

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

AN ELUSIVE ESCAPE: RESTRATEGIZING “FEMININE GENRES” IN
LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN’S FICTION

By

Mary Catherine Bartsh

A DISSERTATION

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AN ELUSIVE ESCAPE: RESTRATEGIZING “FEMININE GENRES” IN
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Mary Catherine Bartsh

Approved:

Steve Butterman, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Portuguese
and Director of Women’s and Gender
Studies

Elena Grau-Lleveria, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Spanish

B. Christine Arce, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Spanish

M. Brian Blake, Ph.D.
Dean of Graduate School

Otavio Bueno, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair of Philosophy

BARTSH, MARY CATHERINE
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This dissertation analyzes Latin American contemporary female authors’ fictional use of normatively “feminine genres” (i.e., letters and diaries) in the structure of the novel. I illustrate that certain authors *re-strategize* these forms in order to execute their own interpretation of the novel. Examples of this reconstituting of feminine genres are an *artist’s novel*, a *crônica manifesto*, a complex parody of *the romance novel* and a *creative prose journal*. The intention is not to relegate these modes of writing to a minor status, but expose their multidimensional literary function and feminist strategies in Latin American women’s fiction. My theoretical intervention posits this body of work as significant in locating feminine and feminist textual agency. This dissertation looks at six authors from different Latin American countries: Elena Poniatowska’s *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* (1978); Sara Sefchovich’s *Demasiado amor* (1990); Marilene Felinto’s *As mulheres de Tijucoapapo* (1982); and Giovanna Rivero’s *Las camaleonas* (2001), all of whom *re-strategize* feminine genres in late 20th century and the 21st century to perform feminist critiques of their particular socio-political, philosophical and literary contexts.

DEDICATION PAGE

I dedicate this dissertation to late my grandparents, Milton Bartsh and Verda Gould, both of whom passed away during my graduate studies and would have been delighted to see my work come to fruition.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Tracing a Feminine Tradition

Usually when one thinks of feminine genres less credited or minor forms of writing come to mind: diaries, letters, and confessionals.¹ These varieties have often been associated with the feminine simply due to the fact that they were the only textual and/or discursive spaces that women had ready access to long before they began writing novels. Even then, frequently women were restricted to or expected to produce a certain type of novel, domestic or romantic.² These minor textual expressions connote a private, intimate space that has been written off as self indulgent. From the 17th through the early 20th century, these works were not seen as worthy literary articulations suitable for publication or reception of literary merit. In Western intellectual thought, the private sphere has been linked to the female body, whereas the public sphere was associated with knowledge and has been connected to the male body, thus creating one of the founding dialectics in feminist thought between public and private. Although few female authors' use of minor genres are recognized in recent Latin American literary criticism,³ the fictionalization of these genres has been generally overlooked by literary scholars.

In Latin America, the first texts produced by women emerged in the form of confessionals, written out of obligation to their priests. During colonial times, women were forced to write to a specific male audience, either out of pure necessity or if they

¹ I do not include the genre of the testimony or autobiography because those genres were initiated and dominated by men. This is not to say that men do not or can not write the epistolary novel; women also participate in genres conventionally thought of as masculine. However, it is the intention of my project to try to locate a genre that could be defined as predominantly feminine.

² See Nancy Armstrong's "The Rise of Feminine Authority in the Novel."

³ I'm alluding to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz work and autobiographical productions by Victoria Ocampo. These texts are discussed in detail in Margarita Saona's "La autobiografía intelectual como antinomia en la escritura de mujeres."

had a particular request to obtain.⁴ Male religious officials would obligate nuns to craft writings that were never intended for a public audience, and in many cases were lost. These writings served as a control mechanism and also as a way for the sisters to subscribe to moral and religious edification. In this sense, the texts reveal⁵ an intimate relationship between the female author and God, based on personal spiritual enlightenment. At the same time, these initial texts present a *private* female author, regulated by men, thus providing evidence of an imposed patriarchal system.⁶ Therefore, since colonial times, there has existed a lucid tension between public and private dimensions with regard to women's writing and the use of "feminine genres."

The Latin American women writer's legacy, then, is to the *private author*, an intimate authority. The already inscribed Latin American literary history usually traced from Independence to post Boom tendencies generally only includes female authors as marginal, vanguard or feminist writers.⁷ This imposed marginalization has led to many

⁴ See M. Olimpia García Aguilar's "La voluntad al escribir y la persuasión de su palabra: Tres textos femeninos novohispanos."

⁵ Specifically I am referencing those that been preserved and studied; for example, the *Relación Autobiograficio* by Sor Ursula Suárez (1666-1749) and *Epistolario* by Sor Josefa by los Dolores Peña y Lillo (1739-1828). Ximena Azúa's "'Abrir los propios cofres' La escritura como conocimiento de sí misma" looks at these texts analytically.

⁶ See Ximena Azúa's "'Abrir los propios cofres' La escritura como conocimiento de sí misma"

⁷ There are several cases of this classification beginning with references in the 1980s, for example in "Latin American Literature from the 'Boom' On" by George Yúdice and Doris Somers. More recent texts such as the *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature* (1997) also follow this trend. Others are organized by authors' names, such as *Hispanic Writers: A Selection of Sketches from Contemporary Authors* (1991) and *Spanish American Authors: The Twentieth Century* (1992) in which case women are included; however, the number of women in comparison to the number of men is significantly lower. It is logical then that women have organized separate encyclopedias and anthologies solely devoted to women writers. Montserrat Ordóñez opens the prologue of *Escritoras de hispanoamerica* (1990) stating: "Hasta poco nos preguntábamos si había escritoras en América Latina" (xi). Similarly, María T. Medeiros-Lichem makes note in her critical intervention *La Voz Femenina En La Narrativa Latinoamericana: Una Relectura Crítica* (2006) that "las escritoras latinoamericanas han estado ausentes del canon literario, a excepción de algunas poetisas mujeres y de ejemplos aislados de autoras de ficción" (89). Both women are responding to the invisibility that women writers have faced in terms of classification of their work.

women writing their own anthologies and literary histories while confronting these ideological problems.⁸

One of the first (feminist) texts produced by a female author in New Spain was Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's well-known *Respuesta*.⁹ In her self-reflexive letter to the Bishop of Puebla in 1691, Sor Juana defends women's right to academic endeavors. As Sylvia Molloy and others have noted in their analysis of the letter,¹⁰ she presents a strong argument in favor of women's writing. Sor Juana also attempts to counter the tradition that women were prohibited from speaking in church, outlining a genealogy of women who had been recognized as saints. According to Sor Juana, the education of women should have been viewed as a virtuous practice and not subjected to limitation. As Sylvia Molloy highlights, Sor Juana's composition provides a glimpse into the power dynamic between writer and text: “(The) narration of self is more a means to achieve a goal than the goal itself” (Molloy 458). Although the letter provides space for the expression of self, it is primarily Sor Juana's vehicle or tool to uphold her rights as a female servant of God and the Church. In a sense this textual space serves a dual purpose, with the strategic function at the heart of writing.

In her chapter “Female Rhetorics” from *Autobiographical Practices*, Patricia Meyer Spacks discusses how, in Victorian and post-Victorian eras, letter writing was the

⁸ In an effort to valorize and reinscribe the female Latin American author there have been numerous anthologies written in the 20 century *La sartén por el mango: encuentro de escritores latinoamericanas* and *Women's Writing in Latin America* are two highly referenced examples.

⁹ This text has also been used by leading Latin American feminists to argue that Sor Juana was fighting for the early liberal feminist ideas, though of course within the parameters of the Church.

¹⁰ See Early Stephanie Merrim's *Modern Women's Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, and Josefina Ludmer's “*Tretas del débil*.”

common form of literature employed by women, specifically among aristocrats and the bourgeoisie.¹¹ Their letter writing exposes a private feminine culture that, in general, reflects and illuminates “the conflict between the desire for self-assertion and the need for self suppression, and they demonstrate strategies of deflection” (178). The female self attempts definition against the models of individual selfhood implicit in men’s writings to construct a different self subject with its own concerns to and for writing.

The valorization of private/feminine genres seen in the prestigious form of the novel among Latin American women emerges in late 19th and early 20th century. These early uses of minor genres remain close to the original or non-fictional genre and tend to take the form of the epistolary novel, diary, and memoir. Two authors, Adela Zamudio and Teresa de la Parra, diverged from the male dominated trends thematically grounded in romanticism, realism, naturalism and modernism’s social preoccupations with the national by employing these genres. However, generally remaining within the modernist zeitgeist, these feminine genres were used within a framework that clearly defined genres as “masculine” and “feminine”, corresponding to different models of social life in keeping with the feminine/masculine binary. Their intimist perspectives provide insight into the limited position of the female protagonist at the turn of the century and serve as ironic critiques of these social concepts embedded in their societies.

¹¹ Although Spacks is specifically interested in letter writing in the English tradition, we can assume similar practices were held by Latin American women of high social class. For example, in *Historia de las mujeres en España y América Latina*, Isabel Morant states that a large part of the autobiographical texts (first person prose) written in the Modern Era were written by women. In addition, it was very common for women to craft letters in order to communicate between the Old and New worlds. Specifically in regard to Spanish women she states that “el epistolario es uno de los géneros de documentación personal que más utilizaron las españolas de la Era Moderna; es mucho lo que estas cartas nos revelan de sus vivencias y esperanzas, así como de los recursos culturales que tuvieron a su alcance” (156).

There appears to be a decline in the use of feminine forms from the 40s to the 60s, with a slight reemergence in the late 70s (although this tendency never has been at the forefront of Latin American women's writing). This may be due to the high number of political works produced denouncing class hegemony and gender subordination, and focusing on sexual exploration.¹² After World War II a conflicted appropriation of the literary system inherited from the male tradition was a primary concern for women authors. In addition, a slew of women writers at the time outright rejected (and still reject) any kind of notion of gendered writing as discussed in Castro-Klarén's, Sylvia Molloy's, and Beatriz Sarlo's *Women's Writing in Latin America: An Anthology* (1991). Julieta Campos, Cristina Peri-Rossi, Nérida Piñon, Elena Poniatowska, Henriqueta Lisboa, and perhaps even Gabriel Mistral, Victoria Ocampo, and Damiela Eltit argue that there is only *writing*, even if historically it has been dominated by men. This refusal to accept the concept of gendered writing, the dismissal of the idea of women's writing as another trend (especially because of its allusion to a biological determinism) has often encouraged the labeling of writers who posit the belief of a genderless writing as antifeminist. In fact, many of these writers would remark that "the feminine," the notion of a women's writing, corresponds to the historical conditioning of patriarchal systems over women (19).

In 1982, Elena González and Eliana Ortega organized a conference gathering the most pertinent women writers and critics at the time to discuss the woman writer and her

¹² In general, Latin American fiction began to change between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. Dictatorial regimes of the 70s especially those in the Southern Cone, and feelings of exile are trademarks of the post-Boom. Also, See footnote 27 for detailed list of Latin American women writers.

work.¹³ Later these discussions would be published in the well referenced *La sartén por el mango: encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas*. The debates focused on questions of comparison, differentiation, and reaction. María Lugones proposed the creation and construction or reconstruction of feminine canons. While Josefina Ludmer believed that feminine thinking should be deessentialized and called for the rejection of categories of the feminine. Alicia Borinsky posited approaching feminine texts from the place where one is located rather than constantly thinking about the characteristics of “feminine discourse”. Marilyn Jiménez reminded the attendees not to confuse feminine text with feminine essence. According to Jiménez, there are only feminine texts as long as there is a concern for the feminine. There will always be feminine texts as long as the feminine condition exists (14).

Although historically, this rejection seems quite logical for Latin American women who demand to be recognized as writers first and not discriminated against for merely being women, I find it problematic to promote women’s writing as genderless. From a feminist’s perspective it runs the risk of dismissing visibility of women’s oppressed position under patriarchy, but even worse, it limits space for new types of theorization dealing with notions of “feminine” writing and genres. Just as the word “gender” possesses various meanings, so does the term “feminine.” The term itself often carries negative implications. Traditionally, characteristics such as passivity and fragility have contributed to a negative associated of the term. At the same time, roles that have

¹³ There were more than two hundred attendees, students, professors, writers, and scholars. The following writers participated: Rosario Ferré, Chiqui Vicioso, Marta Traba, Elvira Orphée, Sylvia Molloy, Elena Poniatowska, Myra Casa, Luz María Umpierre, Dolores Prida, Marjorie Agosín, Olga Casanova, Matilde Daviú and Estrella de los Ríos. Other contributors and participants included: Sara Castro-Klarén, Josefina Ludmer, Gabriela Mora, Juan Brucenova, María Lugones, Alicia Borinsky, Federico Borges, George Yúdice, Efraín Barradas, Juan Gelpí, Marilyn Jiménez, Roberto Márquez, Doris Sommer among others.

been designated as feminine have been viewed as inferior, like childrearing and home life. As a result, certain feminists have focused on particular areas deemed adversely feminine insofar as they once again place value, for example, on domesticity, mothering, and the female body. Although I clearly see the predicament of women's writing being devalued by being labeled as "feminine," alas our societies *are* conditioned by patriarchal systems and as a result of those systems, certain forms of literature have emerged, whether or not they have even been *regarded* as literature. I would like to note that for the purposes of this dissertation, I am not as concerned about "feminine" writing as I am with the use of "feminine genres," which I believe most of the above named authors reject. Using the term feminine genres is a political and feminist gesture in itself. The aim is not to demote these modes of writing to minor status but rather uncover their multidimensional literary function when used in Latin American women's fiction. My theoretical intervention postulates this body of work as a legitimate and relevant set of forms, retaining in their own right literary practices worthy of study. "Feminine" writing suggests the possibility of the essential or essentialized feminine, which is not my intention to examine; rather, I explore the distinctive fictional openings that feminine forms of writing permit women authors. Therefore, in branding them "feminine," I seek to find the literary merit in these forms, despite their having been unfavorably dismissed.

Feminine writing, or *l'écriture féminine* defined by Hélène Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of Medusa," (1975) stakes the claim that feminine discourse is resistant to that of dominant masculine discourse. She calls for women to write with their bodies, as if to promote a sort of bodily inscription that celebrates the parts of the female body. Her argument is hermeneutically linked to female sexuality, comparing women's oppressed

sexuality to their historical position within literature. Cixous attacks androgyny as an annulment of differences and supports instead what she calls “the *other bisexuality*.” Although Cixous’s *l’écriture féminine* is significant in valorizing the female body and sexuality, it adopts Derridean terminology for a philosophically different program that simply inverts the standard pairings.¹⁴ This approach is problematic as it fails to extricate the position of the female body and sexuality from a binary structure that facilitates a power dynamic, one that feminists have traditionally criticized.

Examination of the productivity of feminine genres is restricted by identifying feminine writing and feminine genres. It is true that both men and women can write letters, that is, participate in the same genre. However, *how* and *why* they write such letters will never be the same due to the particular socio-historical experience each has had, specifically the experience of embodiment. In addition, the history of these private forms and their relation to women have been far different from how men have used them. Therefore, in direct relation to the private and public dialectic seen in the use of these forms, they have provided women authors a privileging of the private, not permissible in other genres traditionally dominated by men.

This is why some critics such as Iris Zavala and Elena Grau-Lleveria have declared the necessity for theoretical examination of the use of feminine genres. Women writers that draw upon these personal genres in their narratives endow their texts with their personal interpretations of history through their lived experiences. The subjective nature of private texts reflects the favoring of the expression of intimacy, with a very

¹⁴ Cixous follows Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, setting up a series of binary oppositions (active/passive, sun/moon, culture/nature, day/night, father/mother, logos/pathos, etc...). Each pair can be seen as a hierarchy; the former term is positive and masculine and is forced to kill the feminine one. This is the deadly “phallogocentric” principle from Derrida’s critique of logocentrism.

limited audience. As Grau-Lleveria points out,¹⁵ this feature of personal texts has often led these texts to be analyzed and evaluated as “reformulaciones artísticas de tipo autobiográfico” (46). According to Grau-Lleveria, this line of criticism fails to capture the particularities of the socio-historical and socio-literary commentaries of the texts.

Zavala adds to the discussion, stating:

Si el discurso dominante es genérico e históricamente ha dejado ‘sin voz’ a la mujer, imponiendo normas, cánones y valores, y por lo tanto silenciando o reprimiendo la propia narratividad, es primordial teorizar sobre aquellos géneros que permiten hablar por propia cuenta, dentro de los propios cánones y normas. (68)

In “Las tretas del débil” Josefina Ludmer discusses why women ought to utilize personal genres to develop and generate knowledge that belongs to the public sphere. In this sense, rather than simply analyze these genres as a reaction to the public sphere, Ludmer urges the transformation of this sphere through its interaction *with* the private sphere.

What is required is a proper theorization of the fictional use of feminine genres in order to adequately analyze and value the creative work that women writers have performed. Together with Grau-Lleveria and Iris Zavala, I too believe that the use of feminine genres should be examined within its own theoretical parameters and without becoming bogged down by reductionism or essentialism. The idea that the woman creative artist remains at the center of this theorization is key. In addition, the recognition of genres traditionally limited to women serves as a tribute to the socio-historically relevant spaces that women have occupied.

¹⁵ Grau-Lleveria discusses the fictional deployment of feminine genres in her article: “Memorias de Mamá Blanca: Del diario a la memoria. La construcción de una genealogía (creativa) femenina” (2000).

It's Personal: Women's Diary Writing

In her article *Taking Things Personally: Women, Journal Writing, and Self-Creation*, Marlene A. Schiwy discusses the conceptual, personal, and experimental perspectives on women's diaries, suggesting that the personal journal constitutes a literary hybrid of lived experience and creative expression unique among forms of personal narratives:

Journal writing is not only a process of self-recording, self-exploration, and self-expression, although it is all of these. It is also a channel of *self-creation*. We create ourselves in the very process of writing about ourselves and our lives. Keeping a personal journal is a powerful and effective means of deconstructing our assigned roles as women in a patriarchal society and the numerous discourses that fill our eyes and ears from every direction. (234)

This dissertation establishes the significance of the fictionalization of feminine genres (journal writing, or minor genres¹⁶) in the work of Latin American women writers. It also establishes the relation of fictionalization to “real experiences”.

I aim to construct a literary theory based on the relationships between genre and gender, in particular the use of feminine genres such as journal writing and letters. My analysis centers on the use of journals/diaries and letters in Latin American women's fiction. While there is a substantial amount of work regarding these genres in their own right, there appears to be virtually no theoretical work on the fictionalization of these

¹⁶ In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari discuss the concept of minor literature in connection to Kafka's “bi-lingual” writing practices rather than on Kafka's belonging to a preexistent category or literary genre. Looking at Kafka's *Diaries* and his theoretical texts, Deleuze and Guattari analyze the concept of “minor literature” in which one writes against the current and from a linguistic space radically heterogeneous with respect to his great predecessors. They argue that Kafka was the initiator of a “new literary continent,” opening up new perspectives and breaking ground for new thought. The three characteristics of minor literature that they outline in connection with their reading of Kafka are: “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation” (83). My reading of feminine genres is to take these genres out of minor classification. In addition, whereas Deleuze and Guattari focus on linguistic differentiations, I focus on the strategic power that the genre permits women writers.

genres as a literary strategy in itself. In addition, (as noted in the title of Schiwy's essay), and also separate work that specifically looks at the literary (fictional) productions of women, a theoretical objective of this dissertation is to address both these questions concurrently.

In order to shape this framework, I analyze the fictional texts I have selected through close readings of feminine genres as examined by classic feminist critics and other literary scholars. I unravel the multifaceted functions of the genre while never losing sight of a feminist framework.

Mary Eagleton's work on genre and gender provides a critical survey of valuable work in the field, seeking to "demarcate some of the main areas in feminist analysis of genre,"¹⁷ while also suggesting future lines of inquiry. With regard to sexual difference, feminist criticism has drawn attention to the tendency in literary history to privilege the male-dominated forms. As Eagleton points out, "High tragedy, epic poetry, sermons, the philosophical treatise, and criticism carry more kudos than journals, letters, diaries, even, for the most part, fiction-forms in which women have proliferated."¹⁸ The female forms have been regarded as less literary, less intellectual, less comprehensive, and less profound. As a result, feminist criticism has revisited women's forms like Dorothy Wordsworth and Alice James journals and diaries that were produced while their male counterparts were fashioning "great" literature. In this sense, Eagleton claims these private forms must be analyzed as such, never fully intending to reach a public audience and as a result instilling in the female voice the expression of its owner's experience.

¹⁷ See Eagleton's essay "Gender and Genre" in *Modern Genre Theory* p. 284.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 285.

However, what I propose to show is that the fictionalization of these forms performs the impossibility of bridging the public and private. The women authors are able to reconstitute feminine genres to revise or participate in other genres often closed to women writers. Not only are these female authors venerating “feminine” forms, but they also carve out a “feminine” space within a traditionally male dominated/designed structure, the novel.

Another major way in which feminist criticism has approached the gender/genre debate has been attributing the subversive potential of women’s writing to genre. For example, how women have transformed or may transform male-dominated forms and therefore expose their gender bias, i.e., seen with the female Bildungsroman.¹⁹ I analyze transformation of “feminine genres”, which consequently refashion versions of male-dominated genres, leaving behind the conventional preoccupation with gender bias and moving towards a new construction of a feminine self.²⁰

In her analysis, Schiwy states that she is not suggesting that journal writing can resolve the many forms of oppression that women individually and collectively experience, but that it holds “subversive potential. It can provide a safe channel of thinking and creating one’s life beyond the boundaries and terms that society deems appropriate to female selfhood and behavior in a given historical epoch” (235).

¹⁹ Other feminist critics prefer to question realist forms of writing, with the intention of undermining the symbolic order. Non-realist forms allow women writers to express the contradictions, fantasies or desires that the demands of realism silence. This becomes relevant for my examination, because the authors in my corpus craft a union between these forms. In this context, we can understand feminist criticism with regard to modernist or avant-garde forms of writing, which seek to challenge masculine realism (i.e., utopian writing, science fiction, female gothic). And in France, the ‘*L’écriture féminine*’ breaks down generic classifications and the writing is poetry as well as philosophy, literary criticism, autobiography, utopian fantasy and more (Duff 286).

²⁰ Although one could argue that not all gender bias is left behind, I claim that this new construction is a shift from the traditional concentration with gender bias, which can be seen as beneficial for women writers.

Coincidentally, Josefina Ludmer's "Tretas del débil" examines the subversive potential of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *Respuesta*. Rather than seeing these genres as minor or confirming the marginalization of women, these critics perceive the strength in using such genres to articulate a feminine self. I situate my own theoretical contribution in the use of these genres for constructing a feminine self.²¹

An important component of this theoretical agenda is the relationship between private and public spaces. These forms are generally reflections of experiences in the public sphere. For example, journal writing can be seen as a sort of bridge between one's public and private lives while still maintaining them separate. Schiwy sees journal writing as an "intermediate space in which private and public, personal and political, individual and social, experimental and conceptual concerns meet and intersect" (235). Furthermore, in relation to feminist principles,²² this tension becomes two-fold. The personal political,²³ which has been theorized by feminists, is often expressed in women's

²¹ Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* is also useful when thinking about such concepts. It looks at Virginia Woolf's *A Room of Our Own*, whose title alludes ironically to John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869). In the text Mills claims that women as a subculture within English society, have produced something definable as a "female literary tradition" from Brontës to the present. Therefore, by exposing the evolutionary theory of development of women's writing, she also notes the danger of separating female and male tradition. However, where she notes the danger, I highlight the necessity to do so in this specific literary context.

²² In the 70s, many feminists were preoccupied with the concept of women being silenced for much of their existence in patriarchy. We see figures such as Audre Lorde in 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action' (1984) attempting to have open discussions about women, female sexuality and particularly lesbianism. In *Working With Feminist Criticism*, Mary Eagleton discusses the tension between women's speech and silence as a stratagem of patriarchal power. This power is seen where authoritative language is used; for example, positions of power are often associated with men. In addition, social and cultural pressures have undermined women's confidence and made them hesitant about voicing their views. Hélène Cixous, in 'Castration or Decapitation?' (1981) declares that women need to voice themselves and be heard. Others such as Trinh T. Minh-ha in *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989) and Mineke Schipper's *Unheard Words* (1985) focus on women's struggle to be heard within a postcolonial context.

²³ I am referring to an idea discussed originally in Carol Hanisch's essay, "The Personal Is Political," first published in 1970. The general concept of the personal political is that reflecting on one's personal experience, critically and/or emotionally, functions as a political action because it rejects constituted norms

journals. Schiwy argues that women's journal writings provide a more powerful witness to the insidious effects of sexism, racism, and of forms of institutionalized oppression than any more objective public account (235).

Author and literary theorist Alan Pauls offers a more gender-neutral examination of the "diario íntimo" or personal journal/diary. He looks at the diaries of various famous male authors like Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Jünger, John Cheever, Cesare Pavese, to Witold Gombrowicz and Roland Barthes, and includes two women writers: Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf. Pauls is not preoccupied with the question of gender in relation to genre, but rather the authors' supposedly secret life, and/or quest in knowing themselves. In addition, Pauls is not concerned with Latin American writers, which changes the entire socio-geographical conversation. In his discussion, Pauls points out the guarded nature of these sorts of texts. He claims that intimate diaries are never meant to be found and are usually only discovered after the death of the author.²⁴ It serves as a testimony or the so-called "missing piece" to understand the complete literary puzzle that each created during their lifetimes (2).

What I find fascinating is that Pauls never draws a the link between the private with the feminine. However, he refers to this genre as the space of the "other", the authors' other self, other life, other quest. Their "secretive" self, their "intimate" identity, which Pauls notes, can also be seen as their feminine self. He states: "Es el *más allá* del diario, su otra vida, su vida después de la vida." (3) The problem with this idea is that it

and critiques women's place in capitalist society. In addition, there exists no personal solution but only collective resolutions that stem from articulations of personal experiences.

²⁴ Pauls notes that some committed suicide shortly after their last entries, (Woolf, Pavese) or they were simply published posthumously (Kafka, Mansfield).

has not traditionally been the same for women. Men have dominated the public sphere and have been able to assert themselves much more readily in this space, whereas women have used the textual space of the diary *to* articulate themselves. When Pauls poses the question in regard to Roland Barthes's diary: "¿Quién puede *valer* este día, esta descripción, esta frase? ¿Quién me asegura que lo que consigno es *lo que importa*?" (2-3). Is this not a male author's predicament of the inability of expressing the "other", that is the feminine?

Pauls' discussion is pertinent in locating the gendered nature of these texts, and also in discerning the relevance of genre as men and women use it. Professor and scholar Cynthia Gannett in her essay *Gender and the Journal : Diaries and Academic Discourse* (1992), comments on her students' journal entries, comparing the differences between men and women. She discovered that the forms and functions of the journals did tend to vary according to the gender of the writer. First, women's journals were twice as long as the men's.²⁵ More striking was her finding that most of the women were keeping-or had kept- personal journals outside of the University, while only two of the men reported keeping anything resembling a journal. Even then they were careful to label their writing a writer's journal and not a diary (1). In accordance with Gannett's findings, the diary clearly has been marked with notions of the feminine/private in modern Western culture and reflects contemporary internalizations of these ideas. However, it should not be

²⁵ This finding opens up various interpretations as to why this may be. For example, it may be linked to the social convention that men are expected to withhold emotional reflection in regard to their lived experiences. Also, it may reveal something about women's lived experiences and an overwhelming amount of responsibilities. Or, it may demonstrate women's comfort in divulging their lived experiences in such a private space.

considered inferior to other literary forms, and the very fictionalization seen in Latin American women's writing aids in this new configuration.

Who is Speaking *Does Matter*

Both Roland Barthes's *The Death of an Author* (1968) and Michel Foucault's *What is an Author*, refer to the author as HE, and Foucault ends his essay with: "What difference does it make who is speaking?" The main objective of these two works was to stray from the idea that the person and the life of the author serve as the explanation of a text. Although this is necessary in order to separate the text from the author, as Mary Eagleton argues, for the feminist reader, the sex of the author and the cultural and historical position of the woman author, might continue, for the foreseeable future, to make a lot of difference (66). I agree with Eagleton's argument that concepts of ownership, origin, genius, meaning, control etc., operate differently for women (74).

These differences are obligatory when approaching concepts such as genre and gender. Discerning the above-mentioned differences in these concepts plays an important role in setting the stakes for feminine agency and validation. Nancy Miller, in her essay 'Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader' (1986), states:

The postmodernist decision that the Author is dead and the subject along with him does not...necessarily hold for women, and prematurely forecloses the question of agency for them. Because women have not had the same historical relation to identity to origin, institution, production that men have had, they have not, I think (collectively) felt burdened by *too much* Self, Ego, Cogito etc. Because the female subject has been juridically excluded from the polis, hence decentered, 'disoriginated', deinstitutionalized etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, displays structurally important differences from that universal position. (106)

Miller's declaration is an apt admonition lest we fall into the postmodern trap of the erasure of the female author. In the context of Latin America, where one may argue that these historical relations to gender and institution have been even more patent, the preservation of the female author becomes even more political. The attempt to theorize women authors' use of feminine genres is not designed to essentialize or reduce their writing to banal categories within patriarchal cultures, but rather to examine these techniques through a theoretical premise well-suited for this literary expression.

Restrategizing Feminine Genres in Latin American Women's Fiction Post 1960s

In 1959 Octavio Paz' *The Labyrinth of Solitude* stated that Mexican and Western cultural traditions have construed woman as "an incarnation of the life force, which is essentially impersonal. Thus it is impossible for her to have a personal, private life, for if she were to be herself— if she were to be mistress of her own desires, passions, or whims— she would be unfaithful to herself" (36-37). Paz speaks for women, because according to the male writer, up until that point they were incapable of articulating their own personal thoughts and/or genuine desires. This perception, in turn, suggests that women have historically been limited to private realms.

Like Friedrich Nietzsche, Paz sees the socially constructed figure of woman as a vessel for representing female sexuality and desire but, ultimately, she holds no control over her own desire. Similarly, Jacques Derrida adds to the conversation, defining woman as:

...non-identity, non-appearance simulacrum, she is the *abyss* of distance, the distancing of distance, the thrust of spacing, distance itself-distance *as such*, if one could still say that, which is no longer possible... There is no essence of woman because woman separates, and separates herself off from herself. From the endless, bottomless depths, she

submerges all essentiality, all identity, all propriety, and every property. Blinded in such a way, philosophical discourse flounders... Woman is one name for this non-truth of truth. (“The Question of Style” 179)

In her book *Talking Back*, Debra Castillo has criticized the numerous asphyxiating definitions of women provided by illustrious male scholars. Castillo completes a thorough feminist critique of the historical and theoretical configurations of woman in the late twentieth century. Paz, Derrida and Nietzsche have accounted for the symbolic place of woman as the “other of man,” who, as such, has no, or is not entitled to have independence or agency. They recognize that male-dominated society has characterized woman in this way; however, they do not take their analysis beyond what male-dominated society has interpreted to the ways in which women as subjects/agents create affirmative expressions.

Responding to Paz, Nietzsche, and Derrida, Castillo argues that in their constructions: “The woman is not, ... the place of a powerful repressed otherness; rather, she is an open space, a present/absent, and voiceless aesthetic object. What is worse is that women have been coerced into accepting this marginal, magical role: it is, after all” (39). In agreement with Castillo, I too believe that silence cannot provide an adequate basis for either a theory of literature or concrete political action—eventually women must break the silence and write, thus gaining them authority to inscribe their *own* desires.

The authors I analyze here, through their protagonist’s personal expressions, place the woman at the heart of their novels. In writing, figuratively and literally (letters and diaries), all the women protagonists are disillusioned by their male lovers and/or fathers, thus locating their correspondences in a space of absence. The writers assume this place

of absence that the male scholars conceptualize in order to overturn it and change the terms of the symbologies to which women have been relegated.

In the four chapters of this dissertation, I examine the aesthetics of “feminine genres” (i.e., letters and diaries) in the novel at the height of highly contentious feminist debates in Latin America. After much of the magic of the *Boom* had faded, the majority of Latin American women writers became increasingly engaged in questions dealing with femininity, the feminine and gendered writing. Examining at four novels, Elena Poniatowska’s *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* (1978), Marilene Felinto’s *As mulheres de Tijuapapo* (1982), Sara Sefchovich’s *Demasiado Amor* (1990), and Giovanna Rivero’s *Las camaleonas* (2001), I question the utility of “feminine genres” in approaching these debates. I also examine *how* the fictionalization of these varieties (letters and diaries) elucidates these central questions and presents the argument in favor of “feminine genres.” It is through these forms that the women authors craft their despondent protagonists and storylines, facilitating a multilayered tension between private and public spaces that these genres exclusively allow. Specifically, I analyze the diary and the epistolary form, guarded self-questing spaces and never meant for a public audience, as key in reading the interaction between feminist and feminine gestures. Therefore, in viewing these forms as secretive, private, and feminine, the act of fictionalizing them in the structure of the novel escapes the very restraining taxonomies their definitions represent.

The dramatization of private matters has limited women’s entry to the genre of the novel. Works published towards the beginning and at the turn of the century highlight women’s subjectivity that could not have been demonstrated socially and therefore was

challenged in the text. Teresa de la Parra's *Ifigenia* (1920) is an evident of this phenomenon. The author's novel contested notions regarding women's independence and the traditional Latin American roles assigned to them at the beginning of the twentieth century through the use more traditional use of "feminine genres," both the epistolary form and the personal diary.²⁶ The author exposes the clash between modern Western ideas such as feminism and the postcolonial rule that remained in Latin America, specifically Venezuela.

By the 70s, women experienced more opportunities and freedom in terms of publication and experimentalism. Access to publishing gives women writers a greater space to rework "feminine genres." In 1989, Jean Franco wrote in her counter-canonical *Plotting Women* that:

...women in their struggle for interpretive power have often had to resort to noncanonical genres that are either not within the public sphere (letters, for instance) or their writing has been reappropriated into the public sphere as a "male" text, whether it be hagiography, ethnography, or national allegory. (175)

The examples I study here demonstrate the new women's novel with intricate alternatives to the mainstream—that simply use non-canonical genres. Instead, the authors of these works *re-strategize* these forms in order to execute their own variation of the "novel."

Chapter 2 examines Elena Ponitowska's *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela*.

Poniatowska uses letters and Angelina Beloff, a Russian painter married to Diego Rivero to deploy her version of the artist's novel, or *künstlerroman*, from a feminine and feminist perspective. The author recreates twelve letters written from Beloff to Rivero after their separation and his return to Mexico in 1921.

²⁶ Teresa de la Parra stays true to the genres in terms of mirroring the "real" functions of said genres. They are used concretely to criticize socio-political norms of the era.

Chapter 3 analyzes Felinto's *As mulheres de Tijucoapapo*. In the case of Felinto's novel the author weaves her protagonist's travel diary and letter to her mother together, providing the reader with a collection of Brazilian *crônicas*. Felinto's protagonist in first person narrative puts forth a *crônica comunitária* that attempts to give voice to the voiceless, the double marginalized figure in Brazilian contemporary society, the female *mulata*. Felinto reworks the letter and diary to participate in a genre that has been relegated to the male Brazilian author. In this sense her own work is, in fact, a *crônica-manifesto* to counter the hegemonic Brazilian national genre.

Chapter 4 analyzes Sara Sefchovich use of letters and the diary to embark on a complex parody of the trope of *falling in love*, the popularity of *the romance novel* and the sexualization of the female body as empowering. Sefchovich's protagonist, Beatriz, alternates between letters to her sister abroad and letter-like journal entries in her personal diary. Sefchovich uses these varieties as literary tools to dismantle the romance and fairy-tale genres within the framework of patriarchy and Mexican literature.

Finally, Chapter 5 examines Giovanna Rivero *Las Camaleonas*. Rivero's protagonist Azucena is diagnosed with "feminine hysteria." She is instructed by her psychiatrist to keep a "diario de emociones" in order for him to oversee and regulate her mental illness. However, in the process, Azucena converts this space into an occasion for creative prose and fantastic short stories. The Bolivian author uses the diary form to write a collection of creative stories of *imperfection* of the upper-class women of Santa Cruz. The author questions the notions of unattainable beauty incessantly marketed towards women. Rivero reconditions the discourse intended to serve as a catharsis for the protagonist's infirmity into a space that generates new discursive creativity. This chapter

also reveals a new relationship between writing and the female body unlike any previously seen in Latin American women's fiction.²⁷

²⁷ Latin American women's writing has held a long tradition of writing in relation to the female body, starting with early 20th century works by Armonía Somers *La mujer desnuda* (1950), María Luísa Bombal's *La amortajada* (1938), then philosophical explorations such as Clarice Lispector's *A paixão segundo GH* (1964). In the 70s and 80s, much work is dedicated to sexual exploration and erotic desire as in Lygia Fagundes Telles' *As meninas* (1972), Néida Piñon *A casa de Paixão* (1977), Sylvia Molloy: *En breve cárcel* (1981), and Helena Parente Cunha *Mulher no espelho* (1983). Also in the 80s, the body is presented as tortured with warfare/dictatorship metaphors, as seen in Luisa Valenzuela's *Cambio de armas* (1982). The female body as abject has also been of note to writers like Diamela Eltit in her novels *Lumpérica* (1983) and *Los trabajadores de la muerte*, and in Rosario Ferré *Papeles de Pandora* "La muñeca menor" (1976) *Maldito de amor* (1985), and even in Zoé Valdés' *La nada cotidiana* (1995).

Chapter 1: *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* Elena Poniatowska's *Artist Novel*

In Elena Poniatowska's novel, *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela*, the author writes fictitiously as Angelina Beloff (1879-1969), the exiled Russian artist who has been more popularly known as Diego Rivera's first wife for ten years in postwar Paris and unable to accompany him back to Mexico in 1921. She writes a total of twelve letters from October 1921 to July 1922. The novel's first edition was published in 1978 with a portrait of Beloff painted by Diego Rivera on the cover that still hangs today in the Pinacoteca Veracruz Cultural Institute.

Poniatowska recreates the couple's relationship by inscribing the pain and agony of Quiela's abandonment by Diego. The reader is only given Quiela's letters to Diego, while never seeing any response, which is made clear that a response never arrives. The foundation of the letters is based on this silence and abandonment. In his article " 'Siento que también yo podría borrarne con facilidad' ": epistolaridad y constitución del (os) sujeto(s) en *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela*," Pablo Brescia discusses how this silence serves as a veil to the complex arrangement of subjects in Poniatowska's novel. Brescia writes:

La palabra escrita de Quiela se dirige a un destinatario ausente en el momento de la escritura. Este discurso busca producir un efecto de sencillez, intimidad y autenticidad, pero actúa como *camouflage* de una operación mucho más compleja que se lleva a cabo a través de la configuración de diversos sujetos. (60)

The intimacy that Poniatowska constructs in her novel is part of a layer of questions regarding representation as well as tensions of private and public spaces. Public and private spaces, usually in opposition to each other, are brought together through

Angelina's use of feminine genres (letters and diary). I argue that the complex configuration of subject positions points to Poniatowska's deployment of "feminine genres" to in effect reconstitute them. By deploying these genres, Poniatowska is able to engage *géneros del yo*, intimate first-person narratives to fundamentally write an artist's novel, or better known as a *Künstlerroman*.

*Géneros del yo*²⁸ refer to styles of writing that are autobiographical in nature, typically the autobiography or autofiction. In the case of Poniatowska, her novel possesses a rousing autobiographical thread which is revealed in an interview the author has with Krista Ratkowski Carmona in 1986. In the interview she explains that "me identifiqué totalmente con ella...yo compuso un libro muy emotivo porque al escribirlo sentí que me convertí en ella; en realidad soy yo la que digo a un hombre todas estas cosas, ¿no? Siento que me identifiqué con ella totalmente...agregué mi propia emoción." (37). The author discloses her personal motivations in writing the character Angelina Beloff, and the *desdoblamiento* of Poniatowska that took place between the author and the historical protagonist. The representation of Beloff manifests a complex first person narrative that is comprised of elements of Poniatowska's identity. Poniatowska herself concedes that she did not *fashion* the character Angelina, rather, she based her novel on a factual person that already existed and simply breathed much of her own voice into Beloff. She conveys to Carmona:

No creé el personaje de Angelina. Lo único que hice fue basarme en los datos que ya tenía de Bertram Wolfe y escribí lo que yo iba sintiendo, mi propia emoción. Inclusive, creo que usé a Angelina como un pretexto para lo que le podría decir a mi propio marido. Pero nunca pensé que estaba creando un personaje. Puse lo que yo sentía en ella mientras la imaginaba...(40-41)

²⁸ Referred to as *géneros del yo* in Latin American and Spanish literature

She used her own emotion and her own personal relationship with her ex-husband to construct her *own* representation and voice of the protagonist. In this sense, the novel is somewhat autobiographical because the author draws upon her experience(s). This autobiographical lining is sewn throughout the novel through the fictitious Beloff's letters, which give way to the autofictitious quality of Poniatowska's piece. In 1977 Serge Doubrovsky coined the term "autofiction" when describing his own novel *Fils*. The concept defines the union of autobiography and fiction. Since the birth of this term, there have been many scholarly studies carried out to distinguish the distinct variations that fall under what we can think of as autofiction. In their book *La obsesión del yo: La auto(r)ficción en la literatura española y latinoamericana*, published in 2010, Vera Toro, Sabine Schlickers and Ana Luengo explain the typology that French scholar Vicente Colonna outlines in his 2004 formative book *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraires*. In his work, he delineates four different styles of autofiction²⁹. Two of these styles are described as "*la autoficción especular*" and "*autorial*" and have the most similarity to what Poniatowska produces in her novel. "*La autoficción especular*" is defined as a text that exhibits the author's reflection in his/her work. The editors explain Colonna's definition as a text, stating: "demuestra un (breve) reflejo del autor en su obra, como el autorretrato de Velázquez en *Las meninas* o la mención de Cervantes en la primera parte del *Quijote* que es, una metalepsis" (13). With regard to Poniatowska's work, there is no inclusion of her name in the novel that generates a similar effect found in the texts referenced by Colonna, however through the engineering of the protagonist's

²⁹ Toro, Schlickers and Luengo describe/ translate Colonna's four categories of autofiction, the other remaining two are as follows: "1) La autoficción biográfica como *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977) de Vargas Llosa. 2) La auto ficción fantástica o inverosímil (Borges: "El Aleph", Gombrowicz), en la que el personaje (protagonista) del autor se ubica en una historia inverosímil, refutando así cualquier interpretación autobiográfica" (13).

voice, she writes a realistic sentimental tone for the character Angelina in order to write a novel that focuses on the artist Angelina Beloff. When examining “*autofiction auctorial*,” the editors summarize Colonna’s definition, clarifying the metaliterary or metafictional strategy of the author, maintaining:

...resulta ser una simple intervención del narrador (y no del autor) en la historia que podría calificarse asimismo de metalepsis del lector...se trata de una estrategia metaliteraria y/o metafictional que no requiere una “identificación” entre autor y narrador, sea por el nombre propio o por otras características inequívocas. (13)

Since its publication, Poniatowska’s novel has already caused metalepsis to a certain extent by fusing the protagonist’s voice with her own. The synthesis of the two women has encouraged some to blur the distinction between narrator/Angelina Beloff and author/Elena Poniatowska as John Berry astutely observes in his article *Invention, Convention, and Autobiography in Elena Poniatowska’s Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela*: “In 1985, an art gallery in New York invited “Angelina Poniatowska” to exhibit her paintings there, thereby changing the author’s profession, as well as replacing her first name with that of the novel’s protagonist”(47). According to Berry, the result of such blurring between subject and object calls the novel’s genre into question. “...it seems to be a complete displacement: the Mexican write ‘becomes’ Angelina Beloff and writes Diego Rivera twelve letters...the text also can be decoded as Elena Poniatowska writing one long letter, expressing her personal wishes and fears” (47). Berry argues that Poniatowska’s novels holds generic characteristics of not only of documentary fiction but also of epistolary fiction, testimonial narrative and autobiography. While it is true that her novel encompasses genre overlap, by projecting her own attitudes onto the character, I argue that Poniatowska exposes an impressive *biography* of the Russian artist, thus

ultimately writing a *female artist's novel*, a style of writing often overlooked when examining this text.

An artist novel or *Künstlerroman*, as Linda Pavlovski explains is traditionally known as:

...a type of *bildungsroman*—a novel where the protagonist undergoes an education—in which the writer charts the course of an artist undergoing an evolution from nascent stirrings to full artistic voice.

Literally, *künstlerroman* translates to English as “artist” (from the German, “*künstler*”) and “novel” (from the French, “*roman*”) (*Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, 133).

The *Künstlerroman* can be traced to the German Romantic tradition and became popular among English writers in the nineteenth and twentieth-century in the works of Charles Dickens and Lord Tennyson. In 1916 with the publication of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* chronicling Stephen Dedalus's personal progression into writer, it became the standard of the genre in English and led to Maurice Beebe's influential book on the genre *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (1964). Beebe outlines the moral battle reflected in the *Künstlerroman* genre of writers pondering their position as an artist. He locates three universal and defining themes of the modern *Künstlerrroman*. First, the “Divided Self,” which asserts that the main character of a book is an outward expression of the author himself/herself. The “Ivory Tower” speaks to a tradition in which the writer “exalts art above life.” Third, *Sacred Founts*: “theory where the artist equates art with experience and assumes that the true artist is on who lives not less, but more fully and intensely than others” (139). Although Beebe does cite four

Künstlerromane by female writers, he treats them as the same as the male authors he analyzes, describing the male conventions of the genre.³⁰

In her essay “To ‘Bear My Mother’s Name’: *Künstlerromane* by Female Writers,” Rachel Blau DuPlessis explains the two parallel discussions surrounding the *Künstlerroman* by female writers. The first is examined in Grace Stewart’s *A New Mythos: The Novel of the Artist as Heroine, 1877-1977*. Stewart looks at sixteen novels by American, British and Canadian women, all with plots that focus on women protagonists that seek to be artists. In mapping the protagonists inner struggle to achieve their desires, Stewart examines and highlights what she sees as the mythic configurations of the narrative structures that frame each novel. Specifically, she uses the Faust myth³¹ and the Demeter-Persephone relationship to discuss each protagonist’s inner struggle. Stewart also importantly points out that in the traditional *Künstlerroman*, where the protagonist is male the woman symbolizes and functions as the stimulus for artistic realization. The woman is the muse and never the artist, thus setting up the binary of the active male and the stagnant female. According to Stewart, the female *Künstlerroman* must differ from the male version in order to be unique to its own contextual components. Using the mother-daughter relationship found in the Demeter-Persephone myth, Stewart shows that this myth diverges from the traditional mythic structure found in male *Künstlerroman* that follow a more cyclical pattern of birth, death and rebirth. In the Demeter-Persephone legend, rebirth is preceded by death. Although Persephone is returned to Demeter, her mother and the goddess of Harvest, after having been abducted

³⁰ *Künstlerromane* is the German plural form of the noun *Künstlerroman*.

³¹ Stewart explains that the Faust myth speaks to how the combination of power and pride can lead to one’s downfall. Faust, within mythology is known as a scholar who sells his soul to the devil.

by Hades, the ruler of the underworld, she must return to him one-third of the year, explaining the winter and fall seasons. This relationship represents loss and separation, which Stewart argues is the central relationship in many female *Künstlerroman*. Stewart explains that: "whereas the typical hero destroys the minotaur, marries the heroine, and assumes the throne, the heroine must accept the demon, reject the hero, and live in misery if she is to retain her identity as an artist. Such an artistic rebirth involves the creation of a freak, a monster, a dybbuk, or a Medusa" (178). Stewart demonstrates how this mother-daughter relationship is often central "to the novel of the artist as heroine," and she critiques the negativity associated with their characters.

In the second foundational examination of the genre, in her essay: "The Birth of the Artist as Heroine: (Re)production, the *Künstlerroman* Tradition, and the Fiction of Katherine Mansfield," Susan Gubar argues that two scripts, artistic production and biological reproduction are unified in twentieth-century women's *Künstlerromane*.³² Duplessis is concerned with the feminist nature of the *Künstlerroman* and examines more prominent examples from the last century of the genre, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*.

Recently, feminist critics such as Annie Eysturoy, Linda Huf, and Charlotte Goodman³³ have pointed out the male-dominated core of the *Künstlerroman* in Beebe's

³² Gubar, Susan, "The Birth of the Artist as Heroine: (Re)production, the *Künstlerroman* Tradition, and the Fiction of Katherine Mansfield", in *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, ed. by Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higgonet (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 19-59. Print.

³³ Charlotte Goodman in "Portraits of the Artiste Manqué by Three Women Novelists" (1981) looks at how fiction became increasingly autobiographical in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for example many novelists began to write about artist protagonists. According to Goodman, since many women writers have been painfully aware of the insurmountable difficulties faced by women artists in a patriarchal society, it is not surprising that a number of women authors have chosen to explore the frustrations of the *artiste manqué* (212).

work and much of the criticism regarding the genre. The critical feminist perspective that has emerged studying the differences between female and male artist novels have shown a deviation from the male dominated generalized plot line:

Feminists have noted that in the male-authored *künstlerroman*, the lead character is often a delicate, sensitive type taking on many feminine and stereotypically artistic characteristics, but when that protagonist is a woman she is defined by the world as fearless, pushy, and masculine. For the man, the sole pursuit of art is a noble goal in contrast to the woman's drive, whereby she is described as selfish, her striving for personal glory coming at a cost to the family that needs her. Similarly, for the man-artist, the intent is about the artistic result, the process of creation. But just as much, the female *künstlerroman* attempts to chart the woman's freedom from traditional roles, ironically putting her in opposition to the males in her life. (Pavlovski, 130)

When looking at the pattern of characteristics that are outlined by feminist criticism, in Poniatowska's novel, Beloff is a sentimental and soft character. However, she does suffer the loss of her son and this indeed helps scaffold her pain of abandonment, as touched upon by Stewart.

Linda Huf, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature* explains that since the 19th century the widespread belief has persisted that women only rarely write *Künstlerromone*, that is, autobiographical novels depicting their struggles to become artists—as the Romantics believed, as gods. According to Huf, Beebe describes the conventions of the male genre, only citing four examples and declaring no difference between their male counter parts. Her study shows

that although there are less examples by women; these cases are very different and have their own tradition and development.³⁴

In *Daughters Of Self-Creation: The Contemporary Chicana Novel*, Annie O

Eysturoy asserts the basic contention of her study is emphasized when Beebe argues that “every artist is a man” (313), who, although he might be destroyed in the process, “must go to Woman in order to create” (18). According to Eysturoy:

Beebe’s portrayal of the representative protagonists of the *Künstlerroman* as sensitive young men of artistic temperament who struggle against “the possible fates of the woman-trapped artist” (280), yet need women for creative purposes, is indicative of the general portrayal of women as the necessary “other” of the traditional *Bildungsroman*.
(13)

As Eysturoy points out, one of the main objectives of feminist criticism of the last 20 years has been to challenge the concept of intellectual neutrality, and expose the overall subordination of women in literary history (13). This central difference is challenged in Poniatowska’s novel. Poniatowska gives the reader instances in Angelina’s letters when she recalls how she used to aid in the creative process for Diego, caring for him and feeding his artistic drive. First, she recalls their love making and the phrases that Rivera would express to her, Angelina reflects on this intimate time by writing:

Yo te escuchaba quemándome por adentro, las manos ardientes sobre mis muslos, no podía pasar saliva y sin embargo parecía tranquila y tú lo comentabas: “ ¡Qué sedante eres Angelina, qué remanso, qué bien te sienta tu nombre, oigo un levísimo rumor de alas!” (10)

³⁴ She examines three fictional portraits of the artist written by women novelists: Rebecca Harding Davis’ *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861); Edith Summers Kelley’s *Weeds* (1923); and Harriette Arnow’s *The Dollmaker* (1954). The novels employ the *artiste manqué*, a literary device in which the artist-protagonist’s talents are sabotaged by weaknesses in themselves or those close to them. Their circumstances do not allow the protagonists’ artistic talents to flourish completely (1-10).

According to Angelina, Rivera used words like *sedante*, and *remanso* to describe her, which connote a sense of calmness and refer to Angelina as a sort of haven for him. Poniatowska is using her revisionist power as an author of fiction to accentuate Angelina's role in Rivera's creative progression, fulfilling the role of a pleaser and nurturer. The character of protector and nurturer is further illuminated in the second letter of the novel titled "7 de noviembre de 1921" she writes: "Estaba segura de que sin mí ni siquiera interrumpirías tu trabajo para comer" (11). In a later letter, she describes how due to a recent visit to the Louvre, she became artistically inclined to work and did so to physical exhaustion. She explains:

Me levanté para cocinar algo y recordé nuestros caldos de huesos y unas cuantas legumbres—"pucheros", los llamabas—, sonreí para mí misma al pensar que ojalá y hubiera una Angelina que cuidara de mí y me rogara interrumpir tan sólo un momento para comer un poco, y continué hasta la noche convulsivamente, empezando una y otra vez. (22)

Here, Angelina is remembering how compassionate and supportive she was for Diego, ultimately promoting his artistic production. While immersed in her work, she is able to reflect back on time remembering the significant function she provided for Diego, and sadly the absence of someone to nurture *her* artistic talent in such a way. She is alone and continues to hone her artistic craft in solitude. As Esyturoy points out with regard to the male artist's need for woman in variations of the *Bildungsroman*, Poniatowska demonstrates for the reader this male artist's need for "woman" to aid in his imaginative development. The fact that Poniatowska's protagonist is able to note the incongruence between a male and female's artistic need of the opposite sex for resourceful purposes, is strategic of the author. In doing so, she in effect begins the process of canceling Rivera

out as an artist and as the protagonist in historical discourse surrounding the life of both Rivera and Beloff as a couple. Beloff works and paints without a muse or nurturer of any sort. And as a result, the memory of Rivera himself “becomes” the muse for Beloff, thus once again disrupting the sexist binary found in traditional male artist’s novels.

Leslie Kathleen Hankins in her article “Alas, Alack! Or A Lass, a Lack? Quarrels of Gender and Genre in the revisionist *Künstlerroman*: Eudora Welty’s *The Golden Apples*,” discusses the differences between what has been perceived by feminists as the female and male *Künstlerroman*. She explains that: “At times the disjunction between the prescriptions of the male *Künstlerroman* tradition and the female forms has been presented as the failure of the female *Künstlerroman* to measure up, to reach completion” (233). This lack refers to the lack in existence, meaning that there is an absence of the equivalent strong female artist heroines to the male artist heroes, in the true understanding of the artist novel. Hankins questions the notion of what this perceived lack apparently causes— the acceptance of the male form as the norm. She argues that the idea of a possible difference may explain the alleged lack or absence in female *Künstlerroman* by female authors. Hankins reads “absence” of strong artist heroines in different possible ways, which sheds light on the *Künstlerroman* tradition as a gender-marked and historically based phenomenon. Therefore, she concludes that: “Recognizing and interrogating this difference without placing it into a hierarchy, we may move beyond the *Künstlerroman* genre as a male form to consider different options for the novel about art and life” (234). Poniatowska’s text provides a good start in examining how, through the reconstitution of feminine genres, women might construct an artist’s novel by a female author.

Amy Dickman in *From Development to Deconstruction: The Contemporary Female Künstlerroman*, examines eight novels written by North American women, arguing that her study changes feminist theory of the last thirty years. She posits that the recent evolution of the female *Künstlerroman* parallels the progress of theoretical debates over the problem of female subjectivity. Finally, she argues that the novels provide concrete evidence of women's struggle to establish a speaking/writing subject position, but also, through a writing practice that accesses the pre-symbolic level within language, demonstrating an escape valve out of the dead-end of patriarchal language and its (non)construction of the female subject. When applying the critical work to *Querido Diego*, Poniatowska undeniably establishes a writing subject, Angelina Beloff with her own artistic concerns. What is also important is that Poniatowska's protagonist writes in the first person, in efforts to claim artistic authority. Poniatowska's protagonist builds her own artistic history in the letters to Diego, reflecting on her life and formation as an artist. For example, in a letter the protagonist reveals:

29 de diciembre de 1921

Siento no haber empezado a pintar más joven y ahora que ha pasado el tiempo, cómo añoro aquellos años de Universidad en San Petersburgo cuando opté por el dibujo. Al principio, mi padre iba por mí, todavía recuerdo cómo nuestro pasos resonaban en las calles vacías y regresábamos platicando (por las calles) y me preguntaba por mis progresos, si no me intimidaba el hecho de que hubiera hombres en el curso nocturno de pintura. Después al ver mi seguridad, la gentileza de mis compañeros, me dejó venir sola a la casa. Cuando gané la beca para la Academia de Bellas Artes de San Petersburgo ¡cuánto orgullo vi en su rostro! (33)

She recalls her time at the University of Saint Petersburg, where she studied drawing and how she was the only woman in her painting class, remembering the pride her father felt

when she was awarded a scholarship to attend the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. In this letter, Angelina has shifted from her memories with Diego to her memories regarding her trajectory as an artist. In this way, Poniatowska reverses the standard male artist novel, by casting the woman's story as central, and in a feminist gesture, directs the letters to Rivera. Interestingly enough, although the title of the novel is directed to Rivera *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela*, the individual letters are not in terms of a written salutation. Poniatowska indeed dates each of Beloff's letters; however, in not a single letter is there a specific salutation that addresses Rivera by name, for example, *Dear Diego*. This absence of proper name use heading each "letter" departs from the traditional genre of letter writing.³⁵ This striking gesture also creates a hierarchy that places Angelina's story first, while Rivera's is secondary. The hierarchy that is produced is in part due to Poniatowska's blending between the diary and the letter-writing genres in her novel. After a closer reading of Poniatowska's novel this departure from traditional epistolary writing reveals a strategy for reframing a female artist novel and as well as performing a feminist project.

Scholar Susan C. Shaffer points to this difference from a "true" epistolary representation in a footnote in *Elena Poniatowska's Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela: A Re-vision of Her Story*, highlighting that: "The twelve letters are not even letters in the truest sense of the word, because they lack a salutation (other than the one implied by the title). In many ways the texts read more like journal entries" (Shaffer 95). In agreement with Shaffer, I point out that the letters have a tendency to evoke the style of a personal

³⁵ Altman defines the specific properties of the letter writing genre, pointing out that one of the fundamental characteristics is reciprocity. Furthermore, Altman goes on to distinguish the epistolary genre from feminine forms stating: "The epistolary experience, as distinguished from the autobiographical, is a reciprocal one. The letter-writer simultaneously seeks to affect his reader and is affected by him" (113).

diary, and the absence of reply from the recipient, in fact, aids in this conception. As Cynthia Steele notes in her article “La creatividad y el deseo en Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela, de Elena Poniatowska,” this overlapping of genres is made possible by the intimate framework that Poniatowska has constructed in her novel: “El resultado es una transformación de la forma de la novela, que empieza a parecerse poco a poco a la de diario de vida, todo ello como consecuencia de la ruptura del pacto epistolar implícito de reciprocidad que genera el silencio de Diego” (19). The transformation that occurs is one that is focused on the life of Angelina, not primarily on the life of Rivera, the more historically popular artist of the two.

The centralization of the voice of Angelina is a result of Diego’s silence in the novel, which morphs the “letters” into a long oration or address. Pablo Brescia also touches on this important aspect, noting that:

La voz de Quiela, producto del silencio al que se enfrenta una y otra vez, en ocasiones se transforma de diálogo con el ausente en monólogo sobre su situación y su subjetividad. Esta tendencia a monologar, que se acentúa ante la ausencia de reciprocidad, va a establecer pasajes autorreflexivos en el discurso y con cada vez más firmeza, la subjetividad del sujeto que escribe. (62)

As Brescia aptly observes, the bond of reciprocity that is formed in letter-writing is truncated by Diego’s silence, which she acknowledges in each letter. Consequently, this then establishes the male recipient as breaking the reciprocity of the epistolary and enacts literary violence. As a result, Beloff is raised to a status of protagonist and active agent in Poniatowska’s text. Therefore, Angelina’s letter-writing becomes more self-reflexive and resembles the act of keeping a personal diary or journal. This self-examining nature aids in the re-strategizing of the letters and creates a space for Poniatowska to discuss

Angelina's life as an artist rather than constructing an identity completely dependent on Rivera. The following letter demonstrates the introspection and the struggle of an artist, especially abandoned by her husband and grieving the death of her son. The letter is entitled "17 de diciembre de 1921" Beloff writes of how she had recently fallen ill because of the long hours she dedicated to her work. At the same time the way in which Poniatowska represents Rivera makes his image appear ridiculous. Angelina writes:

A consecuencia de mi visita al Louvre, en medio de la mayor exaltación me puse a manchar una tela, agitada y con dolor de cabeza. Desatendiendo la tela, al poco rato tomé un lápiz y deseché un boceto tras otro y como se me había acabado el papel, recogí las hojas para dibujar tras de ellas. Nada me satisfizo. Me levanté para cocinar algo... y continué hasta la noche convulsivamente, empezando una y otra vez. Pensé que tu espíritu se había posesionado de mí, que eras tú y no yo el que estaba dentro de mí, que este deseo febril de pintar provenía de ti y no quise perder un segundo de tu posesión. Me volví hasta gorda Diego, me desbordaba, no cupéa en el estudio, era alta como tú, combatía en contra de los espíritus—tú me dijiste alguna vez que tenías tratos con el diablo—y lo recordé en ese momento porque mi caja torácica se expandió a tal grado que los pechos se me hincharon, los cachetes, la papada; era yo una sola llanta, busqué un espejo y en efecto, allí estaba mi cara abotagada y ancha, palpitante como si la soplaran con un fuelle desde adentro...(23)

This letter displays Angelina's commitment to her work, but also sets up an interesting dynamic between the Russian painter and Rivera. According to Angelina, Rivera's spirit has taken her over. Poniatowska exaggerates Rivera's physical size and pompous attitude. It also speaks to a larger metaphor of Rivera's tendency to overshadow the Angelina, filling the entire room. At the same time, Poniatowska has her protagonist consume Rivera, she cannibalizes his image in order to recuperate the parts of this image to function and contribute to the artistic production of Angelina. This is also made

evident with the fact that Angelina no longer feels an affinity to her motherland Russia but considers herself more Mexican than anything as she expresses in her letters: "...me mexicanicé terriblemente y me siento ligada *par procuration* a tu idioma, a tu patria, a miles de pequeñas cosas me parece que me sentiré muchísimo menos extrajera contigo que en cualquier otra tierra" (46). Many of her close friends and confidants are Mexican, and it has been the language that she has been studying and speaking for the last decade while living with Rivera in Paris.

Shaffer examines the discursive construction and framing of the physical traits by which Poniatowska has represented Beloff, claiming that the novel is able to parody the notion "that the subject of a portrait is defined by the sum total of traits with which the painter has articulated her on canvas" (85). Here, Shaffer is drawing a comparison between the two distinct portraits of Angelina, one painted by Diego, and Bertram Wolfe in his biography of Rivera, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera* and Poniatowska's literary portrait. According to Shaffer, by excluding descriptions of Beloff's appearance and age, she "hyperbolizes" Rivera's large frame and pompous personality. In addition, her struggle as an artist is revealed, showcasing many long hours dedicated to her craft and juxtaposing Rivera and Beloff as painters rather than writing Beloff off as unimportant, as was done in Wolfe's book (86-87). In agreement with Shaffer, I argue that self-reflective letter writing that Poniatowska uses creates a space for the voice of her protagonist to express her torment and provide her own history. This new space allows for representation of the artist that is free of the marginalization found in Bertram Wolfe's biography *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera*.

Querido Diego and Dear Bertram...

In a 1968 interview with Krista Ratkowski Carmona, Elena Poniatowska spoke candidly about her discursive confrontation and writing in *Querido Diego*. In the interview, Poniatowska discussed what motivated her to write the short novel, comprised of 12 letters from Angelina to Diego Rivera after their separation. The writer explained that it was not until she was half way through Bertram Wolfe's biography of Diego Rivera *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera* (1963), (chapter 12, titled "Angelina Waits") that she was inspired to write her own book, a novel. Although the writer confessed to using much of the information presented by Bertram, she also claimed to have had her own sources. One of those sources, a close confidant to Beloff, Vita Castro, led her to believe that Bertram was careless with his writing. Two of the specifics that Poniatowska shared in the interview are the nickname Quiela used, which was in fact Gela and the anecdote discussed in Bertram's book that she cites at the end of her novel. This refers to the last page of her novel when the third person writes thanking Wolfe for his work, stating that it helped greatly in the construction of *Querido Diego*. The third person narrator also reports that thirteen years after the last letter that Angelina wrote to Diego, she finally made her way to Mexico. Upon arrival she did not look for her lost partner; however, when they both met at a concert in Bellas Artes, Diego passed her by without even recognizing her:

Bertram Wolfe, a quien estas cartas le deben mucho de su información, consigna en *La fabulosa vida de Diego Rivera*, que sólo en 1935, es decir, trece años después, impulsada por pintores mexicanos amigos suyos, Angelina Beloff logró ir a la tierra de sus anhelos. No buscó a Diego, no quería molestarlo. Cuando se encontraron en un concierto en Bellas Artes, Diego pasó a su lado sin siquiera reconocerla. (72)

Although Poniatowska has made it clear that she believes it to be false that Diego did not recognize Angelina at the Bellas Arts and that the nickname for Angelina was Quiela, she willingly includes these two falsities in her novel for strategic purposes. The fact that she publishes the book as fiction and cites Bertram at the end of the novel counters and questions the validity of his representation of Beloff.

Poniatowska provides her own account of Angelina in her letters and shows the impossibility of accurately representing another person as historical evidence. Hayden White discusses the subjectivity of historical discourse in his article “Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased’: Literary and Historical Writing.” According to White, the biography is far removed from the perceived official unbiased account of an historical figure. The only critical difference that White points out between historical discourse and literary discourse is that the former refers to “real” subjects.³⁶ While feminine genres have been deemed traditionally as unimportant, the very fictionalization of these varieties challenges this characterization. By fictionalizing these genres the author is able to postulate different representations of Beloff and add depth to a character fashioned in Bertram’s biographical text of Rivera. In a sense, then, it is through genre, feminine genre, that Poniatowska takes a stab at Bertram’s masculinist genre, the biography. As Juan Bruce-Nova writes and Susan C. Shaffer’s reaffirms,³⁷ Poniatowska’s novel should be read as a subversive text with her particular feminist agenda in mind.

In his article “ ‘Siento que también yo podría borrarne con facilidad’: espistolaridad y constitución del (os) sujeto(s) en Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela,”

³⁶ See Susan C. Schaffer, p. 84.

³⁷ See *Subverting the Dominant Text: Elena Poniatowska’s Querido Diego*.

Pablo Brescia comments on the intertextuality of *Querido Diego* noting that: “no sólo apunta el intertexto principal de la novela- la biografía de Wolfe sobre Rivera, de 1963- sino que además desestabiliza e interroga la relación entre verdad y ficción en el texto.” This destabilization is precisely how Poniatowska challenges and critiques Wolfe’s biography in her novel.

In his biography of Diego Rivera, Wolfe purports not only to have known the feelings and thoughts of Angelina, but also portrays her as foolishly naïve and out of touch with the realities of Diego. Bertram’s representation of Beloff derives from her supposed letters that he read in the company of Rivera. He attempts to re-represent the letters in his biography only to overtly critique them. Poniatowska seeks reprisal with this biased representation of Beloff and the reconstruction of her *actual* letters. Bertram writes:

Poor Angelina! Love cannot be compelled by pity. After years of intimate life with Diego, did she not know him well enough to perceive that all was over? Had he not refused to tie again the bond which had broken with the death of their boy? Had he not let her know that his passion had long yielded to a feeling akin to the fraternal? Had he not even brought to her, as to an unusually knowing friend and confidante, tales of his new passions for other women?
(127-28)

What Poniatowska is contesting by rewriting Angelina’s letters and calling them fiction is the representations of subjectivity of females of any kind. In particular those that appear in texts considered to be masculine and/or “official,” such as the biography, which Shari Benstock points out in her book *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. Wolfe’s “biography” goes so far as to question Angelina’s actions and motives as illegitimate in the sense that she must have been unstable to

pursue correspondence with a man that did not reciprocate her same feelings. Her letters then are viewed by Wolfe as pathetic and abject, consequently giving the genre little merit. Legitimacy is a contested phenomenon and in order to constitute Angelina's voice, Poniatowska must fictionalize it, thus providing a multidimensionality to it and transforming it into an artist's novel.³⁸ As Benstock points out:

To be able to theorize women's writing practices, including women's critical writing practices, is to make women's writing somehow legitimate within the academy. The costs of such a legitimacy are always an issue when discussing forms that have traditionally been considered illegitimate, as have autobiographical writings-especially diary, letter, and memoir writing. (2)

While Wolfe criticizes Angelina's letter writing for being nothing more than overly sentimental female inscriptions, Poniatowska takes a different route. Although it is true that Poniatowska portrays the abandonment and heartbreak of Beloff, representing her vulnerability and love for Diego, she does not trivialize or critique this anguish.³⁹ As Carmona astutely argues: "El libro es una auténtica experiencia de emociones humanas, pero al mismo tiempo provoca una respuesta intelectual porque su visible calidad ficticia plantea cuestiones como las de la verdad frente a los hechos, la realidad frente a la imaginación y la historia frente a la fábula" (37). By posing these questions regarding fiction and reality/truth, Poniatowska executes a complex feminist gesture, not only giving depth to the "character" of Angelina that Wolfe has fashioned but also providing density to the epistolary genre by using it to manipulate this very representation. As

³⁸ Pablo Brescia discusses this point in his article in general regarding Poniatowska's work stating: "La polifonía en la obra de Elena Poniatowska está situada casi siempre en el margen de los discursos y de las instituciones dominantes, privilegiando, en muchos ocasiones, la palabra de la mujer" (59).

³⁹ In her chapter "Elena Poniatowska's Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela: A Re-vision of Her Story," Susan C. Shaffer also touches on this point regarding Wolfe's text, explaining that: "In it Wolfe relies heavily on excerpts of letters to Rivera from his first wife in order to show that her reaction to being abandoned was hysterical" (75).

Pablo Brescia posits, it is the calculated intertextuality of Poniatowska's engagement with Wolfe's work, particularly the mention of his book at the end of *Querido Diego*, that destabilizes and interrogates the relationship between reality and fiction (60). By disrupting this association between the historical and imaginary, Poniatowska is able to critique Wolfe's work and confront his depiction of the Russian painter, which he had portrayed as a ragdoll for his own professional advancement and the further glorification of Rivera.

Poniatowska is responding to Wolfe's book, but her feminist gesture goes further—taking a stance against how Mexican culture has consistently dominated and used the figure/symbol of the woman for its own benefit, whether it be literary, political or artistic. She explains in her interview with Carmona: “Creo que muchos mexicanos se aprovechan de las mujeres y las usan. Creo que ésa es una característica del mexicano, incluso del artista o del político. Tampoco en el partido comunista la mujer es valorada para nada, la mujer es utilizada” (42). With this argument in mind, Poniatowska is writing against a tradition that has exploited the figure of the woman, even in a literary sense, as in the case of the female protagonist in question. By fictionalizing the voice of Beloff, she ironically frees her from the use of “authoritative” documentation and archiving that Wolfe's work attempts to carry out. She rearranges the rules of engagement for the artist's novel exploiting Rivera to elevate Beloff.

This reorganization and the first person narrative have caused some scholars to discuss the confusion, as previously mentioned John Berry, between the subject and object, or what Brescia defines as the “sujeto enunciador y sujeto enunciado”(60). By muddling the lines of autofiction, as well as literary norms, Berry explains that:

Poniatowska modifies, even breaks with, pre-existing literary conventions... Like Unamuno, who manipulated genre to accommodate personal philosophical and autobiographical questions, Poniatowska adapts novelistic conventions to give expression to her own preoccupations and concerns. (47)

Berry points out that like Unamuno, Poniatowska manipulates the traditional conceptualization of the novel. Berry goes on to examine the purpose of the two primary blended genres in Poniatowska's novel, the epistolary and the novel, stating that letters are usually written for a very specific audience, while novels are for a more widespread readership. He claims that this tension has not only caused readers to complicate the subject and object relationship but also to cast negative acclaim resulting in literary neglect of the novel (48). I maintain that this fusion is in fact the genius of Poniatowska's novel. She is able to write an artist's struggle, and as well recount her experiences as a woman who has been abandoned by her partner and suffered the loss of her child. What Poniatowska achieves is to counter the so-called "real" representation with her own. Even Berry falls into the trap of viewing Wolfe's construction of Angelina as the "real" Angelina, noting: "In the only dated letter found in Wolfe's text, the real Angelina ends with 'And with that I embrace you warmly . . . Quiela'" (127) (51 Berry). In Wolfe's entire text, all of Angelina's letters are *reproduced* through Wolfe's voice. The reader is made aware of Wolfe's claim that he had access to the letters when writing Rivera's biography, however since it is not Beloff herself publishing the letters the reader does not know the full context or even all of the letters she may have written. The reader is only provided with Wolfe's representation of the supposed "authentic" letters and the specific passages of those letters that Wolfe chooses to emphasize in order to fit his agenda of elevating the status of Rivera. The referent in both Wolfe and Poniatowska's novel is

“real” in the sense that Angelina Beloff the human being is not imaginary. However, just because the subject is “real” does not make the representation of that subject authentic and/or official.

Poniatowska has made Angelina, or Quiela, the core of her novel, focusing on her thoughts and innermost feelings, while Diego is secondary. This is again in contrast to Wolfe’s piece that primarily focuses on the life of Rivera placing him center stage, while Quiela is simply stage left, or perhaps backstage or even uninvited to the *fabulous* spectacle. As Shaffer observes, Poniatowska “...constructs a more variegated, enriched view of the Russian by recontextualizing her story and fictively illuminating the black holes left vacant by her predecessors...devoting fully one third of the novel to Beloff’s formation as an artist and her work as a successful painter and printmaker” (84, 87). For example, in one letter Beloff writes her currently daily routine as an artist, but also describes her particular work in detail:

Al llegar a la casa me puse a pintar, estaba carburada y hoy amanecí con la caliente y me senté frente a tu caballete, bajé la tela que dejaste a la mitad—perdóname chatito, luego volveré a ponerla—y tomé una blanca y comencé. Es imposible no llegar a tener talento cuando se tienen revelaciones como la que experimenté ayer. Pinté con ahínco una cabeza de mujer que sorprendí en la calle ayer de regreso del Louvre, una mujer con ojos admirables, y, ahora que se ha ido la luz te escribo mi conmoción y mi alegría. Por primera vez a lo largo de estos cuatro largos años siento que no estás lejos, estoy llena de ti, es decir de pintura. Dentro de algunos días pienso ir al Louvre de nuevo: veré otra sala, la de los flamencos que a ti tanto te atraen; los veré contigo, asida de tu mano y volveré también a la galería de los Cézanne. El dueño fue muy amable y comprensivo conmigo y esto le dio alas a mi corazón. Siento que he vuelto a nacer, tantos años de entregarme a la pintura, tantas academias, tantas horas en el taller, tanto ir y venir contigo y sólo ayer tuve la revelación. Te escribo todavía con el temblor de la emoción, chatito

adorado, y espero que al tomar esta hoja blanca percibas esta vibración entre tus dedos y me veas conmocionada y agradecida y como siempre tuya.

Quiela (21)

Poniatowska deliberately includes specifics regarding Beloff's trajectory as a painter, noting the long hours of study and work in the studio dedicated to her art that was renewed in the absence of Diego. It also showcases her close connection to painting when she mentions that she frequents the Louvre regularly. The fact that she began to paint again causes her to feel alive after the loss of her son and partner. It is art that ignites the life within her and that defines her as a painter, not Rivera. Therefore, writing Angelina's history in fact nullifies the Mexican muralist as sole proprietor of the role of artist. As evident in the following letter, Poniatowska portrait of Beloff focuses on Beloff's formation and life as a female artist:

He estado muy excitada; la pintura es el tema central de mis meditaciones. Hace ya muchos años que pinto; asombraba yo a los profesores en la Academia Imperial de Bellas Artes de San Petersburgo, decían que estaba yo muy por encima de *la moyenne*, que debería continuar en París, y creía en mis disposiciones extraordinarias. Pensaba: todavía soy una extranjera en el país de la pintura, pero puedo algún día tomar residencia. Cuando gané la beca para ir a la Academia Imperial de Bellas Artes de San Petersburgo ¡ay Diego, entonces pensé que yo tenía en mí algo maravilloso, algo que a toda costa tendría que proteger y salvaguardar! Mi meta final sería París, l'Académie des Beaux Arts. Ahora sé que se necesita otra cosa. (24)

Poniatowska fills in the historical blanks with her revisionist pen which is simultaneously a feminist act for it stages the female artist as central, challenging the conventional formula of the male *Künstlerroman* but also places the artist, Diego, as ancillary to Angelina. The reader learns where Angelina studied and of the praise she received from her professors for her outstanding talent. She provides the reader an

account of the prodigious work she displayed once at the Parisian Academy. Angelina was by far the most steadfast student there and once noticed, was mentored by the renowned French painter and sculptor André Lhote. She narrated her time there and divulges:

Desde el primer día en que entré al atelier en París, me impuse un horario que sólo tú podrías considerar aceptable, de ocho a doce y media del día, de una y media a cinco en la tarde, y todavía de ocho a diez de la noche. Nueve horas de pintura al día ¿te imaginas tú lo que es eso?... Comía pensando en cómo lograr las sombras del rostro que acababa de dejar, cenaba a toda velocidad recordando el cuadro en el caballete, cuando hacía ensayos de encáustica pensaba en el momento en que volvería a abrir la puerta del taller y su familiar y persistente olor a espliego y pigmentos y de vez en cuando los universitarios se asomaban y me preguntaban: “Cómo va el color?” A la hora de comer, me enojaba si alguien me dirigía la palabra, distrayéndome de mis pensamientos, fijos en la próxima línea que habría de trazar y que deseaba yo continua y pura y exacta...suscité envidias entre mis compañeros por los elogios que me prodigó André Lhote. (34-35)

Lhote admired her artistic talent and above all her loyalty to her growth as an artist.

Poniatowska shows that Angelina lived for her craft and spent all of her time, dedicated to her artistic production. This unwavering commitment was noticed by the distinguished artist and the recognition she was awarded inevitably set her apart from her colleagues, causing envy among the students, as she continues to explain in her letters:

Yo no estaba herida, pero las palabras de la española zumbaban dentro de mis oídos y en la noche no pude dormir pensando: “Y si de pronto fuera yo a perder esta facilidad?...Sería tanto como perder mi alma, Diego, porque yo no vivía sino en función de la pintura...(38)

Poniatowska has capsized the character painted by Bertram Wolfe’s book, and sketched a woman that lived and breathed art. This is in fact her connection to Rivera, not simply

an obsession with a man that does not reciprocate her love but rather an artistic bond. Fundamentally they are both artists, and through the recollecting of the time they spent together Poniatowska's Beloff is reminding Rivera of how they painted together in her letters.

Later, in another letter written on January 17, 1922, Poniatowska's protagonist describes how she has decided to continue to work alone on her illustrations requested by *Floreal*, after receiving no feedback from Diego. The geometric landscapes that Beloff was used to creating take on new meaning: "...mis figuras de últimos meses no son geométricas, al contrario, redondas y dulces, no puedo dislocar las líneas rectas como lo hacía antes...(50). Angelina's art begins to evolve, and her sketching has adopted a round and tender aspect not present before. She elucidates that it was an experience out of her control in which she began to paint the small faces of children that in her opinion are "las mejor logradas." They are indeed the finest faces she has ever painted. Poniatowska gives the reader insight into not only Beloff's artistic process but also showcases the artist's landscape painting. In fact, landscape painting was one of Beloff's specialties as an artist, and made a living from this type of work, as shown in the novel with the work she completes for *Loreal*. While working on the urban landscapes requested by the magazine, the protagonist finds herself compelled to paint children, which she attributes to the endless thoughts of her lost son. Beloff continues to write, and explains to Diego that:

Es mi hijo el que se me viene a la yema de los dedos. Dibujé a un niño de año y medio, dolido, y con la cabeza de lado, casi transparente...Mis colores no son brillantes, son pálidos y los más persuasivos son naturalmente los azules en sus distintos tonos. Ves que a pesar de todo he trabajado...(51)

Although Angelina's artistic production has changed, her craft will always remain at the center of her identity and existence. Poniatowska skillfully shows the reader that Angelina is an artist first and foremost, which diverges from the image of the painter provided by Wolfe in his text. Angelina's artistry is her ultimate form of expression and consequently has been affected by the suffering she has endured by the loss of her son and husband, however the dexterity will never leave her. In this sense, the memory of her child has now contributed to her imaginative process; she is both mother and artist in this moment of grief. This instant also gives ways to Poniatowska's revisionist talent, in which she connects two impossible identities for women that of mother and artist. Poniatowska's character is rich with a profound emotional expression that translates to artistic creation. Beloff is not one sided, nor limited by Poniatowska's representation of the painter, rather she is an enhanced version of what we see in Wolfe's book.

In this same space, while channeling her son and painting fluidly, Beloff also reminisces how Rivera used to accompany her amidst this process, enthralled in her creative production and process, all the while encouraging her development:

Entre tanto, tu voz bien amada resuena en mis oídos:
 “Juega Angelina, juega, juega como lo pide Picasso, no tomes todo tan en serio” y trato de aligerar mi mano, de hacer bailar el pincel, incluso lo suelto para sacudir mi mano cual marioneta y recuerdo tu juego mexicano:
 “Tengo manita, no tengo manita porque la tengo desconchavadita” y regreso a la tela sin poder jugar, mi hijo muerto entre los dedos. Sin embargo, creo que he conseguido una secreta vibración, una rara transparencia.
 (51)

This memory reframes Angelina as the *artistic* interest in Diego's life, rather than the pathetic abandoned ex-wife found in Wolfe's text. Another telling component of this recollection is the image of the marionette, which speaks to another facet of Beloff's

long art career that included marionette design, again augments the simplistic depiction criticized by Wolfe. At the same time, the use of language with words like “juega” brings to life the *pincel* as a puppet of sorts by allowing it to play and dance on the easel. This image symbolizes Beloff as a mother and conjures up the memory of their son, Diego and the song Rivera used to sing to him *Tengo manita*, a popular Mexican folk song commonly sung to infants or children.⁴⁰ Poniatowska brings the two figures, Rivera and Beloff together through both art and connects them through the memory of their son. However, as pain stricken as she may be, Beloff is the artist central to this space and Rivera is tributary, and she is simultaneously a mother.

Another significant aspect of this memory is the inclusion of Pablo Picasso’s name. In this passage, along with many others, world renowned artists with whom Beloff and Diego were close friends are mentioned. This gives the reader a picture of how involved with the artistic milieu of the postwar era Beloff herself indeed was. She was surrounded and interacted with those considered the most illustrious artists of the time and continued to participate in this community after Diego’s exit from her life. Although Rivera’s success was overwhelming in Beloff’s life and often fulfilled the role of protagonist, Diego was *not* Beloff’s primary connection to art, rather it was a passion they both shared.

Throughout the novel, Poniatowska constructs Beloff’s artistic community in Paris by including conversions or mentions of and to Élie Faure, the French essayist Léon Bakst, the Russian painter Marie Blanchard, Juan Gris, Picasso, Ossip Zadkin and

⁴⁰ *Tengo manita*, is colloquial children’s song that was popular by José Luis Orozco in his album *Lírica Infantil: Latin American Children’s Folklore*. Orozco released 13 different volumes from 1971 to 1995.

Hayden. Beloff often shares with Diego that their mutual friends inquire about his situation in Mexico and complain of his absence for example:

-“veo a tus amigos, sobre todo a Élie Faure que lamenta tu silencio.” (9)

-“hacerle frente a los amigos que encuentro en el atelier, y me preguntan qué pasa contigo y a quienes no me atrevo a decir que no he recibido una línea tuya...Jacobsen quiere ir a México...Élie Faure estuvo un poco enfermo...(15)

-“Me he debilitado mucho, no he salido y salvo Zadkin que vino a preguntar una tarde si tenía noticias tuyas...(24)

Diego’s absence in combination with the constant inquiries about his whereabouts demonstrate her part in the artistic community and at the same time her abandonment.

While some of the friends have stopped phoning because of Diego’s absence, others try to console her.

In her writing to Diego, she describes different advice she has received from their mutual friends. Hayden, while reassuring the broken hearted Angelina, asks “Pero, Angelina ¿cuánto crees que tarden las cartas? Tardan mucho, mucho, uno, dos, tres meses y si tú le escribes a Diego cada ocho, quince días, como me lo dices, no da tiempo para que él te conteste...” (49). Zadkin on the other hand, while comforting her slightly offends her with his comment: “Angelina ¿qué no sabes que el amor no puede forzarse a través de la compasión?” (49). Although her fellow artist friends are harsh with Beloff, what these passages display is her interaction and involvement with the art world. Beloff’s group is not simply built around the mutual friends that she shared with Diego, rather she also mentions Russian artists that moved to Paris during the same: “Han venido algunos amigos rusos, Archipenko y Larionov, del tiempo de la guerra...” (51).

These encounters fill the letters, in attempt to keep Diego abreast of the situation in Paris

now that he has returned to Mexico. At the same it shows Beloff's association with fellow artists independently of Rivera.

The Last Letter

Finally, in the last letter to Rivera, Beloff does not choose to succumb to her feelings of abandonment, but rather to continue her life as an artist because it is the only way of life she knows how to live:

22 de julio de 1922

He pensado en dejar la pintura, rendirme, conseguir un trabajo de institutriz, dactilógrafa o cualquier otra cosa durante ocho horas diarias, un *abrutissement* general con idea al cine o al teatro los sábados y paseo en Saint Cloud o Robinson los domingos. Pero no quiero eso. Estoy dispuesta a seguir en las mismas, con tal de poder dedicarme a la pintura y aceptar las consecuencias: la pobreza, las aflicciones y tus pesos mexicanos. (70)

Poniatwoska successfully ends her novel presenting the reader with a new revised representation of Beloff that is constructed by Wolfe. Indeed the woman is still heart-broken and dealing with the grief of abandonment, yet she is above all an artist. She is willing to continue her trajectory as an artist even if that signifies poverty, pain and having to depend on alimony from Rivera. She does not want to forsake this enormous part of her life, and she will not.

Thirteen years after the couple's initial separation, Beloff does actually make her way to Mexico, by invitation from la *Secretaria de Educación Pública*. She would work as an instructor of drawing and engraving and would later teach at the *Nacional de Bellas Artes*. Much of her work as a teacher was dedicated to children's theater and the construction of marionettes. In the 30s and 40s, Beloff became an acting member of numerous organizations including: the *Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios*,

Sociedad Mexicana de Grabadores, Sociedad para el Impulso de las Artes Plásticas and the *Salón de las Plástica Mexicana*.⁴¹

Once in Mexico, she exhibited at the *Sala de Arte de la Secretaria de Educación Pública, the Galería de Arte Mexicano* and the *Salón de la Arte Plástica Mexicana*.

Exhibitions of her work since the 50s have been rare; however; recently in 2012 an exhibition in Mexico showcased her work and life as an *artist*, not simply as the first wife of Diego Rivera.

⁴¹ On February 24, 2012 the *El Universal* Mexican periodical published an article on Beloff “Angelina Beloff, más allá de la leyenda” by Sonia Sierra providing more specific examples of Beloff’s professional accomplishments while remaining void in historical discourse dealing with Diego Rivera.

Chapter 2: *Demasiado Amor* or Not Enough?: A Critical Parody of the Romance Novel

In *Demasiado Amor* by Sara Sefchovich, the presence of writing is not only central to the structure of the novel but also crucial to the protagonist's, Beatriz, existence. Writing defines the protagonist; specifically journaling and letter writing gives Beatriz a platform to inscribe her existence into a journal and an epistolary form, leaving a record of desolate life marked by mistrust and solitude. Sefchovich's chapters oscillate between letters written in the present tense from the protagonist to her sister living in Italy and past tense diary-like entries⁴² addressed to her lost love with whom she only spent time on the weekends. In her correspondence to her sister, she reveals the bleak reality of her life in Mexico City that encompasses her new career of prostitution. Vips, the restaurant chain and multinational corporation, is the backdrop of the novel and the protagonist's quasi "corner" where she initiates her slow but steady path to full-fledged prostitution.⁴³ After her day-job as a receptionist ends, she offers her body to men dining at the restaurant, earning money to remit to her sister abroad. Their dream is to one day open a bed-and-breakfast by the sea, and her sister has left Mexico in search of the perfect estate, while Beatriz remains in Mexico City working to earn the rest of the money they still need to start their entrepreneurial vision. However, things do not go as

⁴² I refer to the writing directed to Beatriz's lover as journal entries because of their self-reflective nature and style. They are short, a few pages at most and recall specific memories between the unnamed lover and the protagonist. They are also woven in between her letters to her sister, thus stimulating the pages of a diary creating a temporal disjuncture between the dated letters that provide a chronological timeline. In addition, in the last pages of the novel, the protagonist herself refers to the space as her journal, which I analyze in further detail towards the end of this chapter.

⁴³ This backdrop provides an interesting metaphor for body as commodity given Mexico's growing capitalist market at time. The novel anticipates Vips collaboration with Wal-Mart Stores in 1994, the same year when NAFTA went into effect.

planned, and Beatriz's sister eventually falls in love, marries and bears children, fulfilling the romantic dream that Beatriz never attains. Her sister does not return, and Beatriz, who only discloses her name on the final page of the novel, ends her existence/authorship with a closing letter to her *hermanita*.

Through letter and diary writing, Sefvovich's protagonist weaves together two parallel lives and stories of unrequited love. The first, a dejected love story between the protagonist and her dominant lover; and the second, a deceptive understanding of desire working as a prostitute. These stories of failed love frame the novel and perform a critical parody of the romance novel (in the most generic terms) and with regard to the Latin American romantic novel such as discussed in Doris Sommer's significant *Foundational Fictions* and of dominant Mexican patriarchal society.⁴⁴ At the same time, these two conflicting stories construct a tension between the unsuccessful fairy-tale like story and the reality of the letters to her sister. By *restrategizing* epistolary discourse and the function of the diary, Sefchovich is able to critically discuss the tragic nature of normative ideas of love and sex and how they affect the female figure in contemporary Mexican literature and society.

Happily Ever After, or Not: Romantic Fairy-Tales

In *Demasiado amor* there is a distinction between the dated letters the protagonist writes to her sister in Italy and the epistolary-style diary entries written in the second

⁴⁴ In her influential *Foundational Fictions*, Doris Sommer discusses the "inextricability of politics from fiction in the history of nation-building" and she locates an "erotic of politics, to show how a variety of novel national ideals are all ostensibly grounded in 'natural' heterosexual love and in marriages that provided a figure for apparently nonviolent consolidation during internecine conflicts at midcentury." (5-6). According to Sommer, "romantic novels go hand in hand with patriotic history in Latin America. The books fueled a desire for domestic happiness that runs over into dreams of national prosperity; and nation-building projects invested "private passions with public purpose." (7). Sommer's work provides evidence of a Latin American literary tradition rooted in romantic discourse that aided in branding the nation, or nation building.

person to her lover. In her letters to her sister, the reader is made well-aware that there is indeed correspondence. The protagonist is consistently begging the recipient, her *hermanita*, to write her and bring her up to date on her new life abroad. In addition, the reader is made privy to the narrators' reactions to previous news or letters from her sister throughout her correspondence:

3 de agosto

Hermanita queridísima:

Creo que nuestras cartas se cruzaron, porque hoy en la mañana pasé al correo a dejarte una y cuando regresé de la oficina me encontré la que tú mandaste. Y contestas a casi todas mis preguntas. (16-17)

In these letters the protagonist divulges to her sister the reality of her day-to-day life living in Mexico city and the turmoil she faced working as a prostitute. The reader is provided one or two letters to Beatriz's sister and then the novel switches back to the melancholic diary entries that plead remembrance from her lover through the process of an excessive naming.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the diary entries do not coincide with the temporal scheme that the letters follow. The structure of the novel, the atemporality and the enumerative language contributes to its tone as a fairy tale. For example, the reader is not fully aware of this clash in time until roughly fifty pages into the novel, when the protagonist reveals to her sister, well after beginning her life of prostitution, that possibly she has met the "love" of her life. This lack of chronological continuity contributes to the

⁴⁵ Sefchovich's protagonist builds memories through recounting and excessive naming of all of the places she and her lover supposedly traveled throughout their affair together. She does so in an extremely detailed and cartographic manner that is quite astonishing. Her remembering traverses Mexican history, which includes where various leaders emerged, and the particular vegetation and food, clothing, languages, art and culture of each region of the large country.

fanciful idea of a tale, or romance, seen in romantic fairy-tales. Fairy-tales are often rooted in specific temporal frame but never establish a specific date or time, hence the classic phrase *once upon a time*. Fairy-tales can be primarily seen as agendas for translating social norms and mores. Within this structure of the fairy tale, there exists a gender paradigm that is also articulated. Donald Haase identifies significant developments in feminist fairy-tale scholarship in his article, “Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship: A Critical Survey and Bibliography,” introducing the Lurie-Lieberman debate on whether or not female characters of the fairy-tale genre can be viewed as powerful or reductive.⁴⁶ This debate generally focused on the effects of representing females in this manner on children. It wasn’t until a decade later in 1979 that Karen E. Rowe connected the effect on children to the internalization of romantic patterns for adult women. Rowe contends that there is an implication of romantic discourse that contributes to the “forming of female attitudes toward the self, men, marriage and society” (209). Rowe concluded that the fairy-tale genre no longer provided that same confirmation of female fabled behavior in modern society because of the “gap between social practice and romantic idealization” (211). She explains that: “Today women are caught in a dialectic between the cultural status quo and the evolving feminist movement, between a need to preserve values and yet to accommodate changing mores, between romantic fantasies and contemporary realities” (223). This dialectic is precisely the opposition that

⁴⁶ In 1970 Alison Lurie published “Fairy Tale Liberation” in which she argued that folktales and fairy tales could advance the cause of women’s liberation by exhibiting strong female characters. Marcia R. Lieberman responded to Lurie’s claim in her article “Some Day My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation through the Fairy-Tale,” arguing that female acculturation should be the focus of feminist scholarship looking at stories that have been popularized and that have effected masses of children, as seen in the work of Disney (15-17).

the protagonist Beatriz is caught between, her romantic fantasy found in her diary and the unkind reality living as a prostitute revealed in her letters to her sister.

Linda J. Lee in “Guilty Pleasures: Reading Romance Novels as Reworked Fairy Tales” claims that the romance novel has much in common with “traditional fairy tales: both are highly formulaic; invoke a fantasy realm; focus on the creation or reconciliation of a romantic pair; exist in an infinite variation of texts that fall into distinct types; and are often dismissed as being “trivial” (52). According to Lee: “While most scholars credit the novels of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë as the genre’s antecedents, romance novels also implicitly or explicitly draw on much older narrative forms, including fairy tales” (56). This legacy of romance fiction is important when examining *how* this type of literary discourse can provide insight into the way that “women negotiate fantasy lives within patriarchal culture” (56). Applying this theoretical framework to Sefchovich’s representation of Beatriz, aids in unraveling her tragic desire to perpetuate a fantasy within patriarchal society.

The connection between the concepts of time and romantic fairy-tale are crucial in examining Sefchovich’s parodic work. The author presents the romantic affair between Beatriz and her lover in a vague temporal fashion, for example by not dating her protagonist’s writing. But also, Sefchovich depicts their relationship as existing in a “time-less” realm when having her protagonist write, for example: “Porque así fue como estuve contigo, corriendo por los caminos, viviendo sin tiempo y en el puro deseo, enamorada de tu sonrisa, de tu mirada, de ti” (32). In this sense, it is as if Beatriz is creating/writing her own private fairy-tale romance full of travel, pain and desire. She continues to build this romantic affair and writes:

Así pasé todos los viernes, los sábados, y los domingos de mi vida. Imaginando que la felicidad era eso, que la felicidad estaba en los caminos, en los hoteles, haciendo el amor. Imaginando que todo podía detenerse por estar a tu lado, sintiendo que todo podía calmarse por estar contigo.
(27)

It was only on the weekends when Beatriz claims to have spent the love affair with an unnamed man. And during this time away from her regular job as a receptionist (which she abandons half-way through the novel to pursue prostitution full-time) she claims to have imagined her own happiness and proceeds to write this “tale”.

When asked by her sister to include more information in her letters regarding the affair, Beatriz responds: “Otra P.D. Ya te dije que de mi señor de los fines de semana no quiero hablar. Te suplico que de eso no me hagas preguntas en tus cartas. Es mi secreto y sólo te digo que es el sentido de mi vida y mi gran felicidad” (88). It is clear that the “love affair” is private. Beatriz does not want to conjoin the two realms, her reality that she shares with her sister through letters and the fantasy that she writes clandestinely.

As Bakhtin explains in the *Dialogic Imagination*, the novel is a narrative form in “continuous becoming.” Michael Holquist further elucidates Bakhtin’s work by stating in the introduction to the English translation, it can “include, ingest, devour other genres and still retain its status as a novel” (xxxii). Bakhtin describes what he calls chronotopes, a concept of space and time. He explains that since the classical Greeks, this understanding of time has continued to have a societal significance as well as a constitutive effect upon the representation of man. According to Bakhtin, chronotopes have been affected by particular epistemologies, authorial intentions and compositional stratagems of their times. Therefore, novels have different chronotopic systems and configurations which engender different meanings and values (84). As Holquist and Emerson explain in the

introduction, Bakhtin's definition of the novel may very well supersede the work of theorists of the novel such as Lukács, Ian Watt, Lucien Goldmann, and René Girard, all of whom have defined the novel narrowly. According to Holquist and Emerson, Bakhtin shows us that the novel is "plasticity itself" (39). They explain that with the work of Bakhtin, we can conclude that the novel is an anti-epic of great creativity and strength that is still in the process of development and that draws upon the "lower" energies of human nature. In this vein, the novel has subversive potential because of its "plasticity". It can be manipulated in such a way that proves strategic for a certain group of writers.

Sefchovich's work provides an example of how the novel can be worked in such a fashion that it can generate the subversive potential that Bakhtin discusses. The author is able to draw upon feminine genres—letters and diary—to play with two parallel yet conflicting temporal planes. The letters represent reality and chronological time while the other half represents the protagonist's fantasy realm. Through the use of a journal, this fairy-tale romance is propelled precisely by the elusive time frame from which it takes place. For example, Sefchovich opens the novel with Beatriz writing in the first person to her lover for approximately three pages. Then this personal writing is immediately followed by her first letter to her sister in Italy, dated July 28th. Next, the reader sees her second personal "entry," which reads:

Veintiséis años y setenta y dos kilos tenía yo aquella noche de viernes cuando crucé la puerta de cristal del Vips y me fui paseando entre las mesas, más para que me vieran que para buscar un lugar donde sentarme...y de repente tú. (11)

Beatriz's lover appears to her almost mystically, in the place where she would least expect, her place of work. What is curious about this memory is the discontinuous time frame in which the reader is exposed to it. The letters addressed to Beatriz's sister begin

in August, and according to these letters she does not meet her lover until late February of that same year, recollecting the identical memory seen in the first pages of the novel in her diary:

28 de febrero

Hermana mía, perdóname:

Tu carta tiene razón, un mes ha pasado y yo sin escribir... No se trata de ninguna enfermedad... Se trata de un señor. Lo conocí en el Vips. Yo entré como de costumbre y me fui paseando por entre las mesas que es lo que siempre hago, para echar un ojillo y para que me vean a mí. Y en eso que lo veo... Y allí me fui a sentar y traté de llamarle la atención pero no me hizo caso. Cuando se paró para irse, yo lo seguí hasta la caja y entonces me miró, me pidió mi nota de consumo, la pagó me llevó con él.

The act of not dating her journal entries creates confusion trying to locate and piece together the events in time. By not assigning a date, the protagonist and her diary assume a sort of timeless autonomy, where the (re)creation of memory predominates irrespective of our understanding of linear time. It is as if her desire and relationship with that very desire existed long before ever actually meeting the man. Moreover, her desire is nostalgic insofar as it is loss of desire that drives the inscribing of “memory.” This nostalgic desire experienced by Sefchovich’s protagonist fits well into the Lacanian theory of the unconscious based on a presumed absence within us all. However, this sense of absence in Sefchovich’s novel is not necessarily universal to the extent that it is a female-experienced absence created from the false patriarchal “fantasy” or “fairy-tale” fulfilled through male dominance, which her male lover often exhibits in his behavior towards Beatriz.

While Scholars like Kay Mussels, Jan Cohn and Anne Cranny-Francis critique the central assumptions of the romance novel,⁴⁷ critics like Pamela Regis attempt to find merit in the genre. Regis argues that criticism, especially male criticism (but also feminist criticism) has traditionally labeled the romance novel genre as “silly and empty-headed,” declaring in her book *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003) that: “the romance novel contains serious ideas. The genre is not about women’s bondage, as the literary critics would have it. The romance novel is, to the contrary, about women’s freedom. The genre is popular because it conveys the pain, uplift, and joy that freedom brings” (xiii). This is an interesting notion, given that in Sefchovich’s novel, which inverts the traditional model outlined by Regis, for example, there is no happy ending sealed through the act of betrothal. In fact, Beatriz’s lover leaves her once he learns of her work as a prostitute, showcasing the protagonist’s sexual and emotional captivity. Indeed, this novel successfully *contests* this fairy-tale in the Mexican context. By parodying the romance genre in her novel, she in fact brings to light the criticism that many scholars have noted through a *failed* romantic story.

Regis’s definition of the romance novel, which she notes begins as early as the Greeks, outlines a formula with eight important elements. According to Regis, the romance novel:

⁴⁷ In Kay Mussel’s *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women’s Romance Fiction* (1984) she states that: “the belief in the primacy of love in a woman’s life, female passivity in romantic relationships, support for monogamy in marriage, reinforcement of domestic values—have not faded” in the composition of the genre (Mussels 189). In *Romance and the Erotics of Property: Mass Market Fiction for Women*, Jan Cohn describes romance fiction’s biggest flaw as “the ultimate failure of romance to provide, even in fantasy, a satisfying answer to the problem of women’s powerlessness” (176). And critic Anne Cranny-Francis in *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction*, maintains that romantic fiction “encodes the most coherent infection of the discourses of gender, class and race constitutive of the contemporary social order; it encodes the bourgeois fairy-tale” (192).

...is a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines. All romance novels contain eight narrative elements: *a definition of society*, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform; the *meeting* between the heroine and hero; an account of their *attraction* for each other; *the barrier* between them; the *point of ritual death*; the *recognition* that fells the barrier; *the declaration* of heroine and hero that they love each other; and their *betrothal*.” (14)

For Regis, the romance novel is primarily about overcoming the “barrier” and therefore views marriage, or “betrothal,” as freedom. This specific theme is a point of contention for feminist critic Janice Radway, in her *Reading the Romance*. Radway believes that romance fiction “reaffirms its founding culture’s belief that women are valuable not for their unique personal qualities but for their biological sameness and their ability to perform that essential role of maintaining and reconstituting others” particularly in the binding contract of marriage (205). Regis’s attempt to equate marriage with freedom falls short insofar as it defines the protagonist’s so-called freedom as a binding contract outlined under the parameters of a patriarchal and heteronormative culture. Rachel Blau DuPlessis in *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, notes that often times the romance novel locates success in a coupling of female and male. According to Duplessis:

As a narrative pattern, the romance plot muffles the main female character, represses quest...incorporates individuals within couples as a sign of their personal narrative success. The romance plot separates love and quest...is based on the extremes of sexual difference, and evokes an aura around the couple itself. (Duplessis 5) (Regis 10)

The criticism that Duplessis applies to the traditional romance novel is also evident in Sefchovich’s novel. However, the author is able to expose the protagonist’s repression

by demonstrating her desire to fulfill the fantasies of others (her clients) and to couple with her masculinist male lover.

In her book *The Will To Heal: Psychological Recovery in the Novels of Latina Writers* (2007), Felicia Lynne Fahey writes that Sefchovich plays with the structures and conventions of melodrama, stating that: “Not only does Sefchovich’s heroine engage the pleasures of melodramatic genres in her own writing, but she depicts herself as a lover of popular romance and as an excessively sentimental person who finds relief in “historias de amor” (77). I agree with Fahey’s analysis, and also stress that in doing so, Sefchovich’s *Demasiado Amor* executes an intricate social and political critique of Mexican patriarchal society. By drawing upon feminine genres, Sefchovich cultivates a new space for such complex critique to take place. As Fahey fittingly highlights: “Like many other scholars and authors who began to write after the national crisis of 1968, Sefchovich’s scholarly work centers on the politics of culture and the possibility of creating greater cultural democracy through art and literature.”⁴⁸ Her work exposes a profuse macho national structure, and the myths and histories that frame that narrative, holding a tight grasp over women and their bodies. In exposing the chauvinistic structure, she performs an evaluation of these very discourses. According to Fahey: “Her novel sets out to stage... the growing conflict between residual patriarchal conventions, and the emergence of defiant gender roles.”⁴⁹ Sefchovich is able to give her heroine an intimate space, the act of journaling to expose abuse, to reveal the harsh reality of a single woman in modern urbanity and the tragic “love story” she metaphorically has with patriarchy.

⁴⁸ *The Will To Heal*, p. 77.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 79.

In the concluding twenty pages of the novel, Beatriz writes in response to her sister's judgment of her profession and she declares that her life is in fact *not* something out of a novel:

No es cierto, hermanita, que mi vida sea de novela. Las novelas mienten y mi vida es la pura verdad. O al menos de lunes a jueves porque los fines de semana sí se convierte en cuento, en sueño, en ilusión, en fantasía, en mentira y últimamente hasta en locura y dolor y duda por causa del amor. (176)

Beatriz claims that her life as a prostitute is a valid reality but reveals that her romance is fantasy, and even a lie that will eventually end in pain. The irony of this statement is that her life as a prostitute spins so out of control, that it *does* appear absurd and fabricated. In her letters, she tells her sister of hundreds of bizarre sexual encounters with men, evoking the abuse and shameful experiences, and finally the transformation of her apartment into a barren room used only for prostitution from which she never leaves. However, this *is* her reality, one of abuse and fulfillment of male desire. In one letter she describes an experience in which she had to be hospitalized because of the severe physical abuse she endured. She writes to her sister:

Estuve varios días hospitalizada, por golpes y contusiones. Hasta ahora había tenido suerte pero me falló. Y esa noche fue terrible...desde el principio estuvo agresivo, y eso no me gustó mucho, pero lo que nunca imaginé fue la golpiza. Durísima...Me pegó todo el tiempo que quiso y si no me mató es porque no se le antojó. Yo no me podía defender, estaba hecha una bola de adolorida...Sólo lloraba y me tapaba la cara y luego perdí la noción. Desperté en el piso de la cocina, él se había ido, me dio gusto estar viva y me fui solita y por mi pie al hospital. (107)

The prostitute that tells of her unusual lifestyle and that is constantly mistreated cannot possibly be enjoying her sex work, as Fahey maintains: "As the protagonist changes, the

sexual roles assigned to the heterosexual male and female no longer remain fixed but enter a state of flux as the protagonist finds ways to enjoy sex work, to work safely, and to relate to her clients in more intimate ways” (80). I strongly disagree with this characterization as empowering and do not see it demonstrated in that manner in the novel. Rather, it is a mockery of feminist proclamations of sexual empowerment through sex-work servicing a male clientele. Another example comes two months later when Beatriz communicates to her sister that she has recently had to perform an abortion:

Me tardé en escribirte porque ha sido para mí un tiempo muy malo. Tuve que hacerme un aborto y te juro que no existe nada más espantoso en la vida. Desde buscar al medicucho que lo quiera hacer hasta aguantar sus burlas y malos tratos y desde conseguir el dineral que cobra hasta vivir esa experiencia terrible; te aseguro que sufrí mucho. Pero ¿qué remedio que quedaba? ¡Maldita sea! Sentí mucho miedo, al doctor, al dolor y a la muerte en la que nunca había pensado. Y encima, sola. (113)

The feminist gesture written and presented by Sefchovich criticizes women’s belief that female liberation may come in the form of bodily commodification. The reality that is posited by Sefchovich is that the nameless protagonist becomes just that, a body, an empty vessel, whose sole purpose is to satisfy men’s desires and contentment, thus erasing all personal desire from the subject herself: “...en mis cartas sólo hablo de lo que sienten mis clientes y nada digo de mí. Pero, ¡ay!, hermana, es que cuando ellos están felices, yo también lo estoy” (179). Although the protagonist claims that she reaps satisfaction in the fulfillment of others’ desires, if her happiness is contingent on the gratification of her male clients, her personal contentment is secondary and reinforces a false immediate form of pleasure that is ultimately unsustainable. Women have internalized the concept that they exist to fulfill the desires of others, and in said acts,

women as objects increase in value. However under the new order of capitalist consumerism, women simply transform into commodities.⁵⁰ Through her construction of Beatriz, Sefchovich is demonstrating for the reader the “repressive engendering of the Mexican nation in its strict control of the female body and sexual desire” (Fahey xiii).⁵¹

Beatriz’s inability to connect and form close relationships apart from those that are sexually constructed with male clients is a reflection of the social branding women have undergone. Fahey maintains that Sefchovich:

...explores cultural stigmas placed on women’s sexuality that deny feminine desire in service of masculine fantasy. She presents these cultural stigmas as a traumatic cultural condition that affects women’s ability to explore freely their own sexual desire and develop relationships or real intimacy (78).

Fahey raises an interesting point regarding Mexican cultural stigmas of prostitutes. For example, as early as the turn of the century, we find Federico Gamboa’s 1903 novel *Santa*, which centered on the life of a prostitute living in Mexico City. Santa is thrown out of her home for falling in love with a seductive soldier, with whom she conceives a child and who later abandons her. Having nowhere to turn, Santa finds employment in an exclusive brothel in Mexico City. Sadly, over time, the young woman’s life disintegrates

⁵⁰ Friedrich Engels first laid the blueprints for Marxist Feminist criticism in his 1884 *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* when he discussed the function of gender inequality and the sexualization of women as a result of the capitalist order and centralized within the patriarchal nuclear family.

In 1975, Gayle Rubin’s *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex* used Engels and Marx work as a point of departure, highlighting that women are omitted from the capital exchange and are treated as commodities, however the system needs women in order to function. Rubin argues that patriarchy is not a subset of capitalism rather a system itself that produces gender norms and compulsory heterosexuality. The author opts for a “genderless” society, thus rendering a sexual/gender difference as insignificant.

⁵¹ Fahey comments on what she calls the “binary division” of the rural/urban divide where the reader witnesses a metachronic position of the Mexican in modernity and the impacts on women and their lives (81).

and she dies of cancer. This legacy regarding the female prostitute has existed in Mexican literary discourse for decades. However, at the same time, I am not contending that women's sexuality and desire should or can be cultivated in the service of "masculine fantasy," as Fahey writes. In fact, I argue that Sefchovich successfully demonstrates through her protagonist Beatriz that this is a "tale" that only ends in the woman's (self)-destruction, as seen in both *Santa* and *Demasiado amor*. At the end of the novel, Beatriz does not leave her apartment, which she has transformed into a bleak room with the sole purpose of servicing her clients. She has stopped living in order to permanently function as a vehicle for male fantasy and has accepted this destiny. She writes: "Hermana, ésta es la última carta que te escribo. Mañana, mi vida habrá cambiado, para mí se habrá decidido otro destino..."(184). The mental decadence of the female protagonist is juxtaposed beautifully with the love-struck heroine revealed in her diary. She is whisked away by her lover to become mesmerized by the rural landscape depicted and recounted in her journal. This division allows the reader to catch a glimpse of the weight of urban life on women and their identities. The protagonist is caught between the distinct "female" narratives of and for Mexican women, her reality in Mexico City living as a prostitute and her nostalgic love story with "patriarchy" demonstrated in her journal.

In the space of her personal diary/journal, Beatriz writes to and about her melancholic love. It is an elusive space that can also be read as an unreciprocated love story. This longing is an internalized gendered agony, in which the female protagonist yearns for the unattainable, the so-called masculine savior, or what Steve Stern names "good patriarchy". In his article "What Comes After Patriarchy? Reflections From Mexico," Stern claims that even though the strongholds of the old patriarchal regime of

the seventeenth and eighteenth century have dissipated, “similar conflicts, tactics, mediations, and visions of gender... surface in the late twentieth century. As often happens in Mexico and Latin America, supposedly “old” times somehow resurface and create sensations of long-term continuity” (55).⁵² In a sense, Beatriz aches for a mythical romance in the hopes that it will transgress the patriarchal lining that frames this very desire. And at the same time, she hopes to escape her reality living as a prostitute. Nonetheless, as in any catastrophic love story, it is not the case. Her lover eventually leaves her after gaining knowledge of her weekly work as a prostitute, and for this reason the diary is written entirely in the past tense. Ironically, Beatriz’s “love story” that she writes *is* an escape from her daily reality, though tragically never fully realized because it is only a tale.

The way in which Beatriz describes her relationship with the unnamed man reflects a romantic love-story. As described in their first encounter with one another, Beatriz uncannily yields to her lover before even properly meeting him. She writes: “Y de repente, tú te paraste y yo me paré, tú caminaste hasta la caja y yo caminé detrás de ti, tú te formaste en la cola y yo me formé atrás de ti, como advertencia de lo que sería mi vida pero que entonces no supe ver” (11). This rhythmic submission takes place as part of Beatriz’s doomed destiny. In addition, it evokes an internalized myth of the *machista lover* that rescues his *mujer*, dominating her sexually, mentally and monetarily. Richard Basham defines machismo in his article “Machismo,” as the “the cult of the male.” He continues to describe this cult as being “characterized by a display of sexual prowess, zest for action; including verbal ‘action,’ daring, and, above all, absolute confidence” (3 Basham). According to Basham, “The macho is a man who conquers women at his

⁵² Fahey also cites Stern in her book *The Will To Heal*, p. 81.

pleasure...” (3). This conquering and dominance is at the heart of the relationship that Beatriz describes between her and her lover. She is mesmerized by his presence and surrenders to his domination. Interestingly enough, this *machista* domination is also portrayed in a romantic light.

For example, the protagonist etches the following poetic love scene in her journal, yet the circumstances in which she meets her lover detract from the authenticity of a genuine romantic exchange founded on a dynamic of equal power. She writes:

Y yo como tonta, alargué la mano y te entregué mi nota, mi nota de consumo y mi nota musical, mi nota de pie de página y mi nota de mujer por fin mirada por ti. Y todo el mundo me empezó a dar vueltas a mí...tu nunca volteaste a verme ni me dijiste una palabra, pero yo iba feliz, tan completamente feliz en esa noche oscura de viernes, que supe eso era la vida. (12)

Beatriz explains the encounter as one in which she loses all inhibitions. The fairy-tale that women are socialized to believe is one based on a domination/submission binary. What is even more tragic about Sefchovich’s protagonist is that she recognizes the foolishness in her docile act, referring to herself as “tonta” or silly. Nevertheless, the gratification that she feels as a result outweighs this self-reflection. The earth is spinning around her and she feels utter “happiness” in the moment, even though her new lover does not speak to her. She is entranced by his gaze; according to the protagonist, this gaze has made her life worthwhile. Sefchovich writes Beatriz’s episode as a cataclysmic love story that parodies the romance novel which depict women falling in love with men as the ultimate utopia. Because this act of falling in love is not a mutual exchange, it *is* a sign of female bondage. This challenges the debate surrounding the presence of marriage/betrothal as a sign of bondage or a sign of freedom, because it is the *tale* and false ideas generated by

the notion of falling in love that dominate the female figure in Sefchovich's novel.

Therefore, by fictionalizing her protagonist's diary it too becomes myth, "a fiction about fictions" and paradoxically sheds light on the pervasive discourse of love and dominance in Mexican culture.

Mirroring Fiction: Parody As a Critical Tool

In *Parody: The New Critical Idiom*, Simon Denith concentrates on diverse cultural work performed by parody and parodic forms, especially in contemporary culture. What particularly interests me about Denith's work is his discussion on *how* the act of parody can prove to be an "act of implicit criticism" (16). Scholars such as Margret Rose offer parody as a critical tool for such interrogation; for example, in her book *Parody and Metafiction: An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction* (1979), Rose argues that "certain kinds of parodic fiction act as metafiction—i.e., that in parodying one text (or kind of text), the parody text holds up a mirror to its own fictional practices, so that it is at once a fiction and a fiction *about* fictions" (Denith 14-15). Thanks to the influential work of Mikhail Bakhtin, we know that parody can hold subversive power, as discussed in his 1984 *Rabelais and His World*. Together with the idea presented by Rose, Sefchovich's use of parody provides a sort of "mirror" as described by Rose, to critique romantic discourses and show how they restrict women as literary figures. The use of parody for Sefchovich is also subversive to the extent that it restrategizes "feminine genres" as critical tools to perform literary and cultural critiques.

In their second meeting together, Beatriz and her mysterious moustached benefactor again do not speak a single word to one another. The man dominates her not

with money this time but with his “sexual prowess,” one of the quintessential characteristics of machismo according to Basham. The protagonist writes:

Cuando detuviste la marcha, habíamos llegado a un hotel. Te seguí entonces por escaleras y pasillos hasta una puerta que se cerró detrás de mi persona durante dos días y dos noches...que me tuviste desnuda, echada sobre la cama, parada junto a la ventana, a gatas sobre el tapete, debajo de la regadera, sentada en el escusado, subida en el lavamanos, volando sobre las sillas para hacerme el amor. (12)

What is striking about this first sexual encounter is that it is difficult for the reader to decipher whether or not the protagonist is once again engaged in sex work. The similarity in which her body is subjugated appears all too familiar. In addition, Beatriz describes it in terms of captivity: she was sequestered for two days and two nights. The man has *her* naked and has *her* in various places around the room and in the sexual positions of his choice. However, the style and tone in which she narrates this bodily treatment reveals total infatuation and awe, referring to her sexual domination as “love making.” The protagonist’s letters and diary entries offer a “mirror” once again to two sets of disturbing female representations of love. In Beatriz’s personal diary, Fahey observes that:

The romantic relationship between the protagonist and her lover is revealed as a traditional patriarchal contract defined by a hierarchical relationship between feminine and masculine. The female protagonist and her lover assume distinct sexual roles in which the desires of the masculine lover consistently dictate the heterosexual relationship. (79)

This is evident in the first and many love scenes depicted by the protagonist between her and her lover. Beatriz assumes a passive and subservient role, while her lover “dictates” their sexual relationship. Not only does he dictate their sexual relationship, but also becomes Beatriz’s “guide,” introducing her to different aspects of Mexican topography and constructing a large national and historical repository for the young woman. Beatriz

often writes of how her lover introduced her to Mexico, to her own country: “Tú me enseñaste este país. Tú me llevaste y me trajiste, me subiste y me bajaste, me hiciste conocerlo y me hiciste amarlo” (24). During their many weekends together that Beatriz relates in her journal, the man takes Beatriz across the large Mexican landscape, “educating” her on Mexican history and culture:

Caminamos por calles, iglesias, plazas, mercados y jardines. Subimos cerros y cruzamos puentes. Caminamos horas enteras viendo, callando. Nos quedamos sentados descansando en las bancas de los parques, en las orillas de las banquetas y en las escaleras de las casas, sentados comiendo en cafés y fondas. Y una vez y otra vez volvíamos al hotel para hacer el amor y otra vez nos íbamos afuera. (22)

I argue that the romantic love story that the protagonist pines for is, in fact part of a larger national story of patriarchy and of dominant masculinist Mexican culture. These stories have been told through foundational myths, but also through central masculine cultural traditions and figures which Beatriz cites throughout her diary entries. By citing numerous names and texts dealing with religious, historical and cultural discourses, through Beatriz, Sefchovich artistically critiques these discourses that privilege the masculine imaginary and that mark Mexican literary and cultural tradition.⁵³ For example, the protagonist writes in her journal:

¡Cuántas historias te sabías! Me contaste de una mujer que tuvo muchos amantes, tantos que cuando inauguraron la estatua de un rey a caballo, se río porque el animal tenía los dos testículos del mismo tamaño y dijo que por experiencia sabía que eso no podía ser...Me contaste de un rico que

⁵³ As Fahey and Leigh Gilmore in her *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* observe, Sefchovich is responding to the lengthy tradition of “melodramatic and literary representations of heterosexual love in Mexico” that work to perpetuate fictional accounts of gender (Gilmore 164, Fahey 88). Debra Castillo in *Talking Back* has also argued the idealized woman is indeed at the core of national identity and embodies purity (16).

construyó la iglesia de Taxco para agradecer la suerte de encontrarse una mina, de otro rico que compró y arregló la hacienda más grande de Jalisco y de un gobierno que construyó una biblioteca en Villahermosa... Otro día me contaste de Lizardi y Prieto que escribieron cosas divertidas, de Altamirano que hacía llorar y de Rabasa que hacía pensar. Un día me leíste a Azuela, otro a Rulfo el triste y otro más a Fuentes el elegante. Y de todo esto lo que más disfruté fue un libro gordo de pasta verde que contaba las vidas de Maximiliano, Carlota y Juárez, uno flaquito de pasta café que contaba la vida de Madero y otro sobre Pancho Villa. Y también disfruté los muchos poemas que me recitabas ... con el nombre de Nervo, de Acuña, de Huerta, de Lizalde y Paz, con el nombre de Sabines... Un día me enseñaste pinturas de Juan Correa en Durango, de Fernando Castro en Mérida, de Cordero, Clausel y Herrán y señores vestidos de negro de Bustos. Me llevaste a ver paisajes de Velasco, campesinos hambrientos de Orozco, calaveras de Posada, sandías de Tamayo, y una enorme mujer desnuda de Rivera en alguna universidad.

This long list of esteemed Mexican men are the men that have branded Mexican culture, literature and politics. Therefore, Beatriz's lover serves as a *portavoz* and as a professor of sorts, teaching and passing on the strong male tradition. What Beatriz inevitably finds on both sides of the "mirror" is that she is exclusively a body, a vehicle. She is the body necessary to uphold such a strong dominant male tradition, the figure of the female, and she is a body to be used to fulfill others' desires.

The Grand Finale: The Last Letter

Sefchovich's novel is made up of 51 chapters. Both the letters and diary are numbered as chapters, creating a pendulum effect because the author swings back and forth from the beginning to the end of the novel, between the two literary spaces. As noted previously, the author opens the novel with Beatriz's first journal entry. In closing, she first provides a final journal entry followed by her final letter to her sister. The fiftieth chapter or her last entry concludes her grand love story and read as follows:

Y así como el séptimo día Dios descansó, orgulloso como estaba de su creación, así en el séptimo año yo decidí descansar de ti, orgullosa como estaba de nuestro amor. Siete años y siete kilos después de haberte conocido, decidí terminar. Padresnuestros, Dios te salve, Ave Marías, Aleluyas, Salmos, Cánticos, Rezos, Oraciones, éste es el fin. Padre Celestial, Dios nuestro Señor, el gran final. Ésta es la última vez que yo te quiero, en serio te lo digo hora es de terminar, hora de ponerle fin a tanto amor... ¿Hay otro nombre que tu nombre? ¿Otros ojos como tus ojos en los que estallan las más vastas pasiones? (183).

The end of Beatriz's affair is also the end of her love story. She compares the beginning and end of her romance to that of God in the book of Genesis; as an incredible and miraculous feat. The story she has constructed over the past seven years has been an arduous process that now Beatriz can finally admire, but no longer yearns to live. By using religious discourse to describe her love affair, the romance adopts a sacred tone. The way in which Beatriz evokes God and her lover blends the two identities together. In this sense, Sefchovich compares Beatriz's passion for creating and writing her love story to worshipping God.⁵⁴

The last two pages of Sefchovich's novel are Beatriz's final letter to her sister and it happens to be the only letter not dated in the long correspondence of seven years. This absence of a date is metaphorically symbolic of her transition into a new temporality where she will no longer document her dismal quotidian existence. It is a farewell letter. Beatriz tells her sister that she will no longer receive any letters from her because the following day her life will have changed. The reader can only speculate that Beatriz has decided to end her life. Beatriz also writes a final prayer, which suggests that this letter is her final rite, and that her life will soon end. The ending of her letters to her sister symbolically also ends her reality as a prostitute. Beatriz writes:

⁵⁴ I use the term God in reference to the Judo-Christian understanding of a divine and ultimate being.

Hermana, ésta es la última carta que te escribo. Mañana, mi vida habrá cambiado, para mí se habrá decidido otro destino...Hubo un hombre al que amé muchísimo...Toda mi vida estaba suspendida en el amor a él, esa vigilia, esa espera de los fines de semana que era cuando me buscaba. Tenía yo siempre el corazón en alerta, los sentidos en tensión. Pero lo que no tenía era destino. ¿Creías acaso, hermanita, como piensa toda la gente, que el verdadero amor termina siempre bien? Pues te equivocas. El gran amor es imposible de soportar. Porque no se le puede permitir que se muestre indigno de los espléndidos sueños que se forjan para él. Porque no se le puede permitir que caiga en la rutina, en la costumbre. Hoy terminó para mí esta historia de amor, mi historia de amor. Fue muy fácil. Solamente lo traje aquí, a mi casa... Desde el momento que cruzó la puerta supe que lo había vencido, que lo había destruido...Sé que lo he perdido para siempre. Pero así tenía que ser. Hoy ha terminado mi historia de amor y con ella todo el sentido de mi vida. En adelante voy a desaparecer, a perderme en las sombras...Estoy tranquila. La calma perfecta... “Que los Dioses perdonen lo que he hecho y que quienes amo traten de perdonar lo que he hecho”. Ya no lo veré nunca más ni veré tampoco los rincones de la patria. Te mando un cuaderno con mis recuerdos, los del hombre amado y los del país amado. El amor por los dos fue lo mismo, uno solo. Enséñaselo a mi sobrina, a mi ahijada. Dile que su tía Beatriz se lo dejó para que sepa que existe el amor y que existen los sueños...Dile que hasta es posible amar demasiado, con demasiado amor. (185)

Beatriz tells of how she was consumed by her tale of love to which she dedicated her weekends. She claims, however, that it was never her destiny to live “happily ever after”. She questions her sister about the nature of true love and whether or not it always must end in happiness. According to Beatriz, true love is impossible to handle. Sefchovich is posing that the notion of “true love” is impossible. In the moment that Beatriz tries to bring her lover and her *historia de amor* together, she attempts to conflate two incompatible worlds of fantasy and of reality. Since her lover only exists in the realm of fiction, he along with the story of romance is shattered. This irreconcilability between her

reality as a prostitute and the fantasy she crafted around her dominant lover is sealed in the protagonist's last letter to her sister. Sefchovich, uses the image of the lover rejecting Beatriz's reality as metaphor for the impossibility of the romance she has edified. In this sense, the title *Demasiado amor*, is ironic insofar as it is an unattainable notion. In fact, it is the lack of genuine reciprocal love that constitutes the protagonist suffering. At the end of the letter, the protagonist reveals to her sister that she has kept a journal and has enclosed it along with the letter. This journal is in fact the failed love-story the reader has just finished.

Chapter 3: *As Mulheres de Tijucopapo*: A Crônica Manifesto

Foi em Tijucopapo que minha mãe nasceu. Embora tudo se esconda de mim. Mas sendo que sei sobre o que ela me contou em acessos de um desespero triste, e sobre o que sei que sou e que é dela e que escutei no bucho dela e que está traçado na testa dela e no destino nosso, meu e dela. (19)

As Mulheres de Tijucopapo

In Marilene Felinto's *As Mulheres de Tijucopapo*, the main character Rísia tells of a psychosomatic return to her feminine genealogy, her mother's birthplace, Tijucopapo, located in the rural outskirts of Recife. Within the same narration, Rísia writes a letter to her mother in which she reflects on her thwarted childhood experience growing up as an emigrant in São Paulo. The first person narrative often shifts from present to the past as well as the future. The journey she embarks on to Tijucopapo is linked to Rísia's traumatic upbringing and the desire to recuperate a feminine family in an effort to fill the void of her failed mother and father. Tijucopapo, as a mythical space populated by "warrior women," is crucial for Rísia's voyage inward, back in time and forward. In her book *Gender, Discourse and Desire in Twentieth-Century Brazilian Women's Literature*, Ferreira-Pinto elaborates on the historical importance of the women of Tijucopapo, stating that: "In seventeenth-century Brazil, the women of Tijucopapo used their own weapons— i.e., their cooking and washing utensils—to fight against the Dutch who had invaded Pernambuco; these women had been, however, only a footnote in the male centered Brazilian historiography"(70-71). Rísia channels the warrior women of Tijucopapo, the first armed female battalion of the region and the lost women of history

that must be reclaimed. These women embody feminine strength and authority that was never exhibited to her by her mother, a woman abused and neglected by her father. Felinto is “rejecting cultural myths and assumptions such as those that populated Rísia’s childhood: passive women, liker her mother; unfaithful and violent men, liker her father; adultery, alcoholism, and promiscuity as the norm” in her neighborhood (71). This “trip” transforms into a process of confrontation with her past and her disillusioned childhood, obliging her to explore the agony caused by her family’s disloyalty, but also critiques Brazilian society, steeped in social divisions of class, race and gender.

The prose of Felinto takes on a self-reflective nature resembling that of a diary. The chapters are short and at times as brief as a few paragraphs. Felinto also includes parts of Rísia’s letter to her mother, but only dates the last page of the novel, “*setembro 1980*” when she explicitly addresses her mother. At the same time, throughout the different chapters, Rísia consistently references the letter to her mother. The chapters function as snapshots through time dealing with different subjects from abandonment to misogyny. She focuses much of the book on the discussion of emigration by questioning the notion of origin and attempting to establish a sense of solidarity among the women of her novel. The chapters are arbitrarily marked from 1 to 33, but do not follow the chronological pattern that such numbering would suggest. Each short chapter is its own piece, its own expression that is loosely tied to the underlying theme of journey and is narrated in the first person. The whole letter then is the collections of entries Rísia produces, remembrances and *crônicas* which constitute Felinto’s imaginative novel.

I argue that through the use of feminine genres, the letter and diary, Felinto reworks the famous Brazilian *crônica*, a nationally praised genre that is similar to a short

story but possesses journalistic qualities. Since the *crônica*'s inception in the mid 1800s, it has covered a wide variety of topics and showcased by some of Brazil's most prominent writers. What Felinto's work does is set forth a "Crônica Manifesto" that bears the weight of a collective consciousness. Much like the Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade in his *Manifesto Antropófago* in 1928, used the concept of cannibalism to unite Brazilians socially, economically and philosophically.

The History of the *Crônica*/Feminine Absence

As Alfred Hower and Richard A. Preto-Rodas point out in the first edition of their book, *Crônicas Brasileiras: A Portuguese Reader* published in 1971: "The word *crônica* has no exact equivalent in English. Somewhat similar to our newspaper column, it is a short composition, often humorous in tone, that may at times resemble a short story or an essay or that may be a commentary on almost any subject that interests the author" (vii). As the scholars explain, *crônicas* differ from the short story genre providing "good examples of the urban, middle-class Portuguese spoken in Brazil's major cities (vii). In the *Handbook of Latin American Studies* No. 58, Charles A. Perrone discusses the varied definitions of the *crônica*, stating that it is: "a brief composition about an aspect of contemporary life—continue to be reworked, as can be noted in the prefaces and afterwords of some current collections" (1). He goes on to say that: "While by necessity and practice the literary, editorial, and bibliographical senses of what *crônica* may mean to readers, writers, and publishers are more fluid than those of the standard genres of literature, a consensus remains" (2). Perrone is referring to an accord between those writers and their work which are considered by critics to be examples of Brazilian *cronistas* and *crônicas*. The fluidity that Perrone addresses, ironically marks the genre as

one that is welcoming to many themes and panaches. “Given the thematic and tonal variety of today’s production, an informed and experienced reader might say, “I can’t give a perfect definition, but I know it when I see it,” and wonder whether certain publications titled, subtitled, self-classified, or otherwise described as *crônica* indeed fall within the bounds of this genre” (1).

In 1967, Paulo Rónai attempted to define the characteristics that make up the *crônica*, in his *crônica* ironically titled “Um Gênero Brasileiro: a Crônica.” In the essay, like *crônica*, Ronai writes that: “Para qualquer brasileiro a palavra de “crônica” tem sentido claro e inequívoco, embora ainda não dicionarizado; designa uma composição breve, relacionada com a atualidade, publicada em jornal ou revista” (154). For Rónai, the *crônica* is a national genre, known and recognized by all Brazilians. He poses the question of whether or not the *crônica* can be considered a literary genre in its own right. The *crônica* has been used to deploy all sorts of literary genres ranging from poetry to the critical essay. Rónai argues that this unique aspect, to draw upon many different literary genres, is in fact an important trait of the *crônica*, ironically making it even more difficult to define. Rónai attempts to distinguish what he believes to be features of the *crônica* from other genres such as the short story or the essay. He discusses three principle elements: First, the “atualidade da *crônica*.” According to Rónai, the *crônica* deals with current issues whether it takes the form of a commentary or fiction. Second, the length is brief: “O tamanho da *crônica* é fixo: varia entre uma ou duas laudas datilografadas....É inimaginável uma *crônica* de dez páginas.”⁵⁵ Thirdly, the *crônica* showcases colloquial

⁵⁵ However uncommon it is to find a *crônica* longer than 10 pages, this point is arguable at best. Clarice Lispector published *crônicas* 10 pages in length, for example, “The woman burned at the stake and the harmonious angels” published in *A Legião Estrangeira* (1964). The reason that can be account for early *crônica*’s short length is that they were generally regulated by newspaper guidelines. However, as I will

aspects of Brazilian Portuguese (155). Rónai provides us with a somewhat conservative definition of the *crônica*, paradoxically, trying to make rigid a genre that has evolved over time and evaded such confined framing.

Almost thirty years after Rónai's seminal "*crônica*," Richard A. Preto-Rodas wrote "A Crônica: Vinte e Cinco Anos de Evolução," which appeared in the author's updated anthology of *Crônicas Brasileiras* published in 1994. Treated as a *crônica* just as Rónai's piece, Preto-Rodas attempts to refresh the author's original description of the *crônica* in 1967. Preto-Rodas describes the genre as a national genre that serves as a mirror of changing social values in the country. The scholar and writer briefly traces the history of the *crônica* in Brazil, touching on its emergence in the XIX century and then addresses Rónai's original intervention about the genre. Preto-Rodas notes that one of that the best-selling books at the time of his essay/*crônica* was Luis Fernando Veríssimo's collection of *crônicas*, *O Analista de Bagé*, which centered on Porto Alegre and the customs there, defying the *carioca* rule of thumb, as we will see when unraveling the history of the genre (221). He continues to explain that, as noted in the *Handbook of Latin American Studies*, *crônicas* center on all the states and cities of Brazil and the themes are as varied as provinces. He names some of the wide-ranging themes to elucidate his point: "o gaúcho rural, o futebol, os restaurantes, a agricultura, o candomblé, as favelas, e os novos imigrantes do Vietnã e da Coréia" (22). The variety in theme; however, does not necessarily mirror the diversity of authorial background. The lack of visible women writers, for example, is noteworthy. According to Preto-Rodas, what truly

discuss, with the increase in popularity of the genre, authors began publishing their work in anthologies and collections free from periodical constraints and further stretched the definitional limits of the "national" genre.

defines the *crônica* as a Brazilian genre is that it adapts itself, he explains: “A crônica representa o gênero mais difundido no Brasil e o mais popular entre leitores...um espelho da realidade nacional” (223). Although Preto-Rodas’ definition of the *crônica* is far more inclusive than exclusive, it defines it as a mirror of Brazilian reality. The fundamental problem with this analogy is that the mirror has been overwhelmingly gendered; that is, male. Indeed, there are women *cronistas*, the most famous Clarice Lispector and Rachel de Queiroz, who have had much success writing *crônicas*, but their achievement should not be overshadowed by the great lack of women authors compared to their male counterparts in what is considered by many scholars to be the quintessential Brazilian literary genre.

The *crônica* first appeared in Brazil in the early 1800s, Joaquim Ferreria Dos Santos explains in the introduction of the 2007 anthology *As Cem Melhores Crônicas Brasileiras*. In 1829, the newspaper *Espelho Diamantino* published in Rio de Janeiro and produced what is considered today the prehistory of the *crônica*, which included a section devoted to the “os usos e costumes do período.” Later in 1854, José de Alencar published the first feuilleton called “Ao correr da pena,” in the *Correio Mercantil*. The series showcased “light” literature regarding weekly urban life, marrying journalism with literature. In 1861, Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, author of *A Moreninha*, initiated the relationship between the *cronista* and the *flâneur*.⁵⁶ The author published 44 different texts in the *Journal do Commercio*, which examined through commentaries city life of

⁵⁶ The term *flâneur* refers to Walter Benjamin’s analysis of Baudelaire, the male city stroller which in France was considered a product of modern life. This is also true for Latin America as Amanda Holmes discusses in her book *City Fictions: Language, Body, and Spanish American Urban Space* (2007). She points out that in major Latin American cities the Latin *flâneur* came to be as a result of modern life and the Industrial Revolution (21).

Rio de Janeiro. It was during this time when the name *crônica* was coined (Dos Santos 14). Dos Santos describes the historical trajectory of the *crônica* in Brazil, explaining:

A crônica que surge na relação com a imprensa, os primeiros autores recebiam como missão escrever um relato dos fatos da semana. Eram os chamados “folhetins”. Aos poucos a tarefa foi entregue a penas geniais como a de Machado de Assis, na virada para o século XX, é o gênero, sem pigarrear, sem subir à tribuna, ganhou cara própria. Passou a refletir com estilo, refinamento literário aparentemente despretensioso, o que ia pelos costumes sociais. Narrava o comportamento das tribos urbanas, o crescimento das cidades, o duelo dos amantes e tudo mais que se mexesse no caminhar da espécie sobre esse vale de lágrimas. Eis a crônica moderna. (16)

Dos Santos elucidates that the Brazilian *crônica* has always had a connection to the urban growth of Brazil’s major cities. Photography by Augusto Malta and Marc Ferrez provide examples of modernization in Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁷

Modernization and urbanization are the roots that initially grounded the *crônica*’s legacy in Brazil; however, the widespread success and popularity of the genre will ensure its continuation in mainstream Brazilian culture, according to Dos Santos:

Quase 150 anos depois de instaurada nos jornais, ela apresenta uma espetacular capacidade de se reinventar e se comunicar com o leitor. Literatura é tudo aquilo que permanece. É o caso das crônicas que vêm a seguir. (15)

The reinvention of the *crônica*, given the historical period and the cultural zeitgeist is important for examining the particular themes that have been showcased since the 19th century. Cosmopolitan males were the originators of the genre narrating city life from their perspective. The genre has lived in the largest newspapers in Brazil, traditionally in Rio but later reaching cities across the country. For 150 years, the genre has kept its pace,

⁵⁷ See Luiz Edmundo’s *O Rio De Janeiro Do Meu Tempo*. Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa nacional, 1938. Print. In his book, Edmundo showcases the work of both Augusto Malta and Marc Ferrez.

still reserving space in the most prominent newspapers and also more popularly appearing in various anthologies and collections. The fact that the genre is so closely connected to the newspaper makes it popular by nature. *Crônicas* throughout history have been able to reach a large number of people in a way that other genres do not. It also has been used as a political tool to employ particular ideologies. This has been considered by critics to be a uniting characteristic of the *crônica*, thus bringing Brazilians together. On the other hand, it has been noted that the language often used along with thematic content is the language of the people, that is, a more colloquial form of language than found in academic or professional literature. According to Dos Santos: “A crônica brasileira tem cara própria, leve, bem-humorada, amorosa, com o pé na rua” (15). Although, the style and themes exhibited by different authors found in *crônicas* have evolved, many argue, including Dos Santos, critics and lay people alike that the genre is *the* national genre.

Dos Santos’ anthology claims to unite one hundred of the best *crônicas* to have graced Brazil. What exactly are the aspects uniting these great pieces? The examples in the collection, he claims have:

...a voz nítida de autores que abusam da primeira pessoa, do comentário e da liberdade de adotarem um idioma ora poética, ora jornalístico, ora irônico, ora perplexo, quase sempre bem-humorado. Parecem textos ligeiros, simples e superficiais, tamanha a facilidade de leitura. São pequenas obras-primas de emoção baseadas nos espantos e alegrias, decepções e surpresas do cotidiano. (19)

Dos Santos emphasizes that it is the authorial voice that unites the *crônicas* in the collection, strictly limited to the first person but often light and easy reading for a general public. While this defining characteristic is common among the critics that I have analyzed here, I find it to be far too simplistic. This definition along with the ones

provided by Preto-Rodas, Perrone and Rónai fail to acknowledge a female legacy that often departs from the light and humorous nature of the common *crônica*.

Dos Santos does indeed claim that different authors have stretched the limits of what is commonly thought to be a *crônica*, specifically citing Rubem Braga of the 30s who added a poetic twist to the original recipe. It wasn't until the 50s and 60s that the genre was termed as *the* Brazilian literary genre. During this time, readership was at an all time high due to literacy initiatives across the country and the *crônica* served as a bridge between the educated and the masses: “milhões de brasileiros poderiam repetir o mesmo em relação à crônica. Ela é a primeiríssima paixão pelas letras, através dos jornais, de um povo com pouco acesso aos livros.” (20).

As Sylvia Blynn-Avanosian points out in her article on the genre *A crônica brasileira: Gênero literário representando o espírito do Modernismo e a capacidade de conservar o Humanismo na Modernidade*, it is Brazilian Modernism that reworks the genre as simplistic and light humored literature. During this time, *os modernistas* did what they did best and carnivalized the *crônica*. Rather than simply subscribing to the light and fun examples of the past, writers of the 20s through the 40s expressed adverse emotions and exposed marginalized groups within Brazilian society. Looking at Carlos Drummond de Andrade, for example, the author expresses pessimism in his “A Banda,” drawing attention to the colloquial and the marginalized lower class, such as children living on the street, a theme also touched on by Fernando Sabino in “Protesto Tímido.”⁵⁸ Therefore, it can be said that the *crônica* since Modernismo has had the potential to give voice to the voiceless as Blynn-Avanosian argues in her article: “A crônica dá voz a essas

⁵⁸ Copies of both *crônicas* can be found in Douglas Tufano's collection *Antologia Da Crônica Brasileira De Machado De Assis a Lourenço Diaféria*. Sao Paulo: Salamandra, 2007. Print.

peessoas esquecidas da sociedade, representa o aspecto humano que não vemos ou não queremos ver.” (58). This crucial facet became more relevant for women writers that began to make their mark with and after Modernism. Rachel de Queiroz was the first prominent female author to write *crônicas* openly. She has been characterized as having “raised issues regarding female sexuality” in her work, and is one of the few women often listed in anthologies and collections.

This absence of female cronistas is also evident in Dos Santos’ anthology, which is divided chronologically, beginning with examples of the *crônica* from 1850 to 1920 (6). During this 70 year period there are no women included. Brazilian Modernism follows, 1920 to 1950 and only one female writer is listed, Rachel de Queiroz, as discussed. She is the first woman listed in Dos Santos collection and the only woman under Modernism.

Women have been traditionally left out of the literary canon and it wasn’t until 1990s that female names that were part of the Brazilian literary canon, as Ferreira-Pinto points out in her book. She also claims that women *were* in fact writing much earlier and even during time of the first *crônicas* in Brazil, but many had virtually no success in the Brazilian publishing market: “... poems and chronicles were published under pseudonyms in nineteenth-century periodicals” (1). Ferreira-Pinto further explains in a footnote that:

For example, many articles and editorials published in *A mensageira* identify their authors only by their initials: “M.P.C.D.,” “V.M. de Barrios,” “L.F.” The most famous case of a woman using pen names is that of Emília Mocarvo Bandeira de Melo (1825-1910), who signed her writings at different times as Carmen Dolores, Júlia de Castro, and Leonel Sampaio. (179)

Although the public does not recognize women writers as *cronistas* until the well-known pioneers, Rachel de Queiroz, Clarice Lispector and Lygia Fagundes Telles, women writers *did* in fact exist but were merely shadows of their male-author counterparts. The process of recuperation is arduous but needed in order to establish a lineage of women writers before the modern writers. We now know, thanks to scholars such as Ferreira-Pinto, that women writers' oldest published literary genre in Brazil is the *crônica*, even though they had limited participation. This aspect becomes crucial when analyzing Felinto's *restrategizing* of the genre because it mirrors the author's theme of return to origins and revision.

Beginning with the women modern writers, it is important to remember that they were:

...constituted in the 1930s and 1940s (and) the first group of women openly acclaimed by the male-dominated literary canon. In this way, over the years and through various generations, Brazilian women writers have slowly made their way into the public space, forming a female literary lineage that only in the last quarter of the twentieth century has started to be recovered (1).

This period rendered women visible, and through such new-found visibility, women questioned societal norms as well as literary ones. The constitution of a few women writers as *cronistas* can be seen in Dos Santos collection, for example, two of Queiroz's *crônicas* are included: "Talvez o último desejo" and "Os discos voadores," both of which are societal commentaries addressing capitalism and social contradictions. The latter stresses that Brazilians have become slaves to the so-called "pátria" and also makes a declaration to retreat from the world and from men to enjoy peace and quiet in solitude: "Chegar junto do homem que eu amo e dizer para: Te dana, meu bem! Doravante pode

fazer o que enterder, pode ir, pode voltar, pode pagar dançarinas, pode fazer serenatas, rolar de borco pelas calçadas, pode tudo, que eu não ligo!” (74). According to Queiroz, everyone is a victim of patriarchal structures, and she wishes she could simply wash her hands clean of the mess. However, this is not what she will in fact do. She writes with compassion and knowledge. Her conclusion is cathartic and is about acknowledging the scripts that society has constructed for individuals. The narrative voice is strong and assertive but also empathetic.

It isn't until the 60s that we see Clarice Lispector's name also included in Dos Santos collection and again not until the 80s that another female name is included, that of Lygia Fagundes Telles. The final period marked by the turn of the 21st century includes two other names of women writers, Danuza Leão and Marta Medeiros. In an anthology meant to give a collection of the best *crônicas* written over the last century and a half, there are only 5 women included of the 62 authors showcased. In Alfred Hower and Richard A. Preto-Rodas's *Nova Fase Crônicas Brasileiras* published in 1994, they include only two women: Helena Silveira and Rachel Queiroz of the 34 authors represented, which is supposed to represent productions from the 70s to the 90s.

To this day, there is no collection or anthology that exists strictly comprised of female *cronistas*. Of course, many of the well-know female *cronistas* have published their own collections of their work; however, there is yet to be done a study looking exclusively at women's *crônicas*.⁵⁹ Therefore, this chapter's feminist and political work is revisionist in its attempts to briefly trace the legacy of female *cronistas* and show how Felinto speaks to this group of women by reformulating feminine genres in her novel,

⁵⁹ A collective study looking at female *cronistas* would contribute greatly to the current literary criticism regarding the genre. However, a project as such is out of the scope of this dissertation and will be reserved for future examination.

thus, putting forth *crônicas* throughout her book that comment and inform the public regarding the marginalized figure of the Brazilian mulatta.

Felinto: The (Un)Relatable Language of a Feminist Crônica

Felinto's novel is the story of the historically marginalized figure in Brazil, the mulatta woman. This young woman in her twenties comes from a poor family that emigrated to São Paulo from northeastern Brazil. In her book, Ferreira-Pinto looks at four nineteenth-century novels by male authors *Memórias de um sargento de milícias* by Manuel Antônio de Almeida; *Iracema* by José Martiniano de Alencar; *O cortiço* by Aluísio Azevedo and *Dom Casmurro* by Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, claiming that they have helped to establish some stereotypes about female sexuality well rooted in Brazilian culture, such as “the sensual mulatto woman; the seductive, unfaithful woman; the pure, white, married woman; and lesbians as perverted and/or frustrated women” (4). The racialized and gendered category of the mulatto woman takes center stage in Felinto's novel and is presented as a traumatized figure forced to endure pain and suffering at the hands of her family. Rísia, the protagonist, is compelled to search for her origin(s), in hopes of mending her female genealogy that has been broken by her grandmother and mother. Felinto's novel tells the story of not only Rísia, a marginalized figure herself, but a collective story. It is a collection of *crônicas* that speaks to and also represents the “silenced voices” as Ferreira-Pinto echoes:

Rísia is socially and culturally displaced because of who she is: a woman, of color, poor. In addition, her family follows a Protestant faith in a country where Catholicism is the official religion; and she is a Northeasterner, standing out, because of her accent and her ethnic physical attributes, in São Paulo, a large, wealthy, cosmopolitan and Europeanized city in the Southeast region of Brazil. Rísia's

voice therefore, echoes those of marginalized groups in Brazilian society, voices often silenced, seldom heard. (69)

In this way, Felinto creates a counter *crônica*, one that works in opposition to the original *crônica* that showcased the “wealthy, cosmopolitan and Europeanized city.” In turn she symbolizes a group rarely represented by other *cronistas*. Felinto uses Rísia to show the reader the reality of the poor and displaced people, especially mulatto women in São Paulo. This reality is illuminated in the many different memories from Rísia’s childhood in which she describes her neighbors intermittently throughout the book. She explains that on her street:

...tinha mulheres assim que, na porta da igreja, sobraçavam bíblias e saias longas e, no parta que dá para a goiabeira, praticavam o coito depois duma surra. Os homens de minha rua, irmãos, davam sempre na mulher. E Santo tinha dado em Lita pois eu tinha ouvido também. O coito na porta era o jeito que eles tinham único de se perdoarem. (25-26)

Through Rísia, Felinto exposes the abuse of women hidden behind garbs of faith. Rísia narrates the cruel experience of hearing and seeing women of the community beaten by their husbands and later hearing the sounds of sexual intercourse between them. The abuse of women is not exclusive to her own household but speaks to a communal problem. Rísia also discloses how she was hit by her father as a child and also as a young woman. She talks about a specific violent event when she challenged her father for going in her closet without her permission: “papai, eu ainda mato você!”. After standing up to her father, he beats her: “Papai me deu dois tabafes no toitiço e eu caí meio desmaiada... Quando acordei havia alguns restos de lágrimas nos meus olhos, uma tristeza se formando inteira. Eu teria que ir. Não permitiria que batessem na mulher que sou” (121-122). This chapter in which Rísia tells about the abuse faced in her home and in her

community is in a sense a *crônica* of the abuse against mulatto women in Brazil, and specifically in the slums of São Paulo. This difference between the *modernistas*' critical review of societal problems and Felinto's exposition is that Felinto's narrator is living the social reality of poverty and abuse, she *is* the marginalized figure and *is* speaking in the first person. Felinto herself is Northeastern woman emigrant to São Paulo of African descent. The fact that Felinto *is* herself part of the marginalized group(s) in Brazil, resolves the complicated problem of mediation between the erudite *cronista* and the masses.

Besides abuse, another constant in Rísia's life is the incessant poverty of living in São Paulo. Poverty is one of the many culprits for her unhappy childhood and life as a young woman. Rísia explains that when one is poor it is a horrible realization: "É muito ruim ser pobre. Você passa odiar seus irmãos porque eles não deixam comida para você e porque você dorme no mesmo quarto onde eles chegam para dormir fazendo zoadas. Eu venho de uma família muito pobre" (123). The hatred that one develops for his/her own family is directly connected to poverty, according to Rísia. The language used is personal and reflects the different intimate genres at work. The self-reflective quality of Felinto's writing reads as Rísia's diary entries. They are short, one to three pages and always in the first person. The utilization of feminine genres aids in the production of a collection of *crônicas* for the forgotten women, the lost women of the favelas of São Paulo that emigrated from the Northeast to find a false sense of happiness. At the same time, Felinto continues along the female *crônica* trajectory as seen in works by with Rachel de Queiroz and Clarice Lispector that differed in tone from their fellow male-cronistas. The author's

writing is powerful and lacks the levity often used to describe the dominant notion of *crônicas* written by men.

Working like an intimate diary, Rísia discloses her innermost thoughts and agonies narrating in the first person. Felinto provides a journalistic quality to the narration by having her protagonist essentially record a feminine genealogy. Through Rísia, Felinto attempts to recover a heritage and discusses matters of tension often ignored by mainstream media. Drawing upon a chronicle style, Felinto reaches a large audience publishing her book as fiction, although we know from the foreword that the text is quite autobiographical.⁶⁰ There are many times throughout the book that Felinto's protagonist narrates as if she were speaking, a quality found in journal/diary writing. For example, in the following passage, Rísia describes her neighbors as a young child, she pauses and finishes her thought as if she were engaged in dialogue:

Eu precisava mostrar a vida de irmã Lurdes e Sr. Manuel que moravam em Abreu e Lima. As pessoas acreditariam menos ainda. Quem já viu aqueles velhinhos e aqueles velhinhas? Aqueles...aqueles que...Bom, quando eu ia em Abreu e Lima eu era menina. Lá tinha uma ladeira de barro duro e vermelho de onde eu escorregava de cima a baixo como uma cabrita ...(22)

Rísia's narration is introspective and composed as if she were thinking aloud while recalling the memory. Another characteristic of her diary-like writing, is the language

⁶⁰ In the foreword Eliane Dógenes cites Felinto's own comments regarding the language used in her novel from the *Jornalisticamente incorreto* (2000) in which Felinto herself states: "sei que minha raiva é a coisa mais valiosa que tenho- embora nem eu mesma goste dela, é meu sentimento mais primitivo e verdadeiro- é dali que tiro força e vida, eu que não almejo em nenhum instante a elegância dos escritos comportados, adequados"(8). Felinto's commentary is curious on various levels. First, it demonstrates internal thoughts of the author herself, connecting her personal struggle with rage to that of her protagonist, Rísia. According to Felinto, she affirms the inherent contradiction that exists with regard to her rage. To Felinto, rage is to be recognized as a valuable force, fundamental to her existence, while at the same time the word time indicates a shame. Rage is the principal element, where Felinto locates the "força a vida", which sustains her writing and establishes a space where this rage is expressible.

Rísia “speaks”. Felinto’s use of language defines her protagonist as one full of rage and passion. The reader finds many phrases of hatred directed towards her parents, for example: “Mas que eu odiei meu pai, odiei. Isso sim. Até o ponto de incorporar esse ódio todo que me atrapalha. Porque ódio, menino, ódio é fogo” (29). The novel is filled with such comments mainly directed towards her father, but also her mother and siblings.

Felinto’s protagonist displays vulgar and colloquial uses of language to an extreme that the common *crônica* would not demonstrate. Eliane Dógenes comments on the unique construction of language that Felinto employs through Rísia in the preface of the novel’s third edition. Rísia leads the reader through her interior universe, through morphological puzzles and syntactical labyrinths, all framed by the protagonist’s fury and pain. According to Dógenes:

O leitor não é poupado, o texto trama estratégias narrativas surpreendentes para incitar o sujeito. As provocações ecoam de maneira estrondosa à medida que o leitor é arremessado a um turbilhão, aos tormentos de Rísia; é convocado a escutar a voz inflamada da protagonista; intimado a ser testemunha de suas angústias, do estranhamento de sua existência, do seu desconforto em viver. (8)

Dógenes touches on the corrosive nature of her language, comparing it to a destructive tornado. This hostile language aids in the protagonist’s confrontation with her difficult past. Rísia suffers the neglect of her mother, the abuse of her father and siblings. The first two pages of the novel form the first chapter, a *crônica* that provides a glimpse into Rísia’s childhood:

Me vem barro na boca, gosto vermelho, cuspo farinha, os dentes rangem. Eu tinha cinco anos e comia terra e cagava lombriga abestalhada, os olhos arregalados como os de boto, sem que nada me impedisse, porém, de correr em disparada no outro dia e deslizar de coma a baixo do morro

de terra, me em bolando, me enrolando, comendo, cuspendo e cagando e dizendo aos ventos que dissessem a eles: “Vão à merda das minhas lombrigas, papai e mamãe, vocês que se intrigam e me intrigam nas suas intrigas me fazendo chorar tanto assim. Vão aos meus oxiúros, às minhas giárdias...” E eu fazia pó de terra e despejava na cabeça. Eu saía de lá, fim de tarde, cinzenta como um calunga de caminhão, satisfeita, alimentada, e sabendo que se papai me pegasse era uma pisa. Papai quase sempre me pegava. Apanhei muito já. (20).

Here the narrator discusses child neglect and abuse through the use of memory. The language deployed is harsh and crude, mirroring the reality for the young girl without supervision. Felinto utilizes colloquial language often seen in traditional *crônicas*, but rather it is profane and abject in describing the five-year-old's experience. It is the language of a rejected character that calls attention to grave problems common to many families that have emigrated from the northeast to the megalopolis, São Paulo. The author describes a sick and mistreated child, conscious of the abuse and poor examples set by her parents. The child has become so ill that there are worms in her feces and to a certain extent the young girl realizes the abandonment that has caused such malnutrition. This is evident in the fact that she curses her parents along with the worms they have given her: “Vão à merda das minhas lombrigas, papai e mamãe, vocês que se intrigam e me intrigam nas suas intrigas me fazendo chorar tanto assim.” Even as young as age 5, Rísia recalls a little girl, wild and full of rage. This leads the reader to believe that Rísia's indignation indeed stems from her childhood, specifically from witnessing her parent's abusive arguments and the physical maltreatment that she herself suffered at the hands of her father. Ferreira-Pinto examines the role of language in Felinto's novel and affirms that the protagonist must invent her own language in order to narrate her childhood and her life experiences. In doing so, she has found a way to confront such tragic weapons in

arming herself with a language that is cutting. In conceiving this unique language, Ferreira-Pinto argues that Felinto weaves together different linguistic forms, sewing a fragmented tapestry of expletives with an uncomfortable syntax (68). This “new” language is aggressive, abject and experimental. The discomfort that Ferreira-Pinto describes is an effect of Felinto’s writing. Rather than the whimsical, light literature that is often used to describe the *crônica*, Felinto’s language provokes uneasiness describing the reality of a deeply marginalized group, the dark, out-casted women and children of Northeastern Brazil.

From the City to Country, Reality to Myth

Felinto’s opening paragraph sets the reader up for the atemporal journey Rísia is about to embark on at the moment of narrating the first *crônica*/chapter. It demonstrates Rísia’s psychological journey as well as her fantasy:

Quando eu chegar lá e com certeza já terei visto flores,
quero ver flores vermelhas, quando eu chegar lá depois de
ter passado por canteiros de flores no meio das campinas,
vou passar a carta para o inglês e enviar. (19)

The “journey” that Rísia routes to Tijucupapo can be read as a spiritual cleansing as much as a metaphysical excursion.⁶¹ The letter writing process for Rísia is a painful one, in which she hopes to find catharsis, ultimately arriving at a paradise of sorts that would free her from her suffering she has endured both geographically and corporally. The “flores vermelhas” symbolize the lack of luster or color in her life; through them she fantasizes an illusory mythical future. The use of the future subjunctive suggests that all of her utopian dreams are contingent on whether or not she can mentally (and/or

⁶¹ I use the term spiritual cleansing not to invoke any religious connotation, but rather to point to an emotional purging that the protagonist envisions in a utopian sense.

physically) bear the passage.⁶² By the same token, the unusual use of the future indicative along with the near future tense demonstrates the ambiguous temporality in which the protagonist operates.

Felinto takes the reader on a two-path journey through the voice of her protagonist that appears to supersede any lineal pattern that could be found in a novel. First, there is the journey Rísia makes confronting her wretched past from the present time of her narration. And second, there is the journey that Rísia envisages to the birthplace of her mother, locating a feminine genealogy traced back to Tijucoapo. Felinto's protagonist reveals throughout the brief chapters that she has had to leave São Paulo, making specific references to the unbearable city. Rísia states in first person that she felt compelled to escape the city and its horrors to search for her origins in Tijucoapo. In the city, Rísia is treated as an outcast. There are numerous times when she describes how the other children used to throw stones at her: "E os safados ainda me apedrejam na rua. Sem sequer me conhecerem...Saí de São Paulo porque lá eu me achava uma apedrejada" (109, 140). Rísia was the bullying target of the other children, the dark young girl from the Northeast. She is different from the others and treated as an outsider, never fully feeling at home in the city, the place where her family relocated when she was a very young girl.

⁶² Linguists Heather Holmback and Bernard Comrie explain in their article, *The Future Subjunctive in Portuguese: A Problem in Semantic Theory* that the future subjunctive indicates a situation that is either anterior to or simultaneous with a situation (that expressed in the main clause) that is located in the future. With other time references, the future subjunctive is not used, and indeed with some other time references the indicative is used rather than the subjunctive (217).

Rísia faults the city for her family's downfall declaring: "Estou indo para Tijucopapo agora; depois de papai, mamãe, e a perda do amor. Que ainda não sei se jogo no homem ou na cidade. A cidade é de São Paulo. Haverá uma guerra?" (26-27). Rísia's family first moved to the enormous city São Paulo from Recife in 1969. Rísia explains that it would be "lá nessa cidade eu passei a precisar inventar sonhos. Passei a precisar que o mundo se acabasse" (94). Because of the harsh reality of poverty her family encountered and the abuse associated with the city, Rísia resorted to inventing dreams to soothe her thoughts.

Rísia shares with the reader the memory of her family emigrating to the city from Recife. She remembers her father moving her family to the city in the hopes of economic prosperity, torn out of nature and into the concrete jungle, which also translates as the beginning of the family's life of poverty:

Desgraca. Em 1969, Natal, nós nos retiramos das praias ainda maravilhosas de Boa Viagem. Boa Viagem da incendiada e alagada Recife de entre-rios. Da Recife coitada. Nós batemos em retirada no meio de porcos e galinhas e pedaços de tapioca amanhecida, entre catabios e sacolejos de um pau-de-arara, para um hotel imundo no Brás de São Paulo enquanto papai, o louco, alugava um porão qualquer onde nos socar. (104)

In reviewing the memory, the young adult Rísia finds the move repulsive. She also highlights the family's sacrifice in having to move to the large crowded São Paulo. The city would become Rísia's tragic setting for her painful childhood and upbringing, but at the same time according to the protagonist, it was a chief contributor to the family's problem. She depicts the city as a agonizing place in which one gets lost in its immensity:

Era tão doloroso passar por tanta entrada e por tanta saída, era labiríntico, eu me perdia, eu chorava. São Paulo é muito grande, tem prédios de milhares de andares invadindo o

céu, tem avenidas infinitas, posso me perder facilmente lá,
estou exposta a todos os perigos. (117)

Here the narrator portrays the city as invading nature, as an industrial takeover that pollutes the environment. At the same, in such a mammoth place, one has no identity nor individuality. In this sense, Felinto creates a tension between urbanity and the autochthonous. Felinto's protagonist continues describing the lack of nature in the city, telling the reader that:

Saí de São Paulo porque lá, se eu quisesse eu não podia.
Porque lá não chovia, não tinha areia, não tinha pitomba.
Lá, se eu quisesse não podia. Lá, às vezes, lá naquelas ruas
de entardecer, lá eu parava no meio da ilha esperando que
os carros passassem, eu displicente e desconsolada, e me
queria dizendo que era uma puta...(137)

The city for Rísia represents pain and suffering, the place of the poor and outcast that fail to find a place in the overwhelming maze. People like Rísia's family become the displaced marginalized group hoping for and expecting a better life, yet they are left destitute. Capitalism and modernity are described as forces that work against the emigrants in São Paulo: "Quem andou em São Paulo pela Avenida Paulista moderníssima, riquíssima, onde os prédios já estão todos prontos, armados contra você, contra o seu tamanho de homem diante de montanha, prédios invadindo o espaço" (162). Again, we see the theme of modernity as imposing and dividing not as a uniting influence bringing progress and order to all. In São Paulo, Rísia was exposed to a wealth that she had never encountered before. She uses the concept of film to discuss imperialism and modernity in present in São Paulo, but which is representative of a larger Brazil:

Vou-me embora porque aqueles cinemas, cinemas,
cinemas...telas rolavam passando por minha frente nos fins
de semana em São Paulo. E de noite eu tinha pesadelos.
Aqueles cinemas, telas rolando no fim de semana na nossa

frente. É um perigo. Acho perigoso. Conheci pessoas que viajaram lugares onde se falasse inglês só porque nos filmes falava-se inglês assim, e parecia outra vida, e parecia que seria melhor e mais bonito. Mas era tudo ilusório. Elas foram, então, procurar essa vida que não havia. Um perigo. Porque elas não acharam nunca. (130)

Felinto presents the notion of foreign film's infiltration in Brazil, which for Rísia represents the idea of false hope and a loss of origin. Here, Felinto is strategically underscoring the large number of English films that not only show at the box-office but also circulate in Brazil. Through Rísia, Felinto is suggesting the desire of Brazilians is to emulate what they see in foreign film, even though not a Brazilian reality.⁶³ In this sense, Felinto's *crônica* is one that deconstructs the perception that the city is the center of Brazilian culture and calls attention to the Northeast as a less pretentious center. Interestingly enough, this inversion of the center and the periphery is also associated with the feminine. Felinto is criticizing the city rather than revering it and in doing so she counters the idea that the city cultivates "Brazilianness" which was a common theme in the early *crônicas*.⁶⁴ Rísia's return to Tijucoapapo to her origins is a way for her to connect with an identity she has yet to realize. As Ferreira-Pinto and Penna point out, Felinto has overturned the traditional path of the emigrant in having her protagonist leave São Paulo, the city, and head back to the Northeast. Ferreira-Pinto explains:

Felinto's novel reverses the usual path of the *retirante* (the Northeastern migrant) by depicting Rísia on her way *back* to the Northeast. In this way, Felinto portrays her character's rejection of the society's dominant values; at

⁶³ This echoes Roberto Schwarz's essay *Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination*. In his essay Schwarz discusses what he sees as the disappointing "imitative nature of our cultural life." That is of American and European doctrine and projects (234). He explains that since 1964, the internationalization of capital, the commodification of social relations, and the presence of mass media have developed at such a rapid pace it is difficult to locate a "genuine national culture" (235).

⁶⁴ Although historically Rio de Janeiro was the city center of the *crônicas*, São Paulo has also been portrayed.

the same time, the author is able to disrupt the false notion of Brazil as a racial democracy, and free of gender, class, and religion-based discriminations. (69)

In agreement Ferreira-Pinto, Felinto's protagonist rejects the so-called "dominant" Brazilian values in search of a new set of morals that will essentially free her from the pain and suffering endured in São Paulo and that are founded in a new society of matriarchs. The author destabilizes Brazil's supposed fluid democracy and proposes a new foundation in cultivating a legendary group of women.

Felinto underscores the concept of conformity fashioned in São Paulo. Due to its overpopulation, the city perpetuates a lack of individuality, which is reflected in the language that Rísia witnessed by its inhabitants. Rather than enriching Brazil's amalgamation of cultural influences, the city blends them to the point of blandness. Again the idea of foreign saturation, imperialism is a noted critique of the young protagonist:

As pessoas de São Paulo não sabem mais falar. Não dizem coisa com coisa dizendo que tudo é coisa, chamando tudo de uma coisa qualquer. Eu sinto saudades dos nomes bonitos que vou reencontrar em Tijucoapapo...Em São Paulo eu só encontrei palavras em língua estrangeira, ou numa mudez impressionante. Em São Paulo eu quase perdi a fala. (115)

She claims that the people living in São Paulo do not possess a unique language, but rather it is foreign to Rísia. The international quality of the city that other writers have boasted leaves Rísia feeling like an outsider: "São Paulo é de um jeito que não é o meu. E é tremendo de choro que suporto aceitar que São Paulo tem o seu jeito. Quisera eu poder gritar: "cidade desajeitada doida varrida, marmota! Eu quero sair de você" (113). Rísia wants to scream, vocalize how destructive the city has been and is for her. She must

break free and search for her own roots, create her own language and recover her feminine genealogy. She reveals that: “O fato é que aqui vou eu...Tive de vir. Saí porque não havia um lugar sequer me coubesse...Saí porque quase perco a fala na grande cidade...São Paulo. Precisei sair e vir” (78). Paradoxically, there was not a place for her in the immense city.

Rísia’s journey to Tijucopapo is not only about locating an origin, but about repairing the broken female genealogy that was severed by her grandmother the night that she gave her daughter (Rísia’s mother) away to another family, leaving Rísia’s mother forever wounded. Rísia describes that night as part of the history of the women:

Era 1935, todos os raios da lua escapuliam do céu preto alumiando o caminho num atalho de serra por onde o jegue vinha empinando os caçuás. Minha avó nem sequer açoitava o bicho; vinha pachorrenta, os cabelos entronchados em cocó nas costas. Minha vó era tão negra que se arrastava. Ela levava minha mãe, o que seria dada. Minha mãe veio num caçuá. Minha mãe foi dada num noite de luar. Minha vó não podia. Era o seu décimo e tanto filho. (26)

Rísia’s grandmother could not manage with ten children, and gave Rísia’s mother away, up for adoption. This is the lost link in Rísia’s mind; the link to a new understanding and origin. The breakage of this link with her feminine genealogy must be repaired in order for Rísia to heal from her disturbed upbringing. Rísia then creates her own legend, her own myth by rejecting the harsh reality of the city and turning toward the mythical women of Tijucopapo. Felinto’s protagonist narrates:

Só sei que minha mãe nasceu em Tijucopapo. Lugar de lama escura. O resto, mistério, nem ela sabe. Só eu que sei. Vou ver se a carta pode ser em inglês. Em inglês sairia mais fácil, há lugares e nomes mais sonoros de casas e gentes em inglês, coisa de filme em cinema. Não sei direito

por que vou aqui, caminho afora. Parece que fiz comparações e não serviram. Quero ver flores. (20)

All that Rísia knows is that her mother was born in this place, the place of mystery and of mythical potential. Rather than São Paulo, which is well defined and over populated, Tijucoapapo and its mythical construction is a place/space of refuge for the protagonist. She compares this mystery to the English language, the language of the movies. This represents for Rísia fantasy and the possibility of writing her own script with a happy ending. This is the language in which Rísia would like to compose her letter, her message to her mother and also to a larger Brazilian public. The letter is a metaphor for the traditional and historical movement of peoples from the Northeast in Brazil emigrating from the rural to the urban. Rísia, in order to locate a feminine genealogy, must do the opposite. The letter writing is also characterized by its self-questioning nature, which is part of a larger *crônica* demonstrated by Rísia's attempt to reclaim a place in a cherished female tradition, whether imaginary or not. This recovery is in fact two-fold, insofar as Felinto recuperates and implements a feminine tradition of letter/diary writing to "heal" both the protagonist's pain, but also symbolically the undervalued space of the tradition within the opposition of low and high literature still present in scholarly criticism today.

In her article "As Mulheres de Tijucoapapo: Escritura del Conflicto," Monica Rojas reads the protagonist's journey to Tijucoapapo as a rewriting of history for the women of Tijucoapapo. In accord with Rojas, I too read Rísia's documentation of her metaphysical journey to Tijucoapapo as an act of archiving her identity and as a re-inscription and re-remembering of her feminine genealogy. The reader is given evidence of this ontological journey through Rísia's narration:

Que cansativo chegar. A quantas mil milhas será que estou?
A 250? Faltará parte ainda? No meu caminho há babaçus e
mocambos. Sou uma mulher indo sozinha pela estrada. Às
vezes paro num ponto, numa pedra, me sento num pedaço e
tenho uma música no violão que carrego...(137)

Here the protagonist tells of how tiresome the journey is, the voyage of confrontation and exploration of her past and her future. The length of the journey may be estimated but is unknown, because it is cathartic and cannot be measured in a conventional or chronological way. Felinto compares Rísia's mental journey to that of an intense physical excursion trekking from São Paulo to the northeastern part of Brazil. Rísia claims she is headed on the highway while never indicating any type of vehicle and therefore gives the impression that she is on foot, stopping and sitting to rest on different rocks. This type of passage is unthinkable in modern times and thus serves as a metaphor for the rough mental terrain and distance she must endure to cleanse herself. She is a woman traveling by herself with the intention of recovering, as long and arduous as it may seem, her origins.

In their book, *Deslocamentos de gênero na narrativa brasileira contemporânea*, Regina Dalcastagnè and Virgínia Maria Vasconcelos Leal discuss the feminist strategy of disarticulation in Brazilian women's contemporary fiction. They argue that: "Deslocar-se é não se conformar ao lugar onde estamos ou ao qual fomos destinadas(os). Daí a necessidade de locomoção ou, pelo menos, que seja possível apontar os desconfortos desse lugar" (7). This idea of displacement as not conforming, protest, disarrangement and contestation, speaks to the feminist gesture of Felinto, not only in terms of her treatment of genre but also thematically when interpreting the protagonist, Rísia. Rísia is full of protest and contests her position within Brazilian contemporary society with anger.

At the same time, she states she is a woman alone on the road, this also presents a figure that does not fit society's normative understanding of the Brazilian woman. She has broken away from the center and gone in search of meaningful understanding of the periphery. At the same time, this can be read as a metaphor for the production of a feminist/feminine *crônica* that does not quite fit standardized conception of the Brazilian masculine and masculinist tradition. Rather than concentrating on imitation of the dominant tradition, Felinto looks toward representing those forgotten or marginalized.

In her article "De volta para casa ou o caminho sem volta em Marilene Felinto e Conceição Evaristo," Simone Pereira Schmidt describes the feminine subaltern body in contemporary Brazilian women's fiction as a conflictive stage (*palco de conflitos*) in which:

... se desdobram as tensões resultantes das relações desiguais de gênero, raça e classe no Brasil, corpo colonizado e verdadeiro campo de batalha, em cujos movimentos ainda se enfrentam a casa grande e a senzala... (23)

The colonized space of the female body has become a battlefield and is precisely the space that Rísia responds to with her physical discharge, vomiting throughout the novel: "Ja vomitei várias vezes na vida sem que minha mãe tenha podido evitar" (21). Rísia revisits her deep-rooted rage that manifested itself during her childhood as a direct result of her family's impotence, choosing key moments in which this rage would come spilling outward literally, in the form of vomit.⁶⁵ Her body then has become a site of

⁶⁵ In her influential 1982 essay *The Powers of Horrors*, Julia Kristeva defines the abject as occupying the space of the "jettisoned object" outside of the realm of the symbolic, which cannot be assimilated. She explains the abject of imploring and fascinating desire, however the desire turns aside sickened and therefore rejects part of the subject (1-4). Therefore, the presence of vomit in Felinto's work represents the attempt to repel the trauma her protagonist has suffered. In a separate article, I analyze specifically the presence of the abject in Felinto's novel.

eruption and also a place of torment when ridiculed by her peers in the city as discussed previously. The tensions that she feels throughout her life of being female with an abusive father, mulatta in a city that values European descent and from the lower class results in effect, of her body being the site of battle. Rísia must start a revolution, an upheaval of what is quintessential Brazilian, beginning with language and the historiographical construction of the legendary, the woman of Tijucoapapo. All of these elements together revolutionize the Brazilian *crônica*. Felinto crafts a literary revolution through her protagonist, through language, style and genre.

Talking About a Revolution: The Final Crônica

At the end of Felinto's text, the protagonist, while on her quest to Tijucoapapo has entered into a mythic, dreamlike state, losing consciousness and coming to in Pernambuco. She hears what she believes to be bombing: "Quando eu dei por mim chovia torrencial e eu ouvia burburinho e estrondo de quê? Pareciam bombas"(154). She is with the mystic lover with whom she previously fantasized and drifted into this illusory space. He speaks to her and tells her that his name is Lampião. As Ferreira Pinto explains, the figure of Lampião is popularly recognized as a famous Brazilian *cangaciero*, bandit of the backlands of Brazil's Northeast region from mid-1910s until his death in 1938. Although he was known for terrorizing these populations, in the twentieth century he also comes to be known as a cultural icon, specifically revered as a symbol of rebellion (71). Lampião therefore, represents rebellion and revolution for Rísia and Felinto. He is inspiring a social revolution in the lower economic area of the Northeast against the modern and wealthy, capitalist epicenter of São Paulo.

Rísia questions “Essa zoada?” and the man answers that on the other side of the hill a war is starting (Para além daquela serra começa uma guerra). Lampião continues to explain that the war will head southward towards São Paulo, specifically the highway that enters and leaves the city. It is what he calls: “é uma guerra de conquista...” (157). Felinto creatively emphasizes the dreamlike state of Rísia’s encounter, specifically with the inclusion of the character Lampião. (70). According to Ferreira-Pinto, “he underscores Rísia’s desire for rebelliousness and Felinto’s deconstruction of the Brazilian dominant values” (71). The concept of banditry also counters any type of systemic or hegemonic force by appealing to lawlessness as a virtue. This idea symbolizes Felinto’s *Crônica Manifesto*, insofar as it represents disrupting “Brazilian’s dominant values” and putting forth *crônicas* with a different set of taxonomies, that “deconstruct” the limits of a genre defined exclusively by men, in which few female writers have been able to prevail.

After telling Lampião that she is headed to Tijucopapo, he hoists her on a mare and sends her in the direction of the warrior women. In this moment Rísia is attempting to join the women, riding in the wind, galloping faster and faster when she is thrown from the horse. She falls into a sort of time wormhole, where she is whisked back to a vivid childhood memory. It was morning time and she was overcome with a premonition of sorrow. Searching for something to play with, she remembers becoming sad and deprived, as were many of the days of her childhood. Her old toys were broken and useless, and she remembers thinking: “O que é que me atrapalhava? Uma coisa qualquer me atrapalhava. Um mistério, uma coisa sinistra a me deixar pensativa e tonta...Por que eu amanhecera assim?” (173). The young girl in Rísia’s memory then heads to the yard wandering around and around, trying to forget that she did not have any toys: “Eu era

infeliz. Certas horas eu podia notar claramente que era infeliz. Nada mais me servia” (173). After a fight with her sister, she was sent off to sit down alone by her mother. And in that very instant she became even more sad and bitter, when a large black bird from the plains came flying into the kitchen window: “Tange! Tange! Esse bicho traz agouro,” cried Rísia’s mother (174). Curiously, it is this same Black Bird coming in from the north that serves as an omen to Rísia’s first fall. Shortly after the appearance of the Black Bird, Rísia decides to retaliate against her sister while she was showering, preparing for the parade the family would attend that evening. Rísia mounted herself up on a stool to poke at her sister through a gap in the wall and fell into what she describes as an abyss:

Eu escorreguei do tamborete e caí uma queda como nunca. Uma queda como nunca senti tão grande a indignidade. E então eu caí...Minha primeira queda e eu era menina. Eu caí para um abismo, a minha cabeça contra a placa da plena merda que não era, definitivamente, não era para mim. A merda não era para mim. Eu levava, então, a mais grave das minhas quedas, a mais indigna—no dia exato do desfile, o desfile que poderia muito bem ter sido naquela manhã em que eu estivera corrompiando feito uma marmota sem nada com que brincar; mas o desfile que só poderia ser de tarde, porque o céu nunca foi perto...Uma injustiça...Minha cabeça contra a plena merda. Injusto. Eu caí para o abismo que os desmaios levam... A queda de maior indignidade. Uma queda são sempre essas indignidades monstruosas.
(175)

The fall represents a metaphor for Rísia’s humiliation and the fragility of a young girl left to deal with her own melancholy and rage. She slips and falls off the stool, hitting her head harshly on the slab of cement covering the family’s feces. She questions if all the waste was for her? If all of the abject torment that filled her life was meant for her or did she have an alternative path, an alternative destiny? Looking back on this memory as young woman, Rísia realizes the tragedy of her life in moments such as these. Words like

“indignidade” and “injustiça” echo the unworthiness Rísia felt as a child, never feeling completely loved and cared for by her parents.

The abyss that Rísia describes turns into a depth within her psyche that allows her to evaluate the women in her life, their absence and the need for a strong feminine presence, a mother: “Quando eu acordei havia mulheres em volta da cama onde me tinham deitado. Eu estava seminua e molhada. Havia dez mulheres minhas mães. Dez rostos de mulheres minhas mães. Tinha dez mães. Nenhuma servia” (175). Rísia awakes from her fall with the women in her life surrounding her, the women that had always failed her. They attempt to comfort her by giving her alcohol to sooth the pain, yet Rísia responds with vomiting, and rejects the false consolation: “Eu tive nojo. Eu me sentei na cama de um movimento brusco, eu ia manda-las embora num grito, eu queria dormir. Mas não tive forças para gritar e vomitei na vida; eu vomitei milhares de vezes sem que mamãe tenha podido evitar.... E eu vomitei de novo. Vomitei como nunca. Vomitei como o quê” (176). In a sense, Rísia must rid herself of all the agony and pain, in order to make space for her new family, her new feminine genealogy.

She was so weak and unprotected in this moment that not even ten mothers could ease her pain. After weeping and fighting the feelings of sickness, again in the recollection of this memory, the young Rísia falls eventually asleep. When she awakes this time she is surrounded by the women of Tijucoapapo. “Quando eu acordei eu já estava em Tijucoapapo...Havia mulheres em volta da cama onde eu estava deitada. Mulheres bonitas e fortes, mulheres de uma cara morena de longas caminhadas ao sol...Mulheres de verdade” (179). In the new space, Rísia still laying down as she had done as a young girl is now surrounded by the women she had always longed to have in her life. These

figures are strong, black women who Rísia finds uniquely beautiful. The women represent an origin that begins in the Northeast and not the city:

Havia mulheres assim, então, a minha herança, mulheres que não fossem minha mãe. Eram umas mulheres de cabelos grossos como cordas arrastando pela crina do cavalo[...]Naquele meu livro, um livro de escola, um livro com uma figura vermelha a lápis de cera, era? Uma paisagem? Uma paisagem revolucionária de mulheres guerreiras...Essas mulheres, que não eram minha mãe, tinham a sina das que desembestam mundo adentro escanchadas em seus cavalos, amazonas defendendo-se não se sabe bem de quê, só se sabe que do amor. (181)

Rísia is in Tijucoapapo at last and has finally located women that are of her heritage, strong women that are not her mother. These are women Rísia has always dreamed of, that she compares to something out of a book, far removed from her reality. The women of Tijucoapapo represent everything that Rísia had looked for in her female family but never found: strength, power and a revolutionary quality to defend one's honor and dignity from unrequited love. The space of Tijucoapapo that Felinto's protagonist describes is a passage to fantasy: "...quase um intervalo entre pensamentos, um único passo. Eu chequei a Tijucoapapo por uma queda. Percorri um abismo inteiro" (181). The protagonist is aware of her inward psychological voyage and discovers the women of her desired heritage. In this sense, Felinto chronicles the women of Tijucoapapo, the first armed female battalion and writes the place as a place of insurrection. The space of rebellion is her self-imagined revolt against her abusive family, her unsuccessful feminine lineage and her failed urban experience. Lampião appears again, and she agrees to join his revolution against the city and will head to the target, *Avenida Paulista*.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Avenida Paulista is the center of the Financial District in São Paulo and represents the capitalist direction of the country in the twentieth century.

Before leaving with him she states that she needs to write a letter to her mother. It is this four page letter to Rísia's mother that closes Felinto's text. Rísia explains to her mother why she left São Paulo:

É isso mesmo, mamãe. Eu saí de casa, mamãe, porque é muito ruim ser pobre. Porque eu me coçava como um cachorro sarnento de noite...E depois, nós éramos uma família que não se suportava...Mamãe, eu cheguei a Tijucopapo, o lugar que você não honrou. Cheguei depois da inconsciência de uma queda. Estou indo de volta pela BR que leva e traz carros de São Paulo mas o alvo é a Avenida Paulista. Não posso passar lá por casa. É como você vê—encontrei a guerra...Nós vamos em busca da justiça das luzes, e caso haja destruição, é porque nós viemos de regiões assim, agrestes, de asperezas de alma, de docilidade nenhuma, de nenhum beijo e nenhum abraço, de tiquinhos de comida na cuia e de lombrigas na barriga, e de sede, mamãe, de insolação e forca no caminho para a escola...Mamãe, eu só estava esperando chegar para passar a carta para o inglês e enviar. (184-185)

Rísia confronts her mother in the letter regarding her tragic upbringing. The letter serves as her declaration to her mother of her old life and now her new beginning. At the same time it is violent insofar as it speaks to the injustices that Rísia will avenge for those, like herself, that come from places of suffering and neglect.

In this letter Rísia says goodbye once and for all. She tells her mother that she has finally created something she can call hers, a new path with a new feminine family. She explains: “Vão à merda das minha lombrigas, papai e mamãe...Eu não queria mandá-los. Mas tenho de mandar. A culpa não é só de vocês. Mas, devo vingá-los?...Não, não cabe a mim vingá-los. Goodbye mother. Goodbye father. Goodbye you” (118). She curses her mother and father but at the same time relinquishes her connection to them. And in the act of letting them go, she declares a revolution and describes her journey that has culminated in the revolution in which she finds herself: “A paisagem dum ida são ventos

e o sol de muitos dias de solidão. *A paisagem que eu trouxe pintada na folha em branco virou uma revolução*. Vim fazer a revolução que derrube...os culpados por todo o desamor que eu sofri e por toda a pobreza em que vivi ” (119). (My emphasis). Here Felinto’s protagonist reveals that *she* has become the writer, the *cronista* to inscribe her own passage in reclaiming a feminine consciousness represented in the women of Tijucoapapo. The process of writing the collective *crônica* has turned the paper into a revolution, a transformation. The declaration of revolt, or this *crônica* manifesto avenge the young girl’s misery. The letter continues, in which Rísia divulges:

Ontem eu tive uma noite de muitos sonhos, entre os quais o de que estou mesmo indo vingar e menina que existe dentro de mim e que eu não posso desrespeitar, e que é uma menina sentada num trono, e que é uma menina que chora sua incapacidade de onipotência exigida por uma mesa longa de ministros. É por isso que eu vou. (187)

The little girl represents the disregarded women of Brazil, and the Rísia that writes the letter to her mother is the one who holds the pen, who indeed now holds the ultimate power *da palavra*. Rísia gives authority to her thoughts and to her words, by inscribing the resurrection of the women of Tijucoapapo. She closes the letter with:

O que eu fiz foi um pensamento. As mulheres de Tijucoapapo eram, enfim, como eu fazendo sombra no chão, meio dia de sol de fogo, caminho da BR. É isso mesmo, mamãe. Eu quero que minha vida tenha um final de filme de cinema em outra língua, em língua inglesa. Eu quero que tudo me termine bem.

Setembro, 1980 (188)

She will not return to the city because she deserves to have a better ending than the beginning she experienced, a happy ending. She transforms her myth into her new reality, writing her own script in her own language of choice, in this case English because it represents fiction and fantasy that primarily ends happily, the language of the movies that

Rísia has seen many times before. Also, English represents dominance and control, Rísia has finally been able to take control of her life by *re-scripting* it.

The letter then serves as the final entry in the “Crônica Manifesto” that Felinto has just executed in the form of a novel. The message operates as a cathartic release from the hatred and rage that fueled the young protagonist and that dominated her language. At the same time, it *is* Felinto’s manifesto that vindicates the lost female literary voices, the *cronistas*. It refashions feminine genres from the personal letters and diaries of marginalized, and neglected, female voices in order to recover and reconstruct, a Brazilian feminine literary history.

Chapter 4: The Chameleon Women: Stories of (Im)perfection in Giovanna Rivero's *Las Camaleonas*

20 maneras de besar un hombre desnudo. ¿Cansada de hacer los trucos de siempre? ¡Renuévalos para sorprenderlo!

Haz que él te invita a salir. Te damos seis trucos para conseguir un date con ese chico que sabemos que te encanta.

10 Propósitos de belleza. El decálogo que debes cumplir para verte increíble.

7 bebidas que es mejor no tomar. ¡Ten cuidado con los algunos líquidos! Pueden tener más calorías de lo que piensas.

Cosmopolitan Magazine en Español

Introduction:

Giovanna Rivero's novel, *Las camaleonas* (2001), fosters a textual exit to confining Western notions of femininity and physical beauty. Set in contemporary Santa Cruz, Bolivia, Rivero presents women characters that form part of a tight-knit upper echelon of Bolivian society. These women are plagued by issues regarding beauty and sexuality as evidenced by the references to *Cosmopolitan Magazine* and *Vanidades* sprinkled throughout the novel.⁶⁷ The magazine and other media outlets are ironically portrayed as *the* women's guide to sexuality and attractiveness. Rivero performs a satirical critique of these ideas dealing with women's sexuality and also deconstructs hysteria as a sexed biological condition in masculinist discourse. Feminine agency does not begin with the female body in the case of *Las camaleonas* but is instead found by

⁶⁷ *Vanidades* is one of the most popular selling Spanish women's magazines. The magazine is published by Editorial Televisa and the headquarters is based Mexico, with offices throughout Latin America and Miami in the United States.

appropriating textual space used to regulate that same body. Rivero's novel re-appropriates the diary to celebrate female authorship and creativity, even as abject and dark as that process of self-discovery may be. The "medical journal" that the main character, Azucena's psychoanalyst Alessandro directs her to keep in order to "treat" her depression thus transforms into a provocative collection of women's stories, with both a fantastic/surrealist and confrontational literary aesthetic, as David Sander asserts, "the fantastic opens spaces for interpretation" with its use of imagery and/or supernatural elements (1).⁶⁸ As well as fantastic elements, Rivero adopts surrealist tropes through literary art to express a collective female consciousness that rebels against the pathological feminine unconsciousness implied by the psychoanalyst that may otherwise be inexpressible in reality.⁶⁹ These literary elements are used to critique masculinist

⁶⁸ In the introduction of his book *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, David Sandner discusses the history of the genre citing Aristotle's comments on the "marvelous" as part of the Epic genre. Sandner points out the rise in critical debate of the genre in the eighteenth century, contrasting with realist literary currents of the era. "In the productive tension between realistic and imaginary, fantastic literature defines itself as the modern literature of nostalgia and the impossible. However, the re-location of the "phantasms" of the supernatural into the fantastic reveals an estranged and estranging history on the imagination. An increasing interest in the interior faculties of the mind, especially the cultivation and wildness of the imagination, links the fantastic to the important eighteenth-century aesthetic and protopsychological discourse of the sublime. (7-8). Sandner also, discusses the difficulty of defining the fantastic genre. "The fundamental characteristic of the fantastic is displacement; the fantastic signifier does not point, even superficially, to any clear signified and so causes the reader to experience a lack, a disruption, inviting (if not provoking) an interpretation (9). According to Sandner, not all fantastic literature is sublime, but retains the possibility of encountering the sublime. The genre has also taken various forms since the eighteenth century, from fables to Gothic to the romance.

In his *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997), John Clute explains that the genre of "fantasy" does not become descriptive until the late nineteenth century and the "fantastic" as a name becomes popular in the twentieth century. In the twentieth century, is where Latin American appropriations and expressions of the fantastic come to light.

⁶⁹ In his influential 1924 "Surrealist Manifesto," André Breton postulated that because logic and reason were no longer successful in terms of expression, the use and exploration of spontaneity and illogical aspects of human existence, were the portals where one could explore the subconscious.

In Latin American, Parisian Surrealism of the 1920s and 1930s served as a precursor to fantastic literature as well as *Realismo mágico* demonstrated in works by Gabriel García Márquez (*Cien años de soledad*), Carlos Fuentes (*Aura, La muerte de artemio cruz*), Juan Rulfo in *Pedro Páramo* and the *Real maravilloso* attributed to Alejo Carpentier and his seminal work *El reino de este mundo*. All of these genres or modes of

psychoanalytical discourse in general and as it pertains to feminism(s) in defining femininity. In this sense, the protagonist refashions her journal to write the anti-women's magazine, the stories of imperfection which include the lives and fragmented accounts of the women of elite minority of Santa Cruz through a fictional lens: *The chameleon women*.

Rivero opens her novel with the protagonist and narrator Azucena reminiscing while she looks at pictures of when she was just fifteen years old. Soon to turn thirty, the narrator sees an awkward looking girl, skinny with unappealing stick-straight hair and a face covered in acne. The young Azucena is seated next to the beautiful and full-figured teenage friend Carolina, who is far more “conventionally attractive” than the narrator at the time. She recalls:

Mi esbozo de quince no pintaba bien: acné, delgadez extrema, pelo lacio en caída vertical. Por eso, ahora veo mis fotos de entonces, la nostalgia se instala suave, dócilmente... Me cuesta reconocerme. Y aparece la pregunta elemental, como si en una misma vida se pudiera reencarnar una y otra vez, ser una y ser otra: ¿Quién he sido antes? No recuerdo... no me recuerdo. Quizás por comodidad he borrado toda huella de la quinceañera que alguna vez fui.
(41)

This opening scene sets the reader up for a transformation, a physical and textual metamorphosis that the protagonist and her journal will undergo by the close of the novel. In addition, it signals a past change as well. Through the use of nostalgia, Rivero's protagonist begins narrating the novel with an introspective line of questioning that frames Azucena's personal quest to reclaim a self with agency. Azucena has been

writing have been used as a sort of social weapon against political norms and historical trends. Rivero draws upon different literary elements from surrealist school as well as the fantastic in Latin American literature to reconstitute her protagonist's journal.

successful in changing her physical appearance into an “acceptable” form since her adolescence; however, her mental state is challenged by the difficulty of having to manage and deal with the societal pressures of female embodiment. As the title suggests, *Las camaleonas* are women that have become adaptable and must be ready to mutate, control, and “reincarnate” their bodies to fit the Western model of beauty. From the first page of the novel, Rivero puts forth the notion that obscenity can function as a form of rupture of the rigid conventional ideas dealing with the female body. Women are expected to be and act a certain way, specifically with regard to their sexuality. For example, Azucena describes her experience of female embodiment as being trapped in a controlled space and she envies those that are able to break free: “Nunca fui una Kate Winslet en la escena más mórbida de *Heavenly Creatures*.⁷⁰ Me diviso a lo lejos, hacia atrás, más bien tímida y atrapada en un cuerpo ajeno, como un vestido colocado a la fuerza para cubrir las zonas impúdicas” (41). Azucena references a very specific character and scene from the movie *Heavenly Creatures* (1996) to represent female sexual transgression. In the film, Kate Winslet’s character makes love to her best friend, played by Melanie Lynskey, in 1950s New Zealand, when homosexuality was thought to be an illness and the girls were believed to be sick. Winslet’s character represents, then, not only a soft and delicate woman as described by Azucena, but one that is incongruously unwholesome at the same time through homosexuality. Azucena views Winslet’s character as one that is aware of her body and uses it freely to contravene ideas denoting its appropriate use. Fantasy and the fulfillment of said fantasy are realized

⁷⁰ *Heavenly Creatures* is a 1996 film directed by Peter Jackson and starring Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet. The plot centers on the infamous 1954 Parker-Hulme murder case from Christchurch, New Zealand. Clarkson, Neil. “Separation threat trigger for a brick attack.” *Christchurch City Libraries*. 17 June 1989, p.23.

through Winslet's character and idealized by Azucena. By making this comparison, Azucena shows the reader how she has never felt the same freedom with her own body; rather, it is an entity she felt never quite fit her right. When examining Azucena's narration and diary, Rivero uses the concept of transgression as an avenue for growth and discovery as I shall unravel.

Not only does Azucena struggle with the physical expectations pushed on women through incessant media messaging, but she also finds herself questioning her roles as mother and wife. In order to find an answer to the question of whether or not she should divorce her husband Claudio, she seeks professional guidance in the psychoanalyst, Alessandro. As the novel progresses, her medical diary turns into her fantasy space, finally concretized when she decides to ask her husband for a divorce on the last page of the novel.

Bolivian Women's Literature: An Invisible Tradition

Latin American women writers have historically and traditionally experienced problems of visibility. However, Bolivian women writers have suffered an even larger marginalization in terms of visibility and literary production than other Latin American women writers. The country's demographics has made literary production difficult for women as it is one of Latin America's poorest countries. Literary production in general has been limited to historically low literacy rates, which have consequently placed literary works by female writers in the shadows. Few female authors have reached national acclaim such as Adela Zamudio, Gaby Vellejo and Yolanda Bedregal, while virtually none have gained a strong international status.

In the critical volume *Hacia una historia de la crítica de la literatura en Bolivia* published in 2002, editors Blanca Wiethüchter and Alba M. Paz-Soldán present a collection of essays that include work on Bolivian authors from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One full chapter is dedicated to women's production by Adela Zamudio, Maria Virginia Estenssoro, and Hilda Munday. These three women are the only women studied in the collection and are emblematic of those that have attained some national recognition. The rest of the collection, which we will see as a trend in anthologies that center on Bolivia, focuses primarily of work by male authors.

As Chilean Marjorie Agosín explains, the feminist literary criticism of the past decades has not given the same visibility to women writers from Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador as other parts of Latin America. While critical work from the 1970s-on has proliferated the works of women writers in the Southern Cone, Brazil and Mexico, other countries like Bolivia have remained more nameless. In the 1930s, women poets enjoyed literary praise with examples by Chilean Gabriel Mistral, and Argentine Alfonsina Storni, and Uruguayan Delmira Agustini. Agosín believes that since the 30s, the areas that held the most relevance to Europe and the United States were those they received more literary visibility.⁷¹

Women writers from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru have not been able to enter the international literary marketplace as seen in other regions. The period of the "boom" which catapulted Latin American writers into commercial success was primarily enjoyed by men. When looking at anthologies published during this time, women's invisibility is

⁷¹ See "foreword" in *Fire from the Andes: Short Fiction by Women from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru* Ed. Susan Elizabeth Benner, Kathy S. Leonard. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998. Print.

quite evident. For example, Javier Sanjinés' collection *Tendencias actuales en la literatura boliviana* published in 1985, provides critical work along with an extensive bibliography of Bolivian literature published from 1962-1980. Out of 149 novels recorded, only 6 of them were written by women. In *Biografías de la nueva literatura boliviana* published in 1982, out of the 53 authors showcased only 6 are women writers. The same disparity is seen in yet another anthology published in 1972, *Resumen y antología de la literatura boliviana*. In the section titled *producción literaria contemporánea*, it lists what is deemed as pertinent works from 1930-1972 and astonishingly only four women writers are included in this 40 year period.

As Susan Elizabeth Benner and Kathy S. Leonard point out in their introduction to the collection *Fire from the Andes: Short Fiction by Women from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru*, since the mid-1980s, Latin American women writers have experienced a boom of their own being published in numerous anthologies in English dealing with women's writing. For example, it is now common to find translated works by Chileans Marjorie Agosín, and Diamela Eltit, Puerto Rican Rosario Ferré, Argentine Luisa Valenzuela, Brazilian Clarice Lispector, El Salvadorian Claribel Alegría and Mexican Rosario Castellanos. Despite this widening of Latin American women's audience, Bolivian, Peruvian and Ecuadorian women writers continue to go underrepresented (xii). Currently, there does not exist an anthology solely comprised of Bolivian women writers. Benner and Leonard's collection represents one of the first attempts to represent women writers from the Andean region. The Bolivian writers represented in the anthology are: Virigina Ayllón Soria; Yolanda Bedregal; Erika Bruzonic; Giancarla de Quiroga; Elsa Dorado; Marcela Gutiérrez; Beatriz Kuramoto; Beatriz Loayza Millán; Blanca Elena Paz.

In general terms, writing in these regions has not always been considered an acceptable practice for women. As Benner and Leonard state, to write for women of the these regions “has been an act of defiance, and act of rebellion, an act that requires considerable strength of character” (xi). This “strength of character” should be kept in mind when reading Rivero’s work and the legacy of rebellious authors she follows. The editors state that of the three countries presented in their collection, Bolivia was the greatest challenge in terms of collecting and locating women’s work and corresponding critical work. They assert that women in Bolivia are indeed writing, however, publication remains a difficult obstacle. Women authors often complain they are left to finance and promote their work on their own. As indicated early, demographics play a role in the difficulties of publication. Bolivia is one Latin America’s poorest countries and in 1997 had a literacy rate of only 75%. According the CIA World Factbook, as of 2013 this rate has now jumped to 91.2%, (95% male and 86 % female), which is an encouraging sign of progress.

At the turn of the 20th century, women’s literature from these regions represents a vision of social justice and an alliance with marginalized groups. (viii) Bolivia is a unique country in Latin American as it is home to an Indigenous majority. Rivero on the other hand, represents the antipathy to these groups by portraying the elite majority in her novel to unravel the social problems therein. In this sense, Rivero works from the center to dismantle the foundations of this closed group. Through a dark yet humorous tone the author exposes the imperfections of the isolated elite women of Santa Cruz for the rest of the country to see.

It’s Hysterical: Poking Fun at the Lacanian Feminist Tradition

As is typical of the relationship between psychoanalyst and patient, Azucena discusses her fears and anxiety with Alessandro, and confides her depression regarding perception of body and of domesticity. In return the psychoanalyst diagnoses her with “feminine hysteria.”⁷² He defines her as pathological, and describes her “condition” as:

“Esquizofrenia, frigidez, histeria, patologías matrilineales”, susurra Alessandro irónico, “Despersonalizarse, Azu, fragmentarse, separase en muchas, así sea mediante el transcurrir del tiempo o el pretexto de que uno cambia... Indicios divertidos de locura, la locura esquizoide de ser hembra, la histeria femenina, ¿no te gustaría tomar Traviata? Por supuesto, con receta médica.” (76)

The symbolism of the male doctor diagnosing the female patient with “feminine hysteria” is all to ironic, and echoes a Foucauldian like dialectic of confession and repentance.⁷³ It would be far easier for the male medical professional to prescribe her a drug used to control/reduce anxiety, depression and stress without actually dealing with why these physical manifestations occur. This passage critiques the stigmatization of mental illness particularly when “gendered” as female.

⁷² “Hysteria” has been considered a feminine disease or condition since antiquity, when physician Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, named it by reference to the movement of the uterus in the womb. (Recent medical developments have called into question how much of the Hippocratic Corpus can actually be attributed to Hippocrates himself. See Hellen King, “Once Upon a Text: Hysteria from Hippocrates” from *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, p. 3.

Subsequent studies translated the term *hysterikos* as “from the womb,” “connected to the womb,” and “liable to disorders of the womb.”⁷² In Ancient Greek texts, lists of feminine conditions are grouped together under the term *Hystérie*, which in turn influenced nineteenth century medical and psychological classifications of the term. Helen King points out in her chapter “Once Upon a Text: Hysteria from Hippocrates,” that Victorian era definitions concerning what we think of today as hysteria reflected the context in which they were construed. Nineteenth century medical discourse on the so-called disease followed Charcot’s definition, emphasizing the physical elements of the female condition: paralysis, loss of voice, convulsions, etc.(6). The many definitions of hysteria since then have in common the difficulty in finding a specific cause for the disease.

⁷³ In the *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Michel Foucault examines discourse on sexuality, purporting that the since the Middle Ages, confession has become a pertinent part of Western life. According to Foucault, confession is a major aspect across disciplines such as law, literature, and philosophy. Since confession is so prevalent in our society we have come to view it as necessary in reaching truth.

In addition, the allusion to “patologías matrilineales” implies not only a gendered pathology, but also feminine pathological genealogy. This reference to a feminine lineage connects with Felinto’s text, *As mulheres* and the necessity of the protagonist, Rísia to recover an undamaged feminine genealogy. In this same vein, the idea of a tainted feminine tradition bonds the two authors in their use of subversive and obstreperous discourse to claim and write a new tradition free from patriarchal and masculinist scripts.

Azucena struggles with their therapeutic relationship and doubts her diagnosis saying: “A veces no sé ni para qué vengo a las sesiones, si no estoy enferma, no hay nada que curar. Entiendo que a mi marido lo desorienta mi temperamento, porque los hombres odian la tristeza o cualquier tipo de melancolía, pero no loca” (80). Although her husband is not always pleased with Azucena’s particular mood, she states that there is nothing to cure; she is *not* sick. It is men that do not want to confront the unhappiness and depression experienced by women. Although Azucena’s “hysteria” initially begins as victimization, she is able to find a space of agency, within this self-incriminating cycle of patient- doctor dichotomy. It is not through bodily agency but rather textual agency witnessed in the transformation of the emotional diary into a creative prose journal that Azucena finds her voice.

In their critical introduction, “Openings on the Body,” feminist and body theorists Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price astutely explain that the body and more specifically that differences on the basis of sex and race have often been presumed as universal through conventional biological taxonomies. The universal presumption creates “powerful gendered norms to which all bodies are supposed to approximate without substantial variation” (3). According to the theorists, these presumptions, which translate as standard

and unquestioned expectations for female bodies have been damaging for women. The female body, historically marked as a reproductive body, has been viewed as disorderly and uncontrollable (as seen in natural processes of menstruation and lactation), thus inviting societal regulation that the male body does not undergo. The academics highlight the historical association between “hysteria and the womb” that places the feminine and women in a category of “irrationality.” They write:

The old-age relation between hysteria and the womb (called *hysteria* in Greek) is just one example of how femininity itself becomes marked by the notion of an inevitable irrationality. In short, women just are their bodies in a way that men are not, biologically destined to inferior status in all spheres that privilege rationality. At the same time, however that women are seen as more wholly embodied and hence naturally disqualified from equality with the male, the boundaries of that embodiment are never fixed or secure. As the devalued processes of reproduction make clear, the body has a propensity to leak, to overflow the proper distinctions between self and other, to contaminate and engulf. Thus women themselves are, in the conventional masculinist imagination, not simply inferior beings whose civil and social subordination is both inevitable and justified, but objects of fear and repulsion. Coincident with its marginalization, the devalued body is capable of generating deep ontological anxiety. (3)

Shildrick and Price contend that, traditionally and historically, women and men have established different associations with and to their particular corresponding bodies. Whereas men have escaped such embodiment predicaments, women have endured substantial classification, which perpetuates a deep-rooted anxiety. By using Shildrick and Price’s postulation as a point of departure, we can analyze Rivero’s use of what she identifies as “feminine hysteria.” Azucena’s doctor, Alessandro, tells her that there in fact exists a pathology, a madness related to being female: “Indicios divertidos de locura, la locura esquizoide de ser hembra, la histeria femenina” (76). The “irrationality” linked to

the notion of the female body that Shildrick and Price discuss is exemplified in Alessandro's description of Azucena. He associates her depression and body issues directly with the "irrationality" that historically comes with being female in patriarchal societies. In this sense, Rivero sets up a complex critique of these powerful ideas about women and the female body. Alessandro serves as a metaphor for dominant Western intellectual tradition that has preserved notions of the female body within patriarchy, linking infirmity to the female. In contemporary twentieth century, this tradition has continued by viewing the female body as a space that must be modified in order to fit the expected standard of acceptability through appearance and sexuality. As Shildrick and Price point out, "Many feminists themselves have been reluctant to engage with the female body or have found it difficult to provide a positive theorization of it" (3). Rivero, on the other hand, uses fiction as a tool to engage the female body and begins in a textual space that her protagonist manipulates to rupture these constricting notions.

Alessandro instructs Azucena to begin to keep a "diario de emociones," or an emotional log, in order to track her moods so that he will be better equipped to treat her so-called "feminine hysteria." The medical log is an attempt to document her "hysteria," and to prove that this female mania is the underlining cause for her dissatisfaction in her marriage. Rivero's critique is satirical insofar as she mocks the relationship between a woman in need of a dominant male physician to come to her aid, and interpret her body for her. In fact, the psychiatrist's voice is filtered through that of the protagonist's, Azucena, thus stimulating a discursive inversion. By conflating Alessandro's voice into that of the protagonist's, Rivero extricates the protagonist from the masculinist discourse and this discursive doubling can be seen as a form of resistance.

However, the fact that her character references Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist who primarily has been viewed as controversial by the field of feminism, the reader is made aware that the protagonist is much more enlightened than even she herself fully understands.⁷⁴ When first introducing Alessandro to the reader, Azucena describes him as her “asidero,” or pillar, that is helping her understand her despondency:

Mi asidero por ahora es Alessandro, mi psiquiatra, especialista en depresiones “de antesala”, dice él, para referirse a esas transiciones de ciclos como la treintena o la menopausia. Su método, una especie de instrumentación lacaniana—escritura de un diario personal de por medio, psicotrópicos al rescate de vez en cuando, golpes verbales siempre—lo ha hecho famoso en un medio donde definitivamente estamos lejos de ser Buenos Aires. (42)

The way that Azucena describes Alessandro’s assessment of her is in a trivializing manner, denoting her depression as a “waiting room” type of depression, not clinical nor serious but a common female experience of personal crisis. His method is a fragmented one that includes writing in a personal journal, psychotropic drugs and verbal punches, which seemingly have made him famous in Buenos Aires. Although Rivero’s protagonist presents Alessandro as her “asidero,” the way in which she continues to describe the doctor is scathing, and reveals Rivero’s taunting tone that rings throughout the novel. She refers to the personal diary part of Alessandro’s method as “una especie de instrumentación lacaniana.” The protagonist is alluding to Lacanian controversial methods that focused primarily on provoking the unconscious to decode the language of

⁷⁴ Beginning in the 1970s different feminists took issue and still do today with Lacan’s interrogation of the question of femininity and feminine sexuality.

the Other, in his view usually the Mother.⁷⁵ This reference provides insight to the protagonist's knowledge of psychoanalysis and reveals Rivero's criticism of the sexist tendencies therein. Specifically, Rivero's insertion of Lacan evaluates the paradox of using psychoanalysis theory to inform feminist thought and the controversy surrounding the topic.

Sigmund Freud, generally considered the “innovator of psychoanalysis” saw women as inherently lacking and damaged by the unconscious sense that they had already been “castrated,” which he explains in what he calls the *castration complex*.⁷⁶ Although feminists have harshly criticized Freud's work and denounced the inherent misogyny, early feminists' use of Freud ironically has reinforced the demeaning and masculinist discourse that essentializes male and female sexual difference. For example, representing the site of the metaphoric wound of women as of a place of creativity/growth reiterates the very discourse that these women sought to countermand as seen in the works of Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous.

In the case of Irigaray and Cixous, they looked to psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan for a new formation of the Freudian Oedipal complex in particular as it pertained to feminine sexuality. Although French feminists were outraged by Freudian psychoanalysis' characterization of women and women's sexuality, Irigaray has

⁷⁵ See the Lacan's 1949 essay the “Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” in Richter's *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*.

⁷⁶ See Sigmund Freud's *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. 24 Vols. 1940-68; London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953.

characterized both males and females essentially like their primary genitalia.⁷⁷ Her own version of femininity seems to have a biological basis that harks back to the source of the inaccuracies she exposes in Freud. Similar to Irigaray, Cixous in her influential essay “The Laugh of Medusa,” (1975) argues that women are bisexual and men, unwilling to surrender the “Phallus” are monosexual. Although Cixous attempts to write and define woman outside of masculinist language, she is not able to sneak away from the binary polarities by adopting Derridean terminology that inverts the usual couplings of patriarchal language. These women attempt to write with the “body” in order to discursively to challenge phallogentric psychoanalysis.

On the other hand, some feminists argue that the dismissal of Lacan and psychoanalysis is a mistake. In their book *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne* (1982), feminist psychoanalysts Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose discuss what they see as the fruitfulness of Lacan’s work for feminism(s). They also contend that psychoanalysis is crucial for the discussion of femininity and how it comes into being.

The theorists explain that although there are contradictions in Freud’s work, Lacan believed “there is a coherent theorist in Freud whose ideas do not need to be diverged from; rather they should be set within a cohesive framework that they anticipated but which, for historical reasons, Freud himself could not formulate. The development of linguistic science provides this framework” (1). From the outset, Lacan dedicated himself to redefining Freud’s work. As Mitchell explains, from Freud, Lacan saw the field of psychoanalysis as the study of the unconscious and sexuality, and in

⁷⁷ In her 1977 essay, “Sex Which Is Not One, Irigaray,” describes: “Men, like the phallus, are single (-minded), hard, simple, direct; women, like the two lips of the vulva and their sensations, are multiple, diffuse, soft indirect.”

particular that the “psychoanalytical concept of sexuality... is always psycho-sexuality, a system of conscious and unconscious human fantasies” (2). Where Freud used thermodynamic metaphors, Lacan favored linguistic metaphors and described the unconscious as a language rather than a machine. Lacan recasted the “penis-envy” into the privileged signifier of the *Phallus*, a signifier that both sexes envy and fall into isolation with the collapse of language. Both Mitchell and Rose admit themselves that Lacan’s rereading of Freudian theory does not make any substantial changes to it but rather it clarifies the chief concepts. They argue that the “rehabilitation” of Freud’s work by Lacan provide feminists with an understanding of the psychological construction of sexual difference. According to the scholars, a Lacanian reformulation of Freud is regarded as describing the psychological process and not as prescribing it (28). Together they follow Lacan and argue the subject to be essentially split between conscious and unconscious aspects. According to Lacan, the idea of a whole self is an illusion that places the ego at the center of the subject, a humanist mistake committed by predominant scientific rationality (31-32). For Lacan the notion of a coherent identity is considered fictitious. This idea of an unstable identity is what these women find most attractive about Lacan. According to Rose, the psychoanalytical view of subjectivity posits a certain resistance to any form of identity, and unconscious resistance that appears in dreams, for example. Rose claims that the unconscious reveals the ‘failure’ of identity, primarily because there is no continuity of psychic life, so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which can be easily realized. Therefore, Rose maintains that the concept of an unconscious indicates that gender too cannot be fully established because for Lacan, the process of subjectivity is uncertain (35).

Rose and Mitchell also critique feminists like Irigaray and Cixous claiming that to interpret psychic reality as either biologically or culturally determined is the trap of “utopianism of the psyche.” They contend that if such determinism indeed existed there in turn would be no psychic conflict (33-35). Although I agree with the fundamental difficulty of biological determinism, a major problem with this assertion is the lack of material evidence of the existence of a collective or individual psychic conflict. In fact, this is a major critique of psychoanalysis as a field of study in general, the lack of content and evidence to support such claims regarding the unconscious and the formulation of categories of femininity and masculinity therein.

One of feminists major contentions with Lacan is in the appropriation of the Freudian oedipal complex and the use of the privileged signifier of the *Phallus*. In the oedipal complex according to Lacan, masculinity is set up as the norm, and femininity is as what masculinity is not. The language that fills the “so-called” lack in the Mother *is* phallogocentric. In defense of Lacan, Rose states:

Freud gave the moment when boy and girl child saw that they were different the status of a trauma in which the girl is seen to be lacking. But something can only be seen to be missing according to pre-existing hierarchy of values...what counts is not the perception but its already assigned meaning—the moment therefore belongs in the symbolic. (42-43)

This is clearly a positive that Rose and Mitchell see in using Lacan for feminisms. Lacan can be used by viewing his work as a description of such “pre-existing hierarchy of values.” However with regard to the signifier of the *Phallus*, Rose fails to provide adequate answers as to why the *Phallus* is indeed a privileged signifier, rather she maintains that psychoanalysis is only describing the production of difference. The major

problem with this claim, as Taina Rajanti points out in her review of the book, by using Lacan as a point of departure to form feminist theory, the scholars are in fact *reproducing* the very discourse they recognize to be flawed by pre-existing hierarchy values of male dominance. By applying Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, she argues that the very question of female sexuality abets the sexualization of human beings and culture. Foucault posited that sexuality is produced and replicated through discourse thus facilitating a power of normality.

Rose does acknowledge the problem of the *Phallus* as a privileged signifier, yet at the same time both Mitchell and Rose argue femininity and masculinity are produced within a phallic organization of sexuality. According to the theorists, there is no preoedipal femininity independent of the oedipal division of the sexes. Rose and Mitchell contend that any challenge to the oedipal division should come from "an alternative symbolic order." Nonetheless, as Patricia Elliot points out in her book *From Mastery to Analysis: Theories of Gender in Psychoanalytic Feminism*, this idea bears no significant resolutions to the most imperative questions. In addition, the fundamental question of why sexuality is in fact phallically organized and how one might subvert it has gone completely unanswered by Mitchell and Rose.

In agreement with Elizabeth Wilson's assertion in her essay "Psychoanalysis: Psychic Law and Order?," feminisms does *not* need a theory of the subjective reality of women's subordination but a model for social change. To simply assert that Lacan was only describing the effects of a phallic organization avoids the more critical questions for women and feminists. Furthermore, feminists should also question the very notion of an unconscious, psychological meaning to gender difference, and in doing so deconstruct the

idea that masculinity and femininity are unequal and mutually exclusive constructs, as Elliot has championed.

Although Rose and Mitchell readings aid in clarifying Lacan's work, they ultimately fall short of addressing the major conflicts feminists raise. Paradoxically, feminist appropriation of Lacan has found them no way out of the masculinist circularity of the Oedipus complex. Rivero text postulates that rather than writing with the "body," as suggested by French feminists, or look to Lacan for clarification of Freudian psycho-processes of femininity, creative writing and/or literary production helps to find women an exit from this circularity. The irony is underscored in Rivero's novel through the analytical voice of the protagonist from the position of the female patient who essentially uses the language and tool (the journal) of psychoanalysis, to undo the science behind the practice.

Rivero text also highlights one of the major criticism of psychoanalytical feminism that it depicts women as victims of psychoanalytical laws as seen in the work of Rose and Mitchell. The portrayal of her protagonist's relationship with her psychoanalyst serves as a metaphor for this critique. In Rivero's novel, it is through medical and psychoanalytical discourse that paint not only Azucena but also the other women characters, all patients of Alessandro, as victims. Rivero's reconstitution of this acts as resistance to female victimization and empowers the protagonist, Azucena, with authorial control.

Rivero's presentation of the "journal" along with the character of the psychoanalyst symbolizes the feminist contradiction of reverting to Lacan to shape and/or construct discursive resistance. The psychoanalyst's objective is to provoke the

unconscious through the use of writing and follows the Lacanian view that the unconscious is similar to a language. Alessandro's attempt to provoke a feminine unconscious is disrupted through Rivero's protagonist's textual re-formation of the journal. Throughout the novel, Rivero gradually deconstructs the discourse and turns the journal into a place of imaginative literary prose for the protagonist while simultaneously subverting the Lacanian masculinist reading of an absolute category of femininity found in a female unconscious.

As Azucena explains, she complies with writing in the personal journal to escape her mind-numbing quotidian life:

Astutamente, sorteando mi manía escéptica de burguesita empírica, Alessandro me ordena desde la primera cita escribir un “diario de emociones”, y esto es preferible a estar dormida setenta y dos horas seguidas, ausente de la vida que corre paralela, que te salta, que te obvia. (42)

Azucena immediately views the journal as a way to evade her incessant depression and lack of luster, lost in the well-to-do, middle class where she feels confined. Rather than simply watch her life pass her by, she agrees to write in the diary. Azucena first composes diary entries that discuss her life and actual events and explore her feelings of depression as directed by Alessandro. As the novel progresses, she pulls characters from her life and adds her fictional and at times grotesque and abject twists. The journal becomes the space where Rivero has her protagonist challenge the powerful ideas generated about the female body by creating a textual aesthetic that ruptures and refashions conventional connotations of feminine genres, and at the same time reworks a space cloaked in psychoanalytical discourse to locate her “female” condition.

A *Cosmopolitan* Way of Life

Azucena's first entry, entitled "Fuga de rutina," describes the monotony of marriage after seven years. She narrates a night out with her husband:

Claudio, mi esposo, llamó esta tarde y dijo en un tono diferente, un tono que solo usaba al principio de nuestro matrimonio, cuando el amor era lo único que nos ocupaba: "Te invito a un lugar que te va a encantar". ...No importa, después de todos estos años de convivencia, oxidadas las palabras cariñosas, cansado el apetito de piel, cualquier lugar que consiga renovarnos...un lugar perfecto. Aunque confieso que últimamente noto en su forma de arreglarse más esmero, más detalles que buscan agradarme, hendir su imagen en mis pensamientos diarios, cuando preparo el almuerzo, mientras hablo con Ceci por teléfono, o en la peluquería, sumergida en las charlas desbordantes de otras mujeres, tan insatisfechas las pobres con sus maridos, tan olvidadas. Yo no, lo mío es diferente, no fue un desgaste natural, es decir, desamor, desinterés y todos los "des" que aquejan como plagas divinas al séptimo año de matrimonio....Pero hoy, hoy hay fiesta en casa porque Claudio me ha dicho "te invito a un lugar que te va a encantar"; y yo quiero ir, escapar de esta rutina, rescatar a mi hombre como aconsejan las revistas de *Cosmopolitan*; son buenas estas revistas. Hace poco leí un artículo que indicaba, muy útil, las cinco señales clave para descubrir una infidelidad pasajera... (62)

Azucena explains how her marriage has become dull and unenthusiastic. However, lately her husband Claudio has been putting forth a conscious effort to revitalize the relationship. Tired of her droning life and waning relationship, she writes that she is eager to escape her routine in the hopes of "winning" Claudio back as recommended by *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which she states is a respectable guide to support women's issues. This initial reference to *Cosmopolitan* carves out the space in which Azucena finds herself at the beginning of the novel, as a new author and wife attempting to "fix" her marriage. It also sets up a critique of media like *Cosmopolitan* magazine and the

destructive messaging they relay to women and men regarding gender roles and sexuality.

When examining the content and central aim of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, in her 1990 article “*Cosmopolitan* Ideology and Management of Desire,” Kathryn MacMahon pointed out that the magazine “has been an icon of feminine sexuality since the mid-1960s” (381). More importantly, the magazine has often promoted female heterosexuality, which focuses on how to satisfy and pleasure males. Currently, *Cosmopolitan* appears to uphold its original mission. It emphasizes a tremendous amount of its content on heterosexual relationships and how women may improve said relationships, often centering on sex. Here, Rivero uses Azucena to show the ridiculousness in terms of content of magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, by implying that it is the protagonist’s responsibility, female’s responsibility in general to “rescatar” or regain their male partners in a relationship.

In her article, MacMahon outlines the history of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which was first published in 1886 in the United States. By the 50s the magazine, faced with revenue declines, Hearst Magazines, (owner of *Cosmopolitan* and many other magazines) hired Helen Gurley Brown as editor that set the magazine in motion for discussing important issues such as women’s work outside the home and women’s sexuality.⁷⁸ By the 1980s, its U.S. circulation was close to three million copies sold monthly with

⁷⁸ In her article 2006 “The Joy of Work: Helen Gurley Brown, Gender, and Sexuality in the White-Collar Office,” Berebitsky discusses Brown’s vision the was initiated in the 60s: “Brown directed women to seek professional advancement, and she tied women’s sexual freedom and sexual opportunities directly to their place in the workforce. She also urged women to use gender and, to varying degrees, sexuality for their own gain (90).

editions published in at least twelve foreign languages (382). At the time, “In *Cosmopolitan*, sex was discussed as a function of the public sphere, in the context of the workplace, and in explicit terms of the marketplace. While a sexuality no longer defined exclusively in terms of the home, as domestic and procreative, may be considered as a step toward more freedom for women.” (382) Although this may be viewed as a type of women’s sexual liberation, the focus on women’s sexuality has primarily centered on the heteronormative relationship between men and women and has elucidated ways women may improve said relationship through sex, not vice versa. In 1990, MacMahon analyzed thirty-eight issues published between 1976 and 1988 and found that articles that dealt with relationships with men composed the largest category of the magazine. Although this analysis was done two decades ago, simply paging through the current issues of the magazine, one can quickly assess that not much has changed in terms of the magazine’s focus.

For example, looking at *Cosmpomolitan Español* the online edition, the first topic available for Spanish speaking women when reading the magazine’s Spanish version is to click on *textosterona* with options to evaluate *quién es más hot* and *preguntar a Rodrigo* about all of one’s burning questions dealing with men, sex and relationships.⁷⁹ Other options include: *Amor y Sexo*; *Fashion Book*; *Beauty Book*; *Cosmo News*; *Tú Aún Mejor*; *Agéndalo*; *Horóscopo*; *Galerías*; *Videos*. If one enters the topic of *Amor y Sexo*, the first article that appears on the screen is *Razones por las que él no te ha llamado* and features a young blonde Caucasian female as the accompanying photograph. The remaining articles center on sex positions and how to properly give oral sex. Although the section is

⁷⁹ Rodrigo Guirao Díaz is a famous Argentine actor and model, most well-known for his numerous telenovela appearances.

titled “Amor y Sexo,” the majority of the articles deal with sexuality to satisfy heterosexual men and blame women for whatever particular dissatisfaction they may be experiencing in romantic relationships with men.

In her book *Airbrushed Nation*, Jennifer Nelson (a former *Cosmopolitan* writer) discusses how magazines like *Cosmopolitan* “approach their readers as if they need fixing” claiming that the content in these magazines diminishes self-esteem and creates deep anxieties in women (xi). These deep anxieties are referenced in Azucena’s claim to recently have read an article that outlined the five signs of your male spouse having an affair. “Hace poco leí un artículo que indicaba, muy útil, las cinco señales clave para descubrir una infidelidad pasajera...” (62). This type of content perpetuates paranoia in women. Nelson, having worked in the industry, explains:

With each decade, it seemed, the once fairly innocuous content found in women’s glossies had gotten increasingly more destructive, dumbed down, and airbrushed to surreal perfection. When I became more conscious that these magazines were continually trying to make readers over, often implying that women needed to constantly improve themselves—either directly or through inference—I began to scrutinize them more critically. (xi)

Nelson continues to elaborate that much of the wide readership magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* enjoys, are often very impressionable young women and teenagers to such influential ideas dealing with self-worth and body image. According to Nelson, most readers are oblivious to the advertising and marketing teams that dominate such publications, thus contributing to the ever-growing “beauty industry” (56).

A striking aspect of the Spanish version of the magazine is that it features primarily Caucasian women pictured with Caucasian men. After looking through the most recent online edition, there were no women of color featured in any of the

illustrations accompanying the articles. The illustrations of photographs of celebrities also showcase mostly American and/or Western individuals. On the current cover of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine 2014 print version edition, Lauren Conrad, a Caucasian reality T.V. star from Orange Country, California, showed below in figure 4.1, is featured. The issue also boasts sexual liberation (*liberación sexual*), for the new year, however what is marketed as women's sexual liberation are dangerous ideas of what female sexuality should look like, inscribing rules and regulations of how to be successful with heterosexual men. These successful sexual encounters constitute a brand of female sexual liberation. This is not to say that Latina women are never featured, however the contrast to which they are not is extremely salient. Figure 4.2 also shows an issue of the cover *Cosmopolitan Latina* with American model and socialite Paris Hilton on the cover. Again, a version of the magazine that is geared towards a Latina/Latin American readership often opts for Caucasian American/Western women rather than women of color.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ In her article "The Reality of Mainstream Magazines: Being Thin, White, And Beautiful Matters" in the online blog *Positively Smitten*, Crystal Maldonado did research over the past years to reveal the disparities in terms of diversity representation on the cover of the magazine she found that: "In 2012, the models were as follows: Scarlett Johansson; Dakota Fanning; Selena Gomez; Megan Fox; Khloe Kardashian; Pink; Demi Lovato; Ashley Greene; Lucy Hale; Zooey Deschanel; Kate Upton; Taylor Swift. Only three of them were women of color – Selena, Khloe, and Demi. In 2011, Cosmo's record was the same. Three of the 12 covers featured women of color — Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, and Kim Kardashian. The rest? White."

In looking at the magazine published in the U.S. from 2001-2010 and analyzing 132 covers under the following criteria: Hair color and texture and race. She found that 65% of the females featured were blonde with professionally relaxed/waved hair and 86% featured white women.

Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2



When looking at the *Cosmopolitan España* online edition, the first article that appears on the homepage is: *Crees que te engaña? Claves para detectar una infidelidad*. Again, this article is virtually the same as referenced by Rivero's protagonist in her first journal entry. The Spain edition has virtually the same topics found in the Spanish language version: *Amor, Belleza, Moda, Hombres, Tú, Videos Concursos*. Western ideas of female sexuality and beauty permeate these different issues of the magazine and virtually every article focuses on how women can "improve," making readers more attractive to heterosexual males. Rivero's representation of the magazine and its possible article in her novel is not an exaggeration, but rather a realistic depiction, given the fact that almost fifteen years later, almost identical articles continue to appear in this "women's" magazine.⁸¹

Cosmopolitan is owned by Hearst Magazines, which is a unit of Hearst Corporation and is one of the world's largest publishers of monthly magazines. *Cosmopolitan* is their best-selling women's magazine and on the corporation's own website refers to the journal as a sort of "bible" for females:

Cosmopolitan is the best-selling young women's magazine in the U.S., a bible for fun, fearless females that reaches more than 18 million readers a month. *Cosmopolitan* delivers the latest news on men and love, work and money, fashion and beauty, health, self-improvement and entertainment. *Cosmopolitan Online* reaches over 18 million unique users a month, in addition to boasting 3/5 million+ Facebook fans and nearly one million Twitter followers. In addition to the U.S. flagship, *Cosmopolitan* publishes 61 print magazine editions around the world, including *Cosmopolitan for Latinas*, published in the U.S. five times a year.

⁸¹ The Brazilian edition *Nova Cosmopolitan* has a more complete online edition than the ones found in English and Spanish.

The language used by the corporation's own description compares it to divine intervention and a spiritual guide to one's life on earth. Furthermore, by referencing its own product as "a bible for fun" propagates a belief system, a dogma or philosophy that should be followed strictly. Women should read and follow accordingly. It describes its readership as "fearless females" and its material as "news." However, a magazine that stresses so much sexual and physical self-help creates fear and anxiety rather than promotes self confidence. For example, one may have never suspected his/her lover or partner of infidelity but articles that constantly emphasize said issue perpetuate paranoia and stereotypical concepts of gender, for example that men are innately sexual aggressors and women are naturally sexually passive and therefore need to learn how to stimulate the man and also be vigilant of his possible infidelity, as seen in Rivero's novel. Azucena must attempt to "rescatar" her husband but also is mindful of his possible betrayals.

The "latest news on men and love" actually translates as patriarchal philosophies on women's sexuality. Women's desire is left out of the equation and "the latest news on men and love" is all about how to fulfill heterosexual male desire. What is even more appalling is the vast readership that the magazine commands. It boasts its *Latina* version and international success. Nevertheless, after reading the various editions in English and Spanish and for Latinas, the material and the images remain the same. It is the same masculinist agenda of disseminating sexist ideas about, for and toward women.⁸²

Hearst's widespread publication of the magazine is what makes the messages that the company puts forth so influential. According to the corporation:

⁸² This should in no way minimize the idea of a women enjoying a liberated sexuality; however, when that sexuality is fostered solely for the purpose of pleasuring males, it detracts from feminist movements and sexual revolutions started in the 1960s that celebrated free uninhibited women's sexuality. Second Wave feminism championed the eradication of women's objectification rather than encouraged it unlike magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*.

As the largest U.S. publisher of magazines worldwide, Hearst Magazines International, a unit of Hearst Corporation, publishes close to 300 editions for distribution in more than 80 countries. Major titles include powerful brand equities like *Cosmopolitan* which, with 61 international editions is the largest-selling young women's magazine and has more editions than any other magazine in the world; *ELLE*, *Esquire*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harper's BAZAAR*, *Popular Mechanics* and *Seventeen*. In addition, Hearst Magazines International publishes other titles through joint ventures, including *Men's Health* and *Runner's World* in the U.K., *Madison* in Australia, and *The Robb Report* in Russia and China.

To state that the Hearst corporation has a monopoly on “women’s” magazines and/or magazine publishing would be an understatement. *Cosmopolitan* is not only the company’s best-selling magazine, but it is the best-selling women’s magazine *worldwide* with an unmatched international reach. The magazine has more editions than any other magazine geared towards a women’s readership on the globe. The fact that the magazine is ubiquitous and often features high-profile Western celebrities on the cover serves as a sort of gendering imperialism. *Cosmopolitan* writes a hetero-gendered script for women to follow. In addition, it can also be seen as a *racialized* form of imperialism. Bolivia is one of Latin America’s most indigenous nations and in fact, it is home to only a small “White” minority while the majority is made up of Amerindians and mestizos. In 2011 the nonprofit organization Latinbarómetro found that the “White” elite of Bolivia constituted only 15% of the population, roughly 4.5 million people. The organization also disseminated a survey and asked participants, in general terms, which group they believed to have the most political control over the county. An overwhelmingly 60% of the participants responded that “Whites” possessed this control for their own economic

gain.⁸³ The country's richest city, Santa Cruz, has traditionally been this elite minority's stronghold.⁸⁴ Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the city has attracted a large amount of foreign investment due to its a U.S.-style consumerism. The gendering and racialized colonialism that is propagated by mediums like *Cosmopolitan*, further exacerbates a neo-colonial hatred in a city dominated by an elite "White" minority.⁸⁵ The complex notion of colonial racialized gendering of acceptable female subjectivity is a major theme in Rivero's work. Indeed, the novel opens with the protagonist's first journal entry as a way of setting the stage for the deconstruction of the masculinist script—both in terms of psychoanalysis as well as traditional Western patriarchy—through creative prose.

Although part of the protagonist subscribes to the gender scripting that the magazine puts forth, she also begins to criticize the psychology and absurdity of such articles:

Ninguna de esas señales me aflige, *Cosmopolitan* no puede adivinarlo todo; *Cosmopolitan* no ha adjuntado a su voucher de regalos de temporada un chip para detectar los modos del aburrimiento, la inexorable pérdida de la voluptuosidad, el pudor fraterno que comienza a hacer gata parida en el centro

⁸³ The survey asked two general questions with regard to race, political and economic power in Bolivia. The first was: "*En términos generales ¿diría usted que (país) está gobernado por unos cuantos grupos poderosos en su propio beneficio, o que está gobernado para el bien de todo el pueblo?*" And the second question asked was: "*¿Cuáles grupos cree Ud. que cumplen menos con las leyes?*" 64% of participants answered "los ricos" as the group that least complies with governmental law in the country. These statistics reveal the distrust of the Indian majority among the "White" European elite of the country.

⁸⁴ An 2007 article published by the Associated Press described the Bolivian elite and its relationship with Santa Cruz. The piece discussed the newly elected mestizo President Evo Morales at the time and the conflicts between the elite minority and the long oppressed Indian majority. The once practiced U.S.-style of consumerism has clashed in the last decade with Morales' vision for a communal state.

⁸⁵ Further exploration of the racialized identities of the women characters depicted in Rivero's text is needed and will be reserved for a future project. First, the name Azucena evokes white imagery of the Madonna Lily. Also, Judy Palas, referred to as *La chica Dove*, the face of Dove, a white soap in Bolivia. Both images metaphorically elicit the racialized history between White and Indigenous Bolivians, which should be examined further.

de una relación y te obliga a arrepentirte de tus audacias; entonces volvés a la tienda y pedís que te cambien el hilo dental negro por un camisoncito medieval de blondas, el picante perfume por la floral fragancia, el condón fosforescente de textura rugosa con bolitas chinas plus por un óvulo superácido, avergonzados los dos ante la mirada de Dios. (63)

Rivero's protagonist uses humor to denounce the magazine's claim potentially to have the ability to predict a case of unfaithfulness, and she compares this absurdity to an imagined voucher that would offer a chip to detect spousal boredom or the loss of pleasure. This comparison mocks the magazine's assertion to function as a "bible" providing the appropriate resolutions to unanswerable questions. Azucena describes the unspoken boredom that may develop in a given relationship, which resembles the metaphor of a white elephant in the room. Incongruously, as Azucena explains, this silent distance that forms between a couple makes the woman regret purchasing the adventurous sexual paraphernalia that *Cosmopolitan* encouraged her to buy in the first place, all to reclaim her husband that has gone astray. Rivero, through Azucena, criticizes the contradictory messaging that magazines like *Cosmopolitan* facilitate. It is conflicting messages that causes a sort of hysterical response as mirrored in the protagonist's comical and battering narrative tone. This literary daring voice develops throughout the novel forming Azucena's own subversive women's journal.

After the temporary anxiety regarding spousal disloyalty subsides, Azucena transcends the paranoia that articles mentioned by the protagonist instill in their readers. Rivero through her protagonist takes issue with fear and female anxiety, especially related to illness as "gendered." The author's protagonist explains that the magazine fails to examine how to eradicate such anxiety but rather focuses on its continuation:

Después desayunamos huevos a la copa y jugo de naranjas y olvidé la angustia. Eso, por ejemplo, no lo explica *Cosmopolitan*. De haber ocurrido una infidelidad, una traición imposible, yo sería la primera en darme cuenta, solo con una señal, la intuición, el famoso sexto sentido. Pero cómo pensar en eso, si hoy iremos a un lugar especial, un lugar que me encantará. Además, de alguna manera, soy yo quien se muere por una extraña llamada telefónica. (64)

Oddly, it is Azucena who is dying for a strange phone call, an escape or an affair that would disrupt the monotony of her marriage of Claudio. Magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* perpetuate the perception that it is heterosexual men's nature to betray their partners, however, Azucena's first journal entry inverts this idea. This inversion of gendered presumptions is gradually takes place in the journal, which consequently reorganizes what a women's journal "should" read like. Rather than dedicating the pages to divulge about heartbreak of issues with her partner, she engages in her own imaginings and creative expression, which I shall explore in further detail.

The women of Rivero's book are living in a constant masquerade, negotiating their scripted roles and unscripted desires. The masquerade of *Chameleon women*, more specifically female members of the upper class of Santa Cruz, Bolivia, is in fact a farce; it covers up a host of body disorders like anorexia and bulimia, infidelity, and depression, in an attempt to fulfill their gendered and racialized imperialist script. The constant stress on beauty and its association with the female body is incessant. Moreover, Rivero writes this cultural emphasis as one that acts like an invasion in women's lives.

The Masquerade: Mascara(s) and Cover-up

Throughout the novel, Azucena shares with the reader her experience of this invasion of her body and mind by elite Bolivian, and Western, culture. The urban streets (the public space) are described as where imposed images of the female body persist and

are reinforced. She comments on how, for example, newsstands on every corner depict pictures of unattainable notions of beauty. Magazine covers promote “self-help” tactics that underpin these images, all the while aiming to satisfy husbands’ and boyfriends’ ideas of desire. The Western imposed notion of beauty, stressing thinness and large breasts permeates the Latin American city space. Azucena explains how to confront the city street, as every modern woman does; daily she “constructs” her face, which functions as a mask:

A la calle para ver muchas mujeres que, como yo,
construyen cada día su rostro ante el espejo, con la
pincelada certera de un lápiz labial, con una ráfaga azulada
sobre los párpados, con la piel mentirosa de algún polvo
translúcido. (56)

Above all, the faces that women create are illusions. Echoing gender theorist Judith Butler’s performativity outlined in her 1990 *Gender Trouble*, these women are players of the city, the modern space, and the spectacle. As Judith Butler explains, there are no fixed sexual identities that shape our actions and thoughts; gender is something we “put on” or perform. Our performances from moment to moment, driven by strong inner imperatives, are all we are or can be. In Derridean fashion, Butler deconstructs the binary of original versus copy, questioning not merely which is the real and which the imitation, but whether our entire concept of gender is not in fact based on imitations for which no real “essences” exist.

Scholar Judith Halberstam stresses the asymmetrical aspects of gender identification by explaining:

Since femininity signifies in general as the effect of artifice,
as the essence of ‘performativity’...we have an easier time
understanding it as transferable, mobile, fluid. But
masculinity has an altogether different relation to

performance, the real and the natural, and it appears to be far more difficult to pry masculinity and maleness apart than femininity and femaleness. (“Masculinity without Men,” *Genders* 29 (1999)).

Alluding to Butler’s view of performativity, Halberstam suggests that performing masculinity involves not performing, or at least not appearing to perform. Halberstam would argue that the dominance of male over female in Western culture has made masculinity the “default” position. Given Halberstam’s concern with the details of performing gender, one has little sense that she considers her gender something she merely acts out. Therefore, when Rivero’s protagonist is attempting to “unpack” the complex ideas regarding gender and sexuality, it becomes a complex psychoanalytical discursive process.

Rivero’s character, Azucena, struggles with the expectations of femininity and thus writes about her daily performance of femininity, where she disguises both her body and mind accordingly. What Rivero’s piece postulates is the notion that gender performance has evolved into a gender identity struggle of survival. Women will go so far as to undergo plastic surgery and succumb to disorders such as anorexia and bulimia to achieve the unrealistic “disciplined” body. Rivero proposes that certain societal pressures regarding ideal body image exacerbate what we understand as gender performance.

In his article “Las luchas corporales en *Las camaleonas* de Giovanna Rivero”, Willy Muñoz discusses how the idea of the body operates as a metaphor for culture: “El cuerpo es, el texto de la cultura” (9). Muñoz uses Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* to discuss the way bodies are the result of the organization and regulation of time, space and the movement. The body is molded into a materiality which has been imprinted on the

historical narratives that make up human life and that drives human desire, thus contributing to the categories of “masculine” and “feminine.” When applying Foucault to Rivero’s novel, Muñoz argues:

El psicoanálisis ha codificado simbólicamente a la mujer como el lugar de una falta... La meticulosa práctica de mejoramientos a la que se someten constituye el cuerpo disciplinado, o lo que Foucault denomina “cuerpos dóciles,” una anatomía política que produce cuerpos “que pueden ser sometidos, usados, transformados y mejorados” (136). Muchas mujeres dedican gran parte de sus recursos económicos y su tiempo a la aplicación de cosméticos, a la selección de sus vestidos, a escoger un régimen alimenticio para ponerse a dieta, prácticas de “mejoramiento.” (8)

As Muñoz points out, these practices of “betterment” contribute to women’s daily idea of insufficiency. The ideal aesthetic is unattainable, thus making the goal never-ending (8). This improvement that women often undergo is at the center of Rivero’s novel, creating a false sense of desire for women because they become so consumed with the practice that they lose sight of a sense of genuine personal happiness. To reiterate, much of the normative discourse used to pressure women to adhere to societal expectations focuses on what heterosexual men desire.

Judy Palas, a significant character of the novel, is a famous supermodel that just happens to be on that month’s issue of *Vanidades* when Azucena randomly meets her in the waiting room of their mutual psychiatrist, Alessandro. The other woman along with Azucena in the waiting room exclaims: “La chica Dove!” (The Dove girl!) recognizing her from the widespread advertisements. Judy represents the “disciplined female body” or the “ideal body” with her “perfect” breasts and thin physique, as Muñoz points out in his article. At the same time, Judy is the face of Dove, a white soap in Bolivia. This

metaphorically prompts the racialized history between the White and Indigenous and Mestizo Bolivians. According to Muñoz, Palas' character is:

...representativo de la construcción del cuerpo ideal de la mujer. Los medios masivos de comunicación difunden ese ícono cultural como ejemplo para otras mujeres, cuerpo que es comercializado y consumido junto con los productos que promociona en las revistas de mujeres o en la televisión. (8)

This “ícono cultural” serving as the example for other women to follow is indeed a racialized icon as well.

Azucena pronounces Judy as flawless; however, she is equally as psychologically unstable as beautiful. Soon after forming an interesting yet awkward friendship, Judy discloses to Azucena that she has breast cancer, ironically shattering the allure associated with her voluptuous chest, and exposing the metaphorical infirmity connected with unrealistic ideas of beauty. Pain and illness are considered private affairs that women are to hide and only disclose with their male doctors. Although, it should be stated that not all physicians are in fact male, however, the profession as a whole operates within a gendered discourse that demarcates the knowledge of the female body and reproductive system of science, and as a result leaves women out. As Azucena informs us after learning about Judy's illness: “En esta ciudad nadie tiene derecho a preguntar nada, el dolor es una cuestión privada” (74). Judy and Azucena cultivate a strange relationship when Judy believes her husband Fabio to have a romantic interest in Azucena after seeing them speak at an art gallery. Judy confronts Azucena at her home and according to the narrator, Judy herself appears to be acting a part: “Veo a Judy Palas en caída vertical hacia la imploración. Extrañamente, en su comentario hay algo ridículo que la salva. Parece actuando. Siempre actuando, como en ópera” (119). Judy too has to live up to her

iconic status and in so doing has assumed an identity that exists only for an audience. The two women form a curious dichotomy. Judy represents the supreme female figure, while Azucena refers to herself as “la rara, la huérfana melancólica, la del contraste, la pequeña bitch que un día aprenderá a no sentir piedad. Que aplastará a los grillos con la suela de su tacón” (43). After the confrontation, the two begin to spend time with each other throughout the course of the novel. Both seem to envy one another, trapped in the confinement of their *prescribed* body images.

Turning towards body theorist Susan Bordo, her Foucauldian-based work grapple with this very obsession of surveillance constituted in a set of norms that the body, specifically the female body, internalizes and therefore emanates. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993) she questions the notions and aesthetics of feminine beauty in the United States, and argues that they have been socially constructed and deeply impact mainstream popular culture. She explores how the perpetual transmission of inaccessible images of femininity have led to physical disorders such as anorexia, bulimia (more commonly seen in women), excessive dieting and hysteria as consequential disorders. However, according to Bordo, these disorders are *conditions* and not pathological but logical results of Western culture.

One of Rivero’s *Chameleon women*, Ingrid Núñez demonstrates how the pressure to “discipline” one’s body succumbs to extreme measures in order to meet such expectations. In one emblematic scene, Ingrid hosts a fancy dinner/reunion in her illustrious for the upper class women who all attended the same prestigious preparatory school. In this scene, Rivero showcases how the women’s obsession with beauty is paramount. And when introducing the character, Ingrid, Azucena describes her to the

reader as: “una princesa neogótica en un palacio lleno de luz y monstruos de porcelana china... Por instantes, Ingrid se parece a su casa, lujosa y burlesca, y pese a ello, triste” (136-137). The narrator reveals to the reader the latent story behind Ingrid’s allegedly “perfect” life. Azucena, pulls back the heavy curtain to show the reader the haunting realization of Ingrid’s *imperfect* life.

Although Ingrid represents the epitome of “having it all”, Azucena notes an underlying desolation. During the party, Azucena becomes overwhelmed by the conversations, gossip and the never-ending sob stories. The narrator begins her creative internal monologue and crafts a story of the women gathered at Ingrid’s house. She imagines a group of canines licking each other’s wounds, all the while showing their teeth ready to snap or attack. These seemingly perfect women of high society are likened to wild crazed dogs. Nausea and disgust gets the best of Azucena, and she quickly escapes heading towards to bathroom, the vomit is moving upward about to explode, when she reaches the bathroom, opens the door to find Ingrid bent over the toilet vomiting. Looking up at Azucena, Ingrid discloses that:

Estoy en tratamiento, querida, en realidad no es tan grave, sé controlarlo. Otras mujeres deben controlar cosas más graves, mucho más graves, maridos celosos que las golpean, infidelidades descaradas, soledad, pobreza. Esto es nada, esto se cura con voluntad. Y en realidad: ¿sabes? No necesito la voluntad, creo que me veo delgada. (138)

What interests me here are two main dynamics: first, following Julia Kristeva’s theorization of the abject, these women, are plagued mentally by societal bodily pressures at the same time they are physically rejecting them. Representations of illness, in turn, can be read as resistance. Second is the paradox that is set up surrounding the competing dynamics of control/power and treatment/healing as exemplified by the case of Ingrid.

Her misconceptions and distortions about her own condition lead her to believe that she holds power over her body. She as a woman is doing “her part,” controlling and managing her body in order to fit the image prescribed to her by socio-cultural channels. However, she acknowledges that she is in treatment for her condition of “obsessive control.” At the same time, she places the guilt and obligation of her disorder on herself, but she also takes it further by blaming women for husbands that cheat and abuse them. She states that it is women’s responsibility to “control” situations of abuse. Ingrid has internalized these sexist gendered notions dealing with beauty and abuse and therefore when women don’t comply properly in her mind, the blame falls on the women themselves. Azucena stunned by Ingrid, stares at her and ponders:

Asumo que así, le creo ¿No crees que me veo bien delgada?
Sure. Todas podemos controlar la náusea. Solo que ahora miro a Ingrid y la envidia se deforma. Enano horrible de uñas largas, la envidia es ahora un duende flacucho y suplicante. Un duende inmensamente apenado. (138)

Right before her eyes Ingrid transforms into a goblin-like creature, paradoxically through her abjection. Women are connected through their collective nausea and illnesses they experience (breast cancer, depression, bulimia). These illnesses, which shatter the misconception of perfection are catalysts for Azucena’s narration and also, as I will show, her journal writing. The once felt envy towards Ingrid dissolves, and she now only sees a skinny imploring character of fantasy. The conditions that women develop in order to subscribe to the “beauty myth” ironically turns them into horrid creatures, as Azucena describes. In her well-known book *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (1991), Naomi Wolfe explains that as women break through sexist barriers and build up equality standards, gaining more social power and prominence, the

expectations to adhere to standards of physical beauty has increased for them. The metaphor of the chameleon is that women like Ingrid must consciously change their outer appearance in fear of not being able to survive in heteronormative society without adhering to the standards of physical beauty.

Shortly after the incident at Ingrid's house, Alessandro confides in Azucena that many other women he sees suffer from identical problems and in an effort to show the common infirmity suffered by all, he leaves her with his notes regarding the different women:

Alessandro dijo que en estos papeles hay autenticidad, y sin embargo, se parecen tanto a otros diarios de mujeres que no conozco, cada una de tus emociones escritas las he leído en otros diarios de emociones, Azu, azulita, como si todas las mujeres fueran la misma, como si tú fueras todas ellas. ¿Sabes? Empiezo a creer que esa paranoia existencial cuya de si divorciarse amando o estar casada odiando es el mejor síntoma de normalidad. (109)

Alessandro considers the women's similar conditions of existential paranoia as a symptom of normality. He describes all his female patients as one and the same, hence his earlier diagnosis of "patologías matrilineales." This monolithic characterization diminishes any type of individuality among the women. At the same time, this negative characterization gives a sort of license to Azucena to assume authorial power over these women's lives. Azucena takes these descriptions and becomes a *portavoz* for the women, creating a collective female voice in her journal.

As a result, Azucena uses her diary to rewrite the voices of Alessandro's patients as fictional representations. By fictionalizing these troubled or mentally tormented women, Azucena disrupts the constrictive taxonomies that classify them with regard to their gender and illness. Rather than documenting Azucena's ailments, Rivero, through

her protagonist, *re-strategizes* the journal to tell the untold stories of the women. This space that was intended to restrict Azucena's thoughts and feelings, transforms into a space of spectacular literary ingenuity, a collection of the stories of the *Chameleon Women* of Santa Cruz, Bolivia. The stories are deal with body issues and women's objectification through tropes of disfigurement and *desdoblamiento*. It is in the transformation of the textual domain that is used to "treat" and "regulate" her body that renders new growth and permits Azucena to assume literary and personal agency in her decision revealed on the last page of the novel, to ultimately ask her husband for a divorce.

From Alessandro's notes, she inscribes her own fictional representation of various women, including striking representations of Judy Palas. The journal represents a plurality of voices while ironically employs Azucena's authorial control. She describes her personal change, writing in the third person as someone new: "Va emergiendo una Azucena desconocida y hasta desconcertante, alguien que me dará trabajo, alguien que deberé investigar para permitirle el ingreso a mi existencia. No queda ningún documento de mí misma" (109). This new Azucena, is surprising but at the same time extraordinary. Slowly the emergent Azucena will consume what is left of the old leaving, no trace of the previous woman. This assertion foreshadows the protagonist's flight from her old life into the new, which is realized by leaving her husband in the final scene of the novel, fully actualizing her fantasy of progressing without Claudio.

Anxious to read the fragments of other women's diaries, Azucena swiftly reads through the materials that Alessandro has left her:

Devoro el folder Amarillo, donde coexisten apretados los testimonios de otras mujeres. También reconozco

fragmentos de mi diario de emociones, fragmentos subrayados... Se trata, por supuesto, de diarios anónimos. En algunas hojas, solo están registradas las iniciales, señales azarosas que intento asociar a las caras que he visto durante todos estos meses de persecución onanística. A.F. es Angélica Fernández o, más sofisticado, Angie Fernand; B.O. es Bernarda Oliver; I.N. es Llona Nueces, o—quien sabe—Ingrid Núñez. Solo dos letra saltan con el resorte de la certeza; J.P. No es, no puede ser otra, que Judy Palas. Recorro su historia casi sin respirar. Al concluirla estoy conminada a reescribirla para poner en ella lo que Judy Palas no consigue expresar. Me atribuyo el derecho de la inferencia, me asigno la tarea de inmiscuirme en su vida para derrotar de una vez y para siempre el fantasma glorioso de su belleza. Habla de persecuciones, pesadillas con sudor tatuado en el cuerpo, un fin que justifica todos sus medios. Su belleza como único medio. Y el origen de su Miedo. Someto a Judy Palas a mi lenguaje, la domino y la poseo *for ever and ever*. (140)

Azucena recognizes the various women's initials from the social group in which the women are all part of. Finally, she sees Judy's initials and hurriedly reads through her journal. She decides that she will rewrite Judy's story, expressing what she believes Judy herself was/is unable to. Azucena reads about Judy's horrible nightmares that have haunted and influenced much of her behavior. Her beauty has been her primary means of control and operation, yet at the same time, is her greatest fear because of its ephemeral nature. In this moment, Azucena assumes the privilege of revising her diary to conquer the phantom of her beauty that has plagued so many women, including Judy herself.

Azucena first writes a story titled: "Los honorarios," which discusses Judy's trepidation that her husband Fabio, has been having an affair since her diagnosis of breast cancer. She seeks out the professional help of private detective Montaña to pursue her husband and to ascertain the motive for his relationship with Azucena. She communicates to Montaña her reasons for spying on her husband: "Me han diagnosticado cáncer en la

mama izquierda, justo donde se entibia el corazón, por lo tanto, con éxito, dejaré de ser hermosa...”(143). Judy believes that since she is diseased, she is defective and therefore not worthy of the love and devotion her husband has given her. Rivero is also highlighting the paranoia discussed from the beginning of the novel as generated through media and societal gendering. What the detective finds is nothing close to resembling betrayal:

Las fotografías hablan por sí solas: Fabio Palas tomando café con una mujercita común; Fabio Palas retirando la silla a una señora de esas que visitan galerías para comprar cuadros que luego colocarán en sus recibidores...La rutina de Fabio Palas es un termómetro exacto. Los martes, ciclos de cine; los jueves, noches de jazz; los viernes, romances en pareja (con Judy Palas). (146)

The detective reveals that Fabio has befriended Azucena, “una mujercita común” but otherwise is completely faithful to his wife, Judy. Azucena, in revisionist fashion, depicts herself befriending Fabio as a “common woman” and not as a threat to Judy. She also writes the fragility of Judy’s self-esteem that sees beauty as her only virtue and form of power. Azucena rewrites the model’s nightmares and fears of inadequacy deprived of her physical beauty. Without her breasts, Judy believes she holds no real self-worth. Azucena transcribes this Judy as weak and vulnerable, contrary to how the model is portrayed to the public. She dominates the character through fiction whereas in reality Judy represents the icon and fantasy of all the other women of the social group. In a strange turn, Azucena ends the story insinuating that Judy performs oral sex on the detective. This obscene aesthetic becomes her trademark, adding uncanny twists.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Azucena writes other stories that present strange, illogical or fantastic elements and will be reserved for future examination. For example, Azucena writes one story “Primer Amor,” which is a metaphorical piece that addresses her daughter’s future with the use of vampires and princesses. Azucena assumes the identity of her own daughter, Irina and writes in the third person. Her young daughter to whom she refers to as

Azucena strips the model of her beauty and turns her into a desperate woman, taking any confirmation of her worth. This scene serves as a metaphor for the model's feelings of despair and loss of a personal identity. In this sense, Judy has bought into the myth as well, believing that holding herself to a higher standard of beauty would bring salvation.

In another story that stars Judy Palas, titled "Remake," Azucena paints a very different Judy that is now hospitalized ready to undergo her mastectomy. In this story, Azucena controls the character once again; however, Judy now finds contentment and a sense of liberation from her beauty. Azucena writes: "Su fama era una existencia incorpórea y traicionera, la abandonadaba cuando ella la necesitaba con desesperación casi infantil" (193). Azucena writes that the media and magazines that had once glorified her were the same entities that now devour her and make a mockery of her illness:

"Cirugía para la modelo Dove", se atrevía el chisme prefabricado; "Judy Palas sometida a Spa"... Pero en fin, las revistas y los programas de farándula dejaron de ocuparse de ella y Judy fue tornándose pálida y delgada. Sus pómulos edificaban en su rostro bello el aspecto equívoco de los enfermos. (193)

Azucena discloses the transient nature of the media and magazines that Judy once thought to be her advocates. Once the illness has advanced, she finds herself without the support of the people who once championed her beauty. These mediums are no longer

Nené or baby is now imaged to be turning sixteen years old. The story ends with a vampire disguised as a male friend of Claudio's, Irina's father and Azucena's husband, flying into Irina's room on the night of the sweet sixteen party and seducing her sexually.

In another story dealing with the female body, "9691" she writes as B.O. (Bernarda Oliver), a collector of Reader's Digest that is only missing the 1969 edition. The young woman tracks down the missing number and the professor who owns the copy invites her to his house. However, the professor has a strange collection of his own, women's mammilla or nipples. He tells her that he will exchange the Reader's Digest copy for one of her nipples. The story ends eerily with B.O. clutching her edition while leaving the professor's home and imagining how he choked as she strangled him. Again, the female body is objectified by the male but the female in this story rebels and ends of murdering the Professor, declaring she will begin a new collection of things and people that end with the letters "OR."

concerned about the model in the same way they had been, because facilitating and capitalizing on the “beauty myth” is the only interest that they bear. Azucena writes that the once lionized model dreams up her own fictitious plot, starring herself. She thinks about several grotesque films that recently have gained acclaim such as “El útero parlante” and “el remake de “Frankenstein,” and contemplates why she cannot re-create herself into a beautiful monster. In front of the mirror, she stares at her chest, her blouse unbuttoned and her hair in disarray. Azucena writes that Judy, while looking at herself, makes a decision: “Una vez ejecutada su genial idea, la sensación de abejas se iría y a ella solo le quedaría la paz, y la belleza...” In this moment, Judy decides to take control of her body and not leave the mutilation in the hands of the male surgeon. She begins to perform her *own* double mastectomy as Azucena portrays, overcoming the pain quickly with every incision while repeating the voice of the doctor’s horrible last words to the model “cancer en el seno izquierdo”... “mujer de un solo seno, como un error, una marca de Satán?” (195). She cannot tolerate the idea of only having one breast and takes matters into her own hands, as Azucena explains:

Satisfecha con su obra, Judy miró los charcos sangrientos que le sonreían desde el espejo, ocupando el lado derecho y el lado izquierdo de su tórax, construyendo un equilibrio distinto. Dos rosas púrpuras florecían allí como la promesa de una nueva humanidad. Tomó, entonces, la navaja y la limpió con su propia blusa. En el suelo, aún temblorosos, sus pechos enfermos parecían dos panes pálidos a los que Judy nunca más extrañaría. (195)

Through the narration of Azucena, Judy embraces her fear of living without her breasts. She transforms into a sculptor viewing her body and her mutilation as beautiful rather than abject. The spaces where her breasts used to be now remain bloody pools that appear like roses, which according to Azucena symbolize the promise of a new humanity.

Rivero, through Azucena's newfound authorship, postulates a new kind of humanity by destroying the "beauty myth" and the perfect female body, through disfigurement.

Azucena gives power to Judy through fiction. The maiming of her own breasts represents the death of the media's control and commercialization over her body, in particular, by advertising companies and magazines. The sick breasts that lay trembling on the floor signify the unhealthiness and infirmity that comes with such perpetuation of unnatural physical beauty. At the same time, this dismemberment also symbolizes a rebirth through bodily *imperfection* rather than perfection.⁸⁷ The points of incision and pain are abject and raw, which Azucena transforms through literature as productive wounds that flourish like ruby red roses. Judy will no longer miss her breasts that she once thought defined her as a woman and as a person. Azucena permits Judy to find agency through fiction while the author simultaneously locates a discursive agency that begins in the text, not the body. Finally, Azucena ends the story with a pain filled yet happy Judy Palas: "Judy pensó por un momento que podría arrojar esa material a la pecera que adornaba la suite hospitalaria y desde cuyo líquido amniótico un anfibio con cara de perro le sonreía. "Hey," le dijo Judy, la voz temblaba de dolor, pero también de felicidad" (196). Again through the use of shocking and grotesque imagery, Acuzena writes women's struggle with imperfection and pain. While acknowledging the dog faced fish and entertaining the idea of letting him feast on her now removed flesh, she imagines tossing her breasts in the fish tank located in her hospital room, and smiles. This image harkens back to an earlier scene of the women socializing at Ingrid Nuñez's house and symbolically cast as a pack of wild dogs

⁸⁷ I can't help but make the association between Juan Carlos Onetti's *La vida breve*. In his 1950 classic, the protagonist Brausen, through his wife's mastectomy or mutilated breast as the character describes, imagines a complex story of the town Santa María, portraying himself as Diaz Grey, the doctor. It is through this "void" that the narrator generates creative prose.

through the narration of Azucena. Again through this same narrative voice, invokes the image of the dog elucidates a *perro come perro* metaphor. Competition is constantly reinforced among women through the facilitation of ideas of spousal infidelity and the female deficient body that needs fixing to uphold to impracticable ideas of beauty. What is at stake is the issue of female complicity and the perpetuation of unrealistic and unattainable patriarchal norms for female beauty. The irony with female complicity to patriarchal norms is that it reinforces these very norms and sets the stakes higher, making the competition more fierce for women. Therefore, representing Judy as acknowledging this dynamic and smiling represents the conscious effort to disentangle the harmful female cycle that pits women against one another.

Out of Body Experience: A Textual Transformation

The medical diary has now fully become a creative journal for Azucena. “Jalo la pitita púrpura con la que marco mi diario y la piel de bosque del cuaderno lo calma todo. Escribo para enloquecer” (109). The journal stimulates a nonconformist Azucena that rebels against her position in the world and female embodiment.

Another important aspect to Rivero’s work is the physical way in which the *diario de emociones* is represented. In the original manuscript, the reader is made aware of Azucena’s inscription in the diary due to not only the change in font but also the fact that this new font is printed upon a copy of a notebook. This creates the illusion that the protagonist is inscribing her writings in an actual notebook. Since it is the same notebook as seen in figure 3 and figure 4 below and the same font used for the *diario de emociones* that Azucena begins at the beginning of the novel, the reader can assume that it is the same *diario* that has now evolved into a fully creative writing space. As the novel

progresses, it is the stories of imperfection that counter the myriad stories of perfection that Azucena and her social group engage with constantly through magazines such as

Cosmopolitan

Figure 4.3

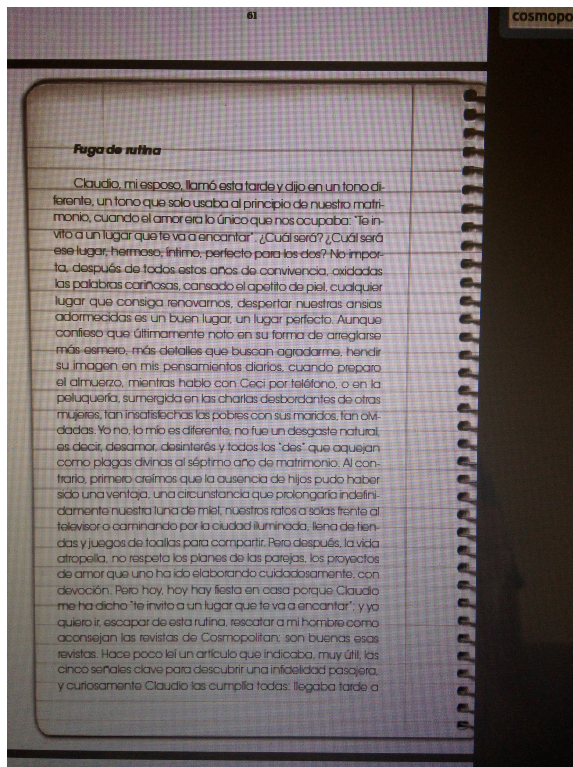
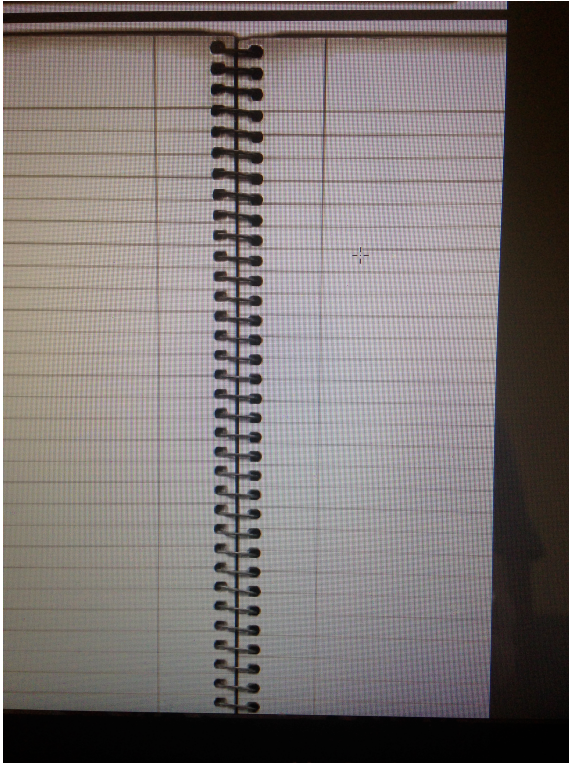


Figure 4.4



Azucena writes many different stories in her creative journal after receiving Alessandro's notes. Some stories demonstrate examples of female imperfection while other controversial narratives like "Éxtasis," which describes Santa Teresa de Ávila in physical sexual ecstasy and questions the relationship to/with scripture and God. In the story "Liliana llorando," inspired by a patient of Alessandro, Azucena also explores the hypocrisy of rape and of the victim blaming that is often involved in such cases. In a subsequent story, "Perro callejero" the same woman, after experiences of the police's refusal to take her accusations of rape seriously, she decides to accept what has happened to her. The woman blames herself and willingly allows herself to be violated again by the same man. This tale serves as a metaphor of female complacency and the internalization of powerful notions of gendering and sexuality.

The narrator and protagonist's last piece, "A.A. (Azucena Antes)" is an introspective story that investigates the old Azucena as well as the new. In the narrative, she separates herself from what she has become, an artistic and daring writer who entertains her fantasies, as abject as they may seem, to criticize the world around her, to look back in time and observe her prior self. She writes in the third person, discerning how the new Azucena has taken over, and leaves little or no room for the *Azucena antes* to return. In a specific scene, she is making love to Claudio and comments: "De tanto abandono, a veces se olvida de volver, y queda vagando por aquí y por allá como un alma en pena" (200). The old Azucena has gone astray like that of a "lost soul" and will not find her way back.

In the story, Claudio hopes that *Azucena antes* returns and for some time he believes that she does by "taking" care of her body, wearing makeup, and exercising. Azucena dreads the possibility of being pregnant, for she could not resist another life inside her which she calls a kind of "internal music." She explains that since the birth of her youngest daughter everything has changed: "Cuando ella volvió a sí, la recibió aquella musiquita y supo que estaba embarazada. Pero aquella vez, es decir, desde entonces, todo cambió" (202). She no longer wants the life she has been living and yearns to be free of her domestic confinements. Azucena looks down upon the new version of herself that has occupied her body, critiquing this new women's actions since assuming control:

Azucena mira desde arriba cómo la otra le cambia la vida. Los tintes de pelo son inverosímiles; malcría a la Nené y a Martín con una irresponsabilidad espantosa...y encima va a cumplir treinta, y como si ella, la extraña los hubiera sufrido se va a llevar la gloria de los treinta. Ahora que recuerda, cuando dejó su cuerpo dormido, Claudio a un costado. La

extraña se ha atrevido a engordar dos kilos. Pero el colmo es que la extraña, que alguna manera la conoce, ¿de donde?, se cree escritora y ha escrito un montón de mentiras sobre ella, calumnias, infamias, injurias. Piensa publicarlos, dice muy fresca, y ella tratando de evitar esa catástrofe después de la cual, no se atreverá, no querrá volver a su cuerpo. Entonces querrá renunciar a todo, incluso a Claudio. (203)

The two internal selves/identities are engaging in a dialogue wherein the old self does not desire to return to her body. The prior self criticizes “la extraña” for her explicit selfishness, a foreign concept to the Azucena at the beginning of the novel. The suffering of the prior self is demonstrated in the reiteration of regulatory discourse intended to disparage “la extraña.” The writer is the identity that will triumph, leaving the tormented body along with the old Azucena. This involves an upheaval of her life as she once knew it in order to destroy the space in which that body operated and functioned. She has finally reached her decision with regard to which direction she wants to take her life, and it is with writing, authorship and art that the new Azucena will reclaim the agency to choose.

Conclusion: El desmaquillante

This novel exemplifies the deconstruction of the imagined racialized and gendered imperialist female body of the elite Bolivian minority. The conditions that the different women characters suffer from are logical but also serve as building blocks for a literary aesthetic of illness that deconstructs this illusory body of the Bolivian imaginary. If these women are not pathological, they are responding plausibly to the space in which they live.

The very idea of the “emotion log” itself performs a critique of the subordinate position of women, and their limited space in regard to literary production within the

canon. In addition, it pokes fun at the idea that women are overly emotional and therefore in fact *need* this space to express their “hysterical” sentimental feelings. Past genres designated as “feminine” in Latin American literature, such as epistolary writing, journaling, testimonials etc., have continually been discredited for their lack of literary sophistication and have been questioned by the canon if in fact they can be judged as “literary” at all. Azucena is supposed to record her emotions in the “private domain,” the only adequate place for women to express themselves, concealed from the public sphere. Since the idea of “logging her emotions” seems antithetical to her psychosocial progression, Azucena begins to craft surrealistic and fantastic prose that builds on existing characters in her life, ultimately creating a new one as well. The journal portrays an imaginative and talented Azucena that is starkly different from the hysterical, body fearing thirty year-old upper-class married woman that regularly visits Alessandro, her male doctor. By using a traditional psychiatric strategy and turning this form of writing into literature, she in effect uses the very tools of the science of psychoanalysis to disassemble the house.

Ironically, the dichotomy that is set up between the idealized body and Azucena’s issues dealing with embodiment eventually lead to a literary realm free from societal confinements, pressures and stereotypes. Moreover, the protagonist’s mental illness, her obsession with her body, and her creative literary journey can all be read as a metaphor for women trying to write within the male dominated Latin American literary tradition. In this sense, it is artistic literary production that serves as her catharsis rather than prescribed medications or therapy. Her literary freedom empowers Rivero’s protagonist

to such an extent that she does in fact find the courage to leave her husband on the last page of the novel and begin her new life, with a new body—a body of literature.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the in depth use of feminine genres, (as defined as minor genres primarily associated with the feminine) particularly the epistolary form and the personal diary, to revise and reconstitute them as strategic literary devices for Latin American women authors of fiction. Used as literary tropes, the women writers studied here, are able to counter and reform other genres that have been constituted within a patriarchal framework. Furthermore, I have analyzed the efficacy of the fictionalization of these forms in disrupting the restricting nomenclatures that the term “feminine genres” may imply. The theoretical work postulated in this dissertation places a conscious personal political on the term “feminine” and rebrands the epistolary and the dairy used in fiction as “feminine genres” to showcase the way in which these varieties can be *restrategized* to perform complex feminist critiques on sociopolitical, philosophical, and literary dominant discourses. The fictionalization of the genres is key in establishing relationships to “real experiences” and to elevate their status to that of high literature. In this sense, feminine and feminist agency is found through authorship and a re-claiming of genres in fiction often denoted as minor and/or nonfiction to then probe and participate in masculinist canonical trends. This agency is a textual intervention that elusively escapes literary and gender relegation and challenges the existing Latin American literary canon and its implicit taxonomies therein.

This project set out to open up spaces for new theorizations dealing with notions of “feminine” genres. Since establishing the terms “feminine” and “genre” carry many different meanings, a major goal of this study was to *reappropriate* the conjoining terms

into a singular phrase referring to strategic literary practices and to uncover the intricate literary function when utilized by Latin American fiction writers. It is imperative to not only revise the term “feminine” but also to contribute to the subversive power of such varieties for women fiction writers. I have shown that dominant discourse has left women without a voice, establishing and imposing unquestioned norms that have stifled women’s narrative with its own generic terms. In the introduction, I called attention to Josefina Ludmer’s assertion that personal genres should be analyzed to transform the public sphere through its interaction with the private sphere. I maintain that the four women writers examined in this dissertation: Elena Poniatowska, Sara Sefchovich, Marilene Felinto and Giovanna Rivero, unscramble Ludmer’s discursive conundrum by employing genres that have been historically viewed as minor to task dominant discourse that has left women historically silent.

Chapter one revealed the revisionist potential of Poniatowska’s use of the epistolary genre in recreating twenty-one letters written from the perspective of the Russian artist, Agelina Beloff to her husband, Diego Rivero who abandoned her to return to Mexico in 1921. In *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela*, the acclaimed Mexican author annuls the position of the historically famed Mexican muralist, Diego and substitutes this absence with the female artist, Beloff. The author uplifts Beloff to the status of equal to Rivero by establishing a detailed narrative of her trajectory as an artist and not merely a footnote in history books as the second wife of Rivero. Subsequently, Poniatowska writes a female *Künstlerroman*, an artist’s novel that mirrors the author’s *own* perspective, all the while using fiction to nullify the simplistic representations of the artist in historical texts such as Bertram Wolfe’s *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera*. Through the articulation of

the private, Poniatowska disrupts the public/canonical notion of a *Künstlerroman* and revises its dominant template, often starring a male artist and written by a male author.

Chapter two examines Poniatowska's compatriot, Sara Sefchovich's *Demasiado Amor* (1990), demonstrating the author's extraordinary literary talent. The author successfully interlaces two parallel stories of unrequited love, comparable to Poniatowska through the manipulation of the epistolary form and the personal diary. The first story showcased in the protagonist's Beatriz's personal diary tells of an impossible love story between the protagonist and her dominant male lover. The other story, of the illusory notion of desire working as a prostitute is told in her letters to her sister living abroad in Italy. Sefchovich's provocative critique, dismantles the deceptive idea that female empowerment may be found in sex work. In contrast, Sefchovich shatters this romantic notion with parody. By recasting the literary function of feminine genres, in the case of Sefchovich, she presents stories of disastrous love that undo romantic fairy-tale discourses that perpetuate unrealistic myths of love and constraining roles for women. The author *restrategizes* personal feminine genres to execute a complex satire of the romance novel and of important views of sex and desire within a patriarchal Mexican discursive space.

Similar to Sefchovich, Brazilian Marilene Felinto plays with concepts of time in the reconstitution of the letter and diary. Felinto utilizes these forms to write a *crônica-manifesto* of sorts. Through the employment of feminine genres and language, Felinto reshapes the Brazilian *crônica*, the singular genre celebrated as "truly" national. This chapter establishes the disparity between the so-called national genre and the lack of women's literary presence in said genre. It also sheds light on the *crônica* being the

oldest Brazilian genre written by women, however, their participation has been extremely limited. By building on Brazilian modernist foundations, Felinto with her journalistic talent, upsets the national masculine tradition by writing her version of the antithetical *crônica*, which is simultaneously feminine, feminist and vulgar. The author's language is cutting, slicing through the dominant male tradition violently, all through the deployment of the personal sphere. Like Poniatowska, Felinto's work is too revisionist, insofar as Rísia represents the underrepresented character in a Brazilian historical and literary context, who is both female and of African descent.

Analogous to Felinto, Giovanna Rivero utilizes an aesthetic of the abject to paint narratives of vivid imagery to form a poetics of rupture. This chapter analyzes Rivero's transformation of the medical diary for creative and cathartic purposes on the protagonist's terms, not that of her psychoanalyst. The journal, first introduced as a "Lacanian" instrument, is converted into a space of literary originality, that disentangles the protagonist, Azucena, from the masculinist discourse from which she is diagnosed by her psychoanalyst. Rivero overturns the space that is believed to tap into a pathological female unconsciousness and demonstrate a gendered understanding of hysteria. This permits the author's protagonist authorial control to reconstitute this very space, the medical journal. The Bolivian author's complex layering of questions regarding heteronormative masculinist discourse in relation to the female body, notions of beauty and matrimony together all frame the novel. Rivero, through the deployment of the personal diary, mockingly critiques psychoanalytical discourse dealing that conflates notions of mental illness and being female. At the same time, illness is connected with the process of contesting racialized gender norms. Infirmary is used as a trope to

deconstruct the female body and strip it of its harmful gendering and racializing seen in publications like *Cosmopolitan* and *Vanidades*, that perpetuate a neo-colonial sense of self-hatred. This deconstruction is creatively written in the journal that Azucena ironically operates for her own imaginative pleasures, thus proving to be cathartic. The artistic release also translates as a construction of women's stories of *imperfection* as an abject rupture to the gender constraints placed on women and to counter *glossy* discourses of perfection.

To reiterate, this dissertation examines these four women author's strategic use of "feminine genres" for literary destabilizing purposes and to execute feminist critiques of the particular sociocultural contexts from which they write. These writers are able to employ genres that have traditionally been viewed as minor and/or feminine and re-form them to disrupt other literary genres and/or currents dominated by men. All four women operate within in a postmodern framework of revisionary literary characteristics. For example, Poniatowska's work is both historical fiction and revisionist as the author stages "real" individuals in her novel. Felinto, draws upon the mythological legend of the warrior women of Tijucopapo to establish an untainted feminine genealogy. In doing so, she revises the universal and gendered understanding of the Brazilian *crônica*. In addition, the author resurrects and recovers the mythical warrior women of Tijucopapo to write them as part of the protagonist's new feminine genealogy, thus transforming the legendary into historical processes. The notion of a tainted feminine lineage is also touched upon in Rivero's work. In her novel, psychoanalytical discourse categorizes hysteria as a matrilineal pathology. The symbolism of classifying a women's tradition as inherently ill, is paradoxically reworked through the deployment of a genre associated

with the feminine and/or a feminine tradition in Latin American women's writing. In this vein, the notion of victimization is controlled and manipulated through the textual authority of the women authors.

This dissertation strengthens the argument for theorization of feminine genres as a distinctive literary fictional technique, but also argued for the articulation of a feminine self. The fictionalization of feminine genres, as tactical and as a malleable space/tool for the Latin American female author, provides a theoretical framework for reading gendered writing as subversive and revolutionary.

This project contributes to the notion of a feminine authority not strictly dependent on the body or masculine/feminine difference, but rather, posits authority in feminine genres. This conception also provides avenues for future research, such as generating new types of feminist discourse that diverge from conventional models, primarily rooted in theorization of the female body. For example, some feminists have aimed their work on reclaiming an inherent female space, the female body to inform feminist theory, like Cixous, Irigaray and Gubar and Gilbert. Others have focused on gender or queer theory that dismisses gender as a biological category all together, as in the work of Butler and Halberstam.

At the same time, Butler's work provides rich insights with regard to gender and political feminism. In the post-feminist work, *Gender Trouble*, Butler presents sex as cultural that works in promoting heterosexuality and phallogocentrism, which consequently normalizes gender and desire. According to Butler, these very constructions become internalized and personalized through the repetition of stylized acts throughout one's given life therefore creating the façade of an "essential" and "natural" connection,

and leading to the determination of a ontological notion of gender. Therefore, feminist political strategy must consist of subverting and displacing dominant norms for gender identity and compulsory sexuality. Where Butler claims that identity politics constrains the very subjects for which feminisms presume to speak, I contend that the concept of subversion remains an important tool/strategy to and for feminist politics. This is also advantageous when applying this understanding to literary studies, especially in contexts such as Latin America where women's visibility has lagged behind that of other regions like the U.S. and Europe.

Finally, the question of feminine authority and the female author in Latin America is tied to a legacy of women with strong political and experimental voices. Although differences may be drawn between Anglo-American and Latin American feminist themes, the intention of this project was to touch not only on women's exclusion from the literary canon and create more visibility but also to examine the unique positionings of Latin American feminist schools of thought, such as poetics of rupture, fictionalization of history, and the utilization of feminine genres (diary and epistolary). Instrumental texts like *Mujer que sabe latín* (Castellanos, 1973), and Patricia González and Eliana Ortega's *La sartén por el mango* (1985) are major theoretical references of Latin American women's writing, which set the stage in the 70s and 80s for critical feminist work in Latin America. Surprisingly, while the theorists would have rejected at the time any understanding and/or conception of "gendered writing," the study presented here demonstrates the critical importance of feminine genres for women writers in making visible a once invisible tradition. At the same time, it substantiates the efficacy of a political feminist reading of naming/branding a genre as feminine for unique subversive

literary possibilities. Lastly, it delivers a theoretical framework for the reconstitution of these genres to move from the personal to the public. The women authors examined here and their use of feminine genres enrich and introduces new spaces to interrogate and critique this already established literary Latin American female lineage.

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