation carried out by the authorities is nothing more than a pantomime for justice. Rather than seriously consider the working-class women’s testimonies of the crime, the chief of police perpetuates the violence of the patriarchal state by casting doubt on their accounts of the theft. He asks the *senora de la casa* if she has any suspicious before prompting her “*confianza en sus sirvientes*”⁵² (Garro 134). The police disregard the domestic worker’s testimonies as liable to be untrue, thereby reinforcing the patriarchal and colonial systems of oppression which make up the history of the Americas. Just as the white invaders destroyed the home’s garden as a metaphor for the arrival of the Europeans

⁵¹ “Very green and fertile isles, with very sweet airs, and there could be many things I yet do not know, because I do not want to stop as I’d rather roam the isles in search for gold.”

⁵² “Trust in her servants.”

to the New World, so too does the presence of the police state serve as a symbol for settler colonialism. By unperceiving the working women, the police is thus erasing their testimonies as the apocryphal history of the land.

Additionally, Garro extends the metaphor by juxtaposing Evita, the patriarch's youngest daughter, and Lorenza Varela, one of the maids working for the family. It is Evita who becomes the narrator of the latter part of the story, revealing the mysteries of that night and breaking the previous silence she adopted to resist the probing of the authorities. As the youngest child raised in an upper middle-class household, Evita comes to spend most of her childhood in close quarters with the maids and other workers. She tells us that as she grew up surrounded by the workers, she considered herself a friend to them because she appreciated the beauty of the indigenous women: "me gustaban sus trenzas negras, sus vestidos color violetas, sus joyas brillantes y las cosas que sabían"⁵³ (137). Evita's appreciation for her maids, their indigeneity, their femininity, and the unique beauty they exuded is reminiscent of the mestizo and criollo idealization of "lo indio." In particular, Evita seems fascinated by Lorenza and her knowledge of taboo subjects like love and witchcraft. She is interested in what Lorenza can offer her because it allows her to gain a semblance of power: "Lorenza, la más joven, me confiaba secretos a condición de que yo le confiara otros de igual importancia que los suyos"⁵⁴ (137). This exchange of information facilitates the relations between the young girl—progenitor of the privileged class—and Lorenza—a maid subservient to the rule of systemic hierarchies. The power dynamic is flipped, as Lorenza possesses the "forbidden" knowledge not available in Evita's world; in a way, the allusion Garro refers to us once again biblical, for Eve reaches for the forbidden fruit

⁵³ "I liked their black braided hair, their violet dresses, their brilliant gems and the things they knew."

⁵⁴ "Lorenza, the youngest of the maids, would confide her secrets to me on the condition that I too would confide my own of the same importance as hers."

from the tree of knowledge, and Lorenza, in her role as the grotesque representation of evil, delivers. Of course, the association between indigenous womanhood and evil is blatant in its representation of Lorenza as grotesque. This is the point I would hereby like to emphasize.

The relationship between Evita and Lorenza is one in which the power dynamic is subverted when both individuals enter into a contract of mutual exchange. For Evita, this means trading her father's fabricated treasures in exchange for some of Lorenza's knowledge of witchcraft: "Cuando Lorenza supo que los jarrones eran tan preciosos, me conto un secreto de brujería, que me sirvió para dar ordenes a mis hermanos"⁵⁵ (138). Evita uses the new knowledge she gains in order to assert power over her brothers. Hence, not only does she trade the secrets of the patriarchal house, but she uses the magic she has learned to completely upend the gender hierarchy of her household, which is nothing else but a microcosm of Mexican society at large. Lorenza, on the other hand, obtains the self-autonomy of the dispossessed. Because she is an indigenous working woman, Lorenza had to be "rendered dependent on the introduced economy or reduced to the stock-raids that provide the classic pretext for colonial death-squads" (Wolfe 395). In order to ensure her survival within the white capitalist world, Lorenza had to conform to patriarchal and imperial impositions of rules and values. However, as she develops this mutual form of aid between Evita and herself, she utilizes her femme, indigenous knowledge of the world to subvert the power dynamic in a way that benefits her.

Now I will focus on Garro's initial representation of Lorenza and her development as a character throughout "El robo de Tiztla." Lorenza is at fist described as an "hija de una bruja y su conocimiento del misterio era muy vasto"⁵⁶ (137-138). Lorenza's pedigree makes her a figure

⁵⁵ "When Lorenza realized the vases were so valuable, she told me a secret about witchcraft which helped me order around my brothers."

⁵⁶ "Daughter of a witch and her knowledge was very vast."

of danger; as a woman with magical power and knowledge beyond what Evita can imagine in her Eurocentric vision of the world, she is indeed a character that deviates from conception of Christian good. In essence, she is grotesque, alien, and marginal. Lorenza's representation is similar to Laura's in "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas." They are both unlikable women willing to sacrifice someone or something if it means ensuring their safety, security, or desires. Both Lorenza and Laura lack loyalty and are portrayed as malinchistas—Laura as a traitor to her people and her husband, and Lorenza as a traitor to the capitalist Ibuñez household working in cahoots with foreigners. Evita confides in Lorenza and tells her that the treasure is located in her father's bodega, where she can find "el gran Tesoro de [su] papa" (139). Lorenza passes this information along to her romantic partner, Julian, and both then organize the ransacking of the property in search for gold.

Garro creates Lorenza as a historic archetype, like Laura, in order to expose the prejudices of a reader familiar only with western canons of womanhood and legitimacy. Garro presents Lorenza as a provocateur, leading a young and innocent Evita away from God and the civilized, then ultimately betraying her to steal the gold she, Julian, and the colonizer's coveted. As all the other maids recounted, on the night of the theft, the white foreigners danced around the garden before mysteriously disappearing through the bodegon. The account is told with certain suspicion, alluding to Devil's work or witchcraft. Yet, as Evita reveals, that night what actually happened was not some unexplained and macabre invasion, but the result of an utterly mundane cause. She describes, "la noche en que mi madre me trepo en la silla, vi a Lorenza que atravesaba el jardín en medio de las antorchas de los asaltantes. Iba con su vestido rosa y sus trenzas deshechas. Corría despavorida buscando el camino de su cuarto. Julián iba detrás de ella con un

machete en la mano”⁵⁷ (139). Evita witnesses the aftermath of the “theft.” Being unable to find the treasure that Evita described—for it did not exist beyond the child’s imagination—Lorenza is assaulted by Julian and runs for the safety of the household to get away from him and the foreigners. When Evita confronts her, Lorenza comes up with a simple plan to avoid punishment from the authorities: Evita will swear she did not see anything, and Lorenza will pretend to have lost her voice “por el espanto”⁵⁸ (140). As a metaphor for colonialism, “El robo de Tiztla” culminates with the utter absence of hold, and with Lorenza’s façade. Relying on the superstitions of the Mexican subconscious and patriarchal conceptions of women as witches, Lorenza’s voice is lost until her mom comes to cure her: “mato a un conejo en el lugar en donde aparecieron los demonios que se llevaron la lengua de su hija y pronuncio unas palabras [...] desde entonces Lorenza pudo hablar con lengua de animal”⁵⁹ (140). Lorenza’s “animal tongue” follows a tradition of acquittal, in which femininity is untranslatable, grotesque, and incomprehensible. This pattern of silencing facilitates the unperception of Lorenza as nothing more than a weak, powerless, and hysterical woman. After all, Garro relies on her readers’ disconnection from material reality to trick them into unperceiving the nature of the Other as a problem which must “solved” or translated. As Samuel Truett writes, “territorial dispossession and the erasure of peoples [...] began with crossings into spaces organized around different political protocols; different vision of past, present, and future; different ways of connecting to other; and different ways of projecting power” (438). Lorenza’s projection of power manifested through how others perceived her; if she was nothing else but a witch’s daughter, grotesque, and

⁵⁷ “The night in which my mother lifted me unto the chair, I saw Lorenza running through the garden amid the invaders’ torches. She had her pink dress on, which was as ruffled as her braids. She ran away in fear in search of the path home. Julian pursued her with a machete in his hands.”

⁵⁸ “Because of the scare.”

⁵⁹ “She killed a rabbit in the same place the demons stole her daughter’s tongue and said a couple words... since then Lorenza has been able to speak again, but with an animal’s tongue.”

powerless, then she was unperceived as just another maid, another *india*. Thus, Garro subverts unperception in Lorenza's favor, demonstrating how marginalized women survive in hierarchical societies by upending the order through chaos.

Garro's writing captures the material realities of Mexican femmes across racial, sexual, class, and religious spectrums in their bid to survive in Western society. She portrays "bad," unlikable women—traitors, usurpers, cowards, and scorned lover to men who use them to their advantage. Like Rosario Ferré, Garro writes with, through, and beyond the structure of American literary and political frameworks. She makes the femme grotesque to expose them as they are, and not as they have been unperceived. Latin American women writers like Rosario Ferré and Elena Garro reappropriate absurdity, biblical mythos, and Western colonial canons in order to dismantle the constructed femme, to empower marginalized women without resorting to the male gaze. Garro's short stories "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" and "El robo de Tiztla" are therefore part of a larger tradition within patriarchal, supremacist literature. Her works fit in the system of the anti-systemic, a feminist, anarchical critique of Mexican society that does not entirely acquit itself from fault. By exposing the realities of Latin American women existing in *las periferias*, Garro, like Ferré, gives us liberty, solidarity, and above all, community.

CONCLUSION

It was important for me to examine how those who “transgress” beyond their position in a hierarchical society survived outside these margins. By initially analyzing the frameworks imitated by Global South writers like Faulkner and Hurston in their respective works, I identified the precise moments of unperception and how they unraveled throughout the novels. In *Absalom, Absalom*, my focus was multifaceted; I analyzed the narrative struggles between Quentin and Rosa as Quentin, representative of the patriarchal state, overwrites and edits pieces of Rosa’s tale. Yet, I also mentioned Rosa’s inability to project outside of herself, and the gaps, the silences which beget characters like Clytemnestra and Charles Bon. When it came to unperception, the defining moment in *Absalom, Absalom* was, per excellence, the stair scene after Charles Bon’s death. Rosa, having heard the news, rushes out to witness his death, to verify it, but is met by Clytie and the ghosts she associates with Sutpen. It is in this moment when Rosa uncomfortably and feebly cannot continue to hold on to the illusion of difference, the exercise of unperception. The events that follow, prompted by the Civil War and absence of the patriarch, are naturally the slow progress of Rosa and Clytie as they become not only sisters, but comrades during desperate times. In much the same way, Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* exemplifies unperception at different levels. In my analysis of Hurston’s novel I focus on the protagonist Janie and her relationships with the various men she has become romantically involved with. Janie’s life is measured through the changes she undergoes as she leaves the men she can no longer be compressed into non-citizen for. As a young woman, her life begins with the presence of the pear tree as an allegory for her naturality, her femininity, and her sexuality. She is unperceived by these men—Logan Killicks, Jody, and even Tea Cake—because they feel threatened by the nature of her body as natural and uncontrollable. Additionally, Janie is

marginalized by society as a woman who cannot be controlled, a woman who does not conform to gender roles and power dynamics. She is desired as an object and is thus susceptible to those who wish to exercise power over her. I used Freud's work to compliment my analysis of Janie and her position in society because the themes and patterns found in Hurston's work are not much different from what was found in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, and the later works which I analyzed.

Understanding the parallel histories and frameworks instituted as a result of colonization, imperialism, and war is pivotal in the recognition of unperception and alienation. Rosario Ferré's short stories, "La muñeca menor" and "Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres," imitate the same structures of power and authority envisioned by Faulkner and Hurston. "La muñeca menor" revolves around an unnamed femme protagonist that fits the description for the archetype of "the bride." She is essentially devoid of life, unaware of herself as human and represented as the homunculus of her husband's desires. She has been raised in an old aristocratic Puerto Rican family and has been surrounded by the narrator of the story, her aunt, throughout her childhood and adolescence. As the youngest daughter, she is the last to be married off and taken away from the bourgeois patriarchal home. This exchange is akin to bartering, as she is then "bought" by a doctor's son in hopes of raising his own social value in the eyes of the emerging industrial, capitalist society. The lack of freedom and her husband's inability to see her as a living being initiates her slow unification and decay into that lifeless doll her aunt had gifted her at her wedding day. The metaphor is clear; by not seeing the woman as a person, but rather only as "his" wife, she became a piece of property, just another doll to project man's desire unto.

Similarly, in “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” Ferré portrays the metaphysical putrification of the protagonists, Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra, after the patriarch’s—Ambrosio’s—death. In a last attempt to control them beyond the grave, Ambrosio’s inheritance to the women is to leave them with half of his home to each, displaying his power over their lives and the inexplicable web of fear-hatred-desire which bands them together. I applied Lacan’s analysis of courtly love in my analysis of “womanhood” and belonging. Isabel Luberza, as a rich white woman, is portrayed as the Madonna, the Lady, and is therefore afforded the “privilege” of being seen and regarded as a luxury. Yet, what this highlights is not Luberza’s freedom, but the objectification of femininity when it meets standards of whiteness. The contrast between her reality and Isabel la Negra’s is more apparent through the Apollonian and Dionysian dialectic. Race determines how the women are viewed, in addition to what class they are assigned. The rich white woman is “properly” speaking, a woman, while the poor black woman is not only not a woman, but a commodity, an item. Luberza is seen as virginal, pure, safe, and la Negra is seen as sexual, dirty, and dangerous. Each woman is assigned a respective sphere that they must never transgress should they wish to acquire the wrath of *el pueblo*. Transgression means unperception; it means to be seen as grotesque, alien, and inhuman. When Luberza and la Negra meet, like Faulkner’s Rosa and Clytie, they realize the myths in which they have enshrouded the other with, prompting their genesis into a plural, uniform Isabel as the narrative voice. My particular focus for “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” is to show how the Madonna-Whore complex is reinvented in the Global South. Ferré’s representation of both women is a reference to the popular Puerto Rican *plena* by the same name. The association of witchcraft and femme power alludes to the rapidly changing dynamic between Luberza and la Negra as they move away from gendered binaries. In the end, the story culminates with the

unification of the Isabels as an allegory for mutual love and understanding between women existing at the margins of an exploitative and patriarchal world.

In Garro's stories, "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" and "El robo de Tiztla," I surveyed the role of unperception in the alienation of women as undesirable Others who are assigned grotesqueness as an essentialist characteristic of their nature as "females." Andrea Long-Chu's analysis of what exactly being a "female" is particularly noteworthy, as it established the gender difference as inherently existential, rather than simply biological. For "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas," Garro portrays the main character, Laura, as a malinchista. Laura betrays the trust of her community, the Tlaxcaltecas, and of her first husband, as she is implied to have facilitated the genocide of her people by selling her people's own treason against the Aztecs. Garro's writing captures the material reality of her characters as their worldview and conditioning is thwarted by the absurdity of Time. The unraveling of linear Time into the absurdity, circularity, and ambiguity of "reality" facilitates Laura's journey as she begins to shed heteronormative views of "femaleness" and inferiority into the femme reclamation of power and resilience needed to overcome oppressive hierarchies. Laura's whiteness in specific is the vehicle in which "treason" is discussed once I analyzed the biblical undertones of Laura as Eve. Following a long tradition of grotesque women in Western literature, Garro uses the readers' own prejudice to envision a different world, a world in which our biases escape us when we can no longer unperceive the Other. The end of Time in "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" is synonymous to the end of hierarchies of gender, as it is marked by the union between Laura and her first husband outside of colonial frameworks of power.

Garro's "El robo de Tiztla" revolves around the role of grotesqueness, indigeneity, and gender in our understanding of crime. For this section of my thesis, I decided to pay particular

attention to Lorenza, one of the working-class, indigenous maids working in the Ibanez household during the theft that took place. I examined how the “theft” which was not a theft was a metaphor for colonialism, as it depended on the voices of women to tell their testimonies to state authorities interested in upholding the status quo. I draw parallels between the destruction of the home’s idyllic garden and the arrival of the Europeans to the “New” World. I used Columbus’ travel logs and his descriptions of the land to demonstrate the sublime and biblical comparisons drawn between Nature in the islands he is exploring, and their arrival as the dawn of a new age for Christianity. I make a connection between the destruction of the garden and nature to the destruction of indigeneity itself. By attacking the natural world and ransacking the riches of the land, the foreign “thieves” ultimately enabled the colonization of that space. The metaphor is extended by the relationship between Evita and Lorenza. Evita displays a sense of admiration for Lorenza’s way of life, and specifically, to her closeness to the taboo: witchcraft. Their relationship is defined by the mutual exchange of information as it is treated by both as a means to gain control or power over men. In Lorenza’s case, she is privy to layers of unperception because of her origins. She is grotesque through both her femaleness and her indigeneity, and this is manifested above all by Garro’s representation of Lorenza as a malinchista. It is at first implied that Lorenza, through her magic, facilitated the theft by enlisting the help of the supernatural foreigners. And yet, as the story progresses, I examined how Garro utilized the reader’s own assumptions for the final plot twist. Rather than being the result of witchcraft or the supernatural, the reality of Lorenza’s betrayal was quite mundane and familiar. The event was a distraction, as her real objective was to steal the treasure she imagined hidden in order to please her romantic partner. Hence, Lorenza’s projection of power relied on unperception, as it allowed her to use other’s desires and prejudices about her to escape the

system she worked under. Instead, of course, Lorenza fails, as there is no treasure and her partner assaults her. Hence, Garro's "El robo de Tiztla" captures the material reality of women like Lorenza, who live in the margins as grotesque and taboo. Garro's representation of la malinchista, of the unlikable, "bad" woman, clarifies the role of unperception and alienation of the subaltern in their to survive. Like Ferré's stories, "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" and "El robo de Tiztla" distinguish the hierarchies of oppression in the Global South in order to dismantle the colonial, male gaze of femininity as inherently treacherous and grotesque.

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