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The Female Identity in Rosario Ferrâe's Papeles de Pandora

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THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Marcie Lynn Pratt for the Master of Arts in Spanish were presented December 8, 1997, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.


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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Marcie Lynn Pratt for the Master of Arts in Spanish presented December 8, 1997.

Title: The Female Identity in Rosario Ferré's *Papeles de Pandora*.

This thesis examines four stories from Rosario Ferré's first book of short stories, *Papeles de Pandora*: "La muñeca menor," "Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres," "Amalia," and "La bella durmiente." In *Papeles de Pandora*, Ferré explores the portrayal of female identity by dismantling the traditional roles that are assigned to women in Puerto Rican, patriarchal society. This thesis analyzes the ways in which Ferré skillfully deconstructs and (re)constructs the identity and sense of self of her female protagonists.

To demonstrate Ferré's deconstruction and (re)construction of the female identity, This study focuses on Ferré's use of recurring motifs such as: the use of doll-like figures, the juxtaposition of black and white, and fantastical elements. These elements, evocative of lucid tendency of postmodern theory, underscore the process by which women either conform to or reject the roles imposed upon them by patriarchal society. Asking the reader for a momentary "suspension of disbelief," Ferré employs those devices to dramatize the ways in which patriarchal society's tools of oppression are used against women. Ferré then appropriates these tools and uses them to denounce the injustices committed against women. With this act, Ferré

makes evident the individual's ability to build a new, and more authentic identity in an oppressive social context.

THE FEMALE IDENTITY
IN ROSARIO FERRÉ'S *PAPELES DE PANDORA*

by
MARCIE LYNN PRATT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
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Introduction

The Female Identity

Diríamos que a medida cortábamos la cebolla, llorábamos; pero al pelar las capas artificialmente superpuestas sobre nuestra identidad como mujer latinoamericana, encontrábamos un centro.¹

Rosario Ferré began her writing career in the early 1970's as the editor of the magazine, *Zona de carga y descarga*, which specialized in new and young Puerto Rican authors and their literature. Since editing the magazine, her literary production has consisted of short stories, poetry, novels, children's stories, and literary criticism (Heinrich 102-03). With the publication of her first book--a collection of short stories entitled *Papeles de Pandora*--Rosario Ferré became well known in her native country of Puerto Rico. The upper-class women were so offended by Ferré's language that they bought all of the copies, and the book soon became unavailable (*From Ire* 902).

In *Papeles de Pandora*, Ferré explores the idea of female identity by questioning the traditional roles that have been assigned to women in a patriarchal society. Her questioning inevitably leads to the exposure and denouncement of the injustices that society commits and has committed against women. In this thesis, I examine four stories from *Papeles de Pandora*: "La muñeca menor," "Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres," "Amalia," and "La bella durmiente." By focusing on the various narrative techniques that Ferré employs, I show how these four stories

exemplify Ferré's skill in the deconstruction and (re)construction of a sense of self and identity in her protagonists.²

The idea of a "female identity" or a "female subjectivity" is a concept that has traditionally been used, abused, applied, and created for and by everyone except woman herself. For centuries an identity, a set of characteristics that define or are unique to a certain personality of a particular entity, has been superimposed upon women by patriarchal society with attributes that correspond to the assigned role of the individual rather than the individual herself. Patriarchal society continuously limits the identity of women in order to perpetuate its own structure. In this thesis, the term "patriarchal society" refers specifically to Puerto Rican society and consists of a group of "male," upper-class, white beings who set the standards for the rest of society. "Male" does not necessarily signify someone of the male gender. As we will see in "La bella durmiente," the Reverend Mother Superior is a representative of patriarchal society because, as Carmen Rivera points out, she is an "asexual creature representing the masculine authority of the Church" (100). Each story contains representatives of patriarchal society who feel entitled to set limits for the female protagonists. Patriarchal society confines the identities of women by imposing a limited repertoire of acceptable roles for them, such as that of wife--whose duty is to please and obey her husband in all aspects--and that as mother--whose job is to take care of everything involving the children. While women are busy being a dutiful wife and mother, their appearance must be impeccable, beautiful enough to be an

adornment, doll-like. Their sense of identity is virtually non-existent beyond the confines of their prescribed role(s). Any manifestation of self beyond the established “norm” is seen as a threat to the position and authority of the representative of patriarchal society. María-Inés Lagos-Pope has noted that these limits often result in the articulation of frustration by female protagonists who have become aware of their confinement:

La identidad de los personajes femeninos, y en las que advertimos que la sociedad encasilla a las mujeres y les impone una imagen de sí mismas, limitándolas a un papel, ya sea el de madre, esposa, mujer sensual o artista, no sólo no les permite desarrollar sus propios intereses e inclinaciones, sino que contribuye a crear un sentimiento de frustración en la mujer. (748)

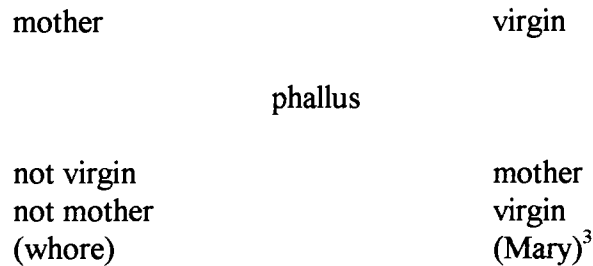
In other words, women in all aspects of life are continuously presented with a certain acceptable image. This image suppresses them and guides them to fulfill certain roles such as that of mother, wife, and as sexual object. Through their submission to the acceptable roles, a feeling of frustration is provoked within women which is expressed in constructive as well as self-destructive ways. The female protagonists in these stories show these productive and self-destructive practices through their journey in the deconstruction of their identity.

The female protagonists in Ferré's stories conform to the profiles mentioned by Lagos-Pope. For example, in “La muñeca menor,” the female protagonists are

continuously compared to and expected to resemble and represent the characteristics of a submissive, lifeless, and obedient woman created by patriarchal society. In “La muñeca menor,” Ferré addresses and recognizes the expected role(s) played by women, but ironically she dismantles these images by turning them into caricature through the use of dolls. All of the young women in this story are given dolls for every year of their life; the dolls are replicas of the girls for each stage of their life. The implied and accepted function for women by patriarchal society in this story is that of a decorative object. As Debra A. Castillo points out, the female protagonist is “the society woman as decorative/decorated doll, a lesser, because impermanent, work of art” (167).

In “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” the two female protagonists, Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra, represent two very different and distinct classes yet they are both oppressed by the same man. Isabel Luberza represents a white, upper-class, pure, obedient wife, and a sexually repressed woman, while Isabel la Negra exemplifies a black, lower-class, impure, obedient mistress, and a sexually liberated woman. As Margarite Fernández Olmos points out, both of these women depict typical female stereotypes, “on the one hand, the white, bourgeois, sexual-repressed female, legal and respectable wife and mother; on the other, the woman of color, forced into sexual liaisons with men of wealth and power because of an inferior economic status, representing the erotic and the sensual” (42). By presenting two women from different classes and emphasizing the stereotypes they are forced to

follow, Ferré underscores how patriarchal society oppresses all women regardless of their social class or racial background. The situation of the two female protagonists relates to the following diagram used by Castillo in her book *Talking Back, Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism*:



The diagram shows the pre-conceived notions of women. On the left, there are the assumed steps for women of lower-classes or of racial backgrounds and on the right are the presumed steps for white women of the upper-class. The dialectic “virgin/whore,” so predominant in Latin American literature as well as culture, has successfully communicated the impossible position for most women but has done nothing to dismantle this image nor to suggest a viable alternative. As we shall see, Rosario Ferré dismantles the image and suggests a viable alternative through her female protagonists, Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra.

In “Amalia” the identity of the female protagonist is intertwined with that of her doll, Amalia. The doll motif in this story is similar to one in “La muñeca menor” in which all of the characters are intertwined with a doll facsimile of themselves. The uncle in “Amalia,” as a representative of patriarchal society, is attempting to maintain the status and advantages of the colonial upper class in Puerto Rico. The implied

function for the female protagonist is that of a submissive, obedient, young woman who has the characteristics of a doll.

In “La bella durmiente” María, the female protagonist, is continuously fighting the constrictions of patriarchal society exemplified by father, husband, and church. She acts out an illusory freedom through the various heroines whose dances she performs. Ballet in this story is María’s only escape; however, given the social status of her family it is seen as a corruptive force and contrary to the standards that they have set for María. Or, as Lagos-Pope emphasizes, “Rosario Ferré presenta a la mujer como un individuo que se debate entre un Ser esencial y un No Ser estipulado por las convenciones sociales” (21). María attempts to enact her most essential sense of self through an artistic medium, but she can never find refuge from patriarchal society’s constrictions that attempt to confine her to the role of white, upper-class, respectable wife and mother.

In these four stories Ferré demonstrates how patriarchal society limits and defines the identities of the female protagonists while also showing how these women are able to break away from their confinements in the search for a new identity. In this thesis, I focus on the various narrative techniques that Ferré employs to evoke the confinement and frustration caused to women. To demonstrate these feelings, Ferré resorts to caricature, parody, symbolism, and metaphor, which denounce the injustices committed against women. She carefully deconstructs the imposed identities and then reconstructs them to present a new and more authentic identity.⁴

The act of “deconstruction” can be read as two-fold in Ferré’s short stories. On one hand, Ferré literally deconstructs or takes apart images of women in patriarchal society. On the other hand, deconstruction can be understood as a function of language that works to collapse oppositions such as white/black, high/low, light/dark, and nature/culture, resulting in a concentric and fluid deferral meaning (Eagleton 133). As described by Terry Eagleton, “Deconstruction tries to show how such oppositions in order to hold themselves in place, are sometimes betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves, or need to banish to the text’s margins certain niggling details which can be made to return and plague them” (133). In Ferré’s stories, deconstruction works to show the oppositions between the expectations and roles created by society for the female protagonists and the authentic roles created by the female protagonists for themselves. Ferré presents these oppositions and shows how society’s expectations are collapsed and the patriarchs’ delineating margins of imposed identity are destroyed, while the authentic roles created by the female protagonists return to transgress the margins. By returning to challenge the margins, the female protagonists in essence are (re)constructing a new authentic identity. As Paul de Man states in, *Blindness and Insight*, “However negative it may sound, deconstruction implies the possibility of rebuilding” (140). Therefore, the imposed identities of the female protagonists are deconstructed throughout the story, but by the end of each story they have reconstructed new, unique personalities for themselves or at least have suggested the possibility of doing so.

To dramatize the deconstruction and reconstruction of identity within the female protagonists, Ferré employs a variety of technical and thematic devices. In the subsequent chapters, I show how Ferré utilizes these devices in order to underscore the process in which women either conform to or reject the roles imposed upon them by patriarchal society. My analysis of Ferré's theme of female identity and of her technical devices is based on postmodernism's employment of inscription and subversion to deconstruct dominant discourse, in this case a patriarchal discourse.

Postmodern critical theory grew out of the impulse to find a new way of conceptualizing the function of art, architecture, politics, society, history, and literature in a post-structuralist milieu. As such, each critic will have his/her own thoughts about the theory based on its application. However, for literary analysis postmodernism can be seen as taking the form of a "self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said" (Hutcheon 1). It also can be thought of as a game of duplicity because it proposes an idea and at the same time it undermines the conventions it purports to challenge (Hutcheon 1-2). In Ferré's stories, she shows how patriarchal images of women contain within themselves the tendency to collapse into themselves and thereby reveal and undo the structures designed to hold them in place. For example, in "Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres," the dialectic set up by the husband / lover of the two Isabels' ends up being his own undoing. They use the collapse of his system to redefine their being while

simultaneously exposing the malefic tendency of his intentions. However, inherent in this duplicitous exercise is the action of questioning. Postmodernism challenges the underpinnings of Western literature and philosophical discourse. It questions the concept of class and status, the centralization of the subject, authority; and it opposes any manifestation of duality. At the same time, it proposes a way of writing which undoes all of the above. Postmodernism provokes the reader into thinking critically about the presentation and articulation of the world around him or her.

The technical and thematic devices I analyze are Ferré's use of recurring motifs such as the use of doll-like figures, the juxtaposition of black and white, and fantastical elements. The doll-like figures in Ferré's stories serve as representations of society's portrayal of women. As Rivera points out, the doll-like figures underscore "the passive, mute role to which women have been reduced in Puerto Rican society" (95). In "La muñeca menor," the aunt, due to her limited choices in life, constructs dolls as exact replicas of each of her nieces for each year of their life. By continuously enforcing the idea of a likeness between the nieces and dolls, the female protagonist herself is transformed into a doll-like figure when she succumbs to the pressures placed upon her in patriarchal society. In "Amalia," the doll is a replica of the female protagonist. The uncle gives the young girl dolls which represent her and the other female protagonists in the story so she will know her role in society: that of a motionless, lifeless doll. Therefore, the doll in these two stories is used as a metaphor for the passivity, ornamentation, and falsification that is imposed on

women. Ferré will take this portrayal one step further. She not only exposes the oppressive forces of patriarchal society, she also suggests the various ways that women rebel by inverting the tools that have been given to them by their oppressors. This rebellion can be seen as caricature, parody, or madness, but it is the first step toward the articulation of a new and authentic identity.

In addition to the manipulation of doll-like figures, Ferré plays with images of black and white, availing herself of all their racial connotations. In a literal sense, the juxtaposition of black and white represents contrastive elements regarding the socio-historical interpretation of race and class dispersion. In a figurative sense, this juxtaposition can be read as a game of duplicity played out in language. On one hand, it hints at the constrictions being placed on women by patriarchal society; on the other, it reveals how women are veering from the restrictions of their social role. In “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” duplicity is presented as an inherent function of language that underscores the conflicts women encounter throughout patriarchal society. Ferré dramatizes the duplicitous nature of language by intertwining the voices of two female protagonists, Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra. The literal dialogue between black and white intensifies this intertwining of voices. In “Amalia” duplicity is used through the intertwining of identities--rather voices--of the female protagonists. The intertwined identities are between the female protagonist, Amalia, and her doll of the same name. Furthermore, the duplicity in both stories is still used to underscore the images of the female identity and the roles

that women are confined to because of patriarchal society. Duplicity in “La bella durmiente” is used as the simultaneous presentation of both the female protagonists’ real life and the roles she plays in the ballets. In this story, Ferré presents the female protagonist with a division of personalities that are woven together in order to demonstrate how María de los Angeles has been alienated by her aristocratic, upper-class family. As Lagos-Pope points out, “Los diversos usos del doble en los cuentos de Ferré contribuyen a explicar la identidad femenina al hacer hincapié en los distintos papeles que desempeñan los personajes y en la multiplicidad de facetas de su personalidad” (748). Therefore, the use of duplicity in these three stories, played out through the interweaving of voices and personalities, serves to highlight the complexities of role-playing for women in patriarchal society. The role imposed upon them is often invented and reconfigured as a mode of protest and escape, the ultimate goal being the construction of a new, authentic identity by the individual.

As we have seen, Ferré avails herself of the destabilizing nature of language in order to deconstruct images of women. This exercise is taken to a new level as Ferré introduces fantastical elements into her stories. The “fantastic” in Ferré’s stories can be understood as “the acceptance of a different logic based on objects and connections other than those of everyday life or the dominant literary conventions” (Calvino 72). The fantastic is created through the juxtaposition of real and imaginary worlds that dismantle themselves in order to show what is false and contradictory. This process is used in “La muñeca menor” to show what is artificial and paradoxical

in both the story and the existence of the female protagonists. For example, within the text we have the “supposed” representation of the world that corresponds to an extra-textual reality and the imaginary world that corresponds to the fictitious reality of the protagonist. By manipulating the presentation of these worlds, Ferré infuses the so-called “real world” (the world with an external referent) with elements of the imaginary, fictitious, or fantastic world and vice-versa. Thus, she challenges the reader to re-think his/her notion of reality and the language through which it is articulated.

By applying the technical and thematic devices of postmodernism--the juxtaposition of black and white, doll motif, and fantastical elements--to “La muñeca menor,” “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” “Amalia,” and “La bella durmiente,” we see how Ferré rejects patriarchal society. She shows her rejection by using against them the tools they have created to confine women. She uses her stories and her female protagonists to confront patriarchal society’s expectations of women. Through this confrontation, Ferré deconstructs the preconceived, expected identity that has been created for women. As we shall see in the subsequent chapters, while Ferré portrays the importance of a woman’s ability to confront and dismantle their expected roles, she also emphasizes the importance of the individual’s (female) ability to have a choice and an attempt at building an authentic identity for them.

Notes

¹ By Patricia Elena González. This quote is from Debra Castillo's *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism*. xii.

² I will use the term's "women" and "female protagonists" interchangeably throughout the thesis because Ferré's stories are about certain types of women rather than a specific woman. Therefore, Ferré's theories apply to women as a whole.

³ This diagram used by Debra A. Castillo is from Jean Franco, "Beyond Ethnocentrism: Gender, Power, and the Third-World Intelligentsia," *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: Uof Illinois P, 1988) 503-15.

⁴ I use the term "authentic" as defined by Simone de Beauvoir. She used this term in an attempt to enable the individual (female) to assert herself and live "authentically." In this way, the subject will empower her own self knowing she has the ability to form her own life and take responsibility for her own actions and outlooks.

Chapter One

La muñeca menor

In the first story from *Papeles de Pandora*, “La muñeca menor,” Ferré employs the use of doll-like figures and fantastical elements to dramatize the deconstruction and the reconstruction of the female identity. The deconstruction is the dismantling of an imposed identity on the female protagonists while the (re)construction is, in essence, the re-creation of an authentic identity. Gaining an authentic identity becomes the process by which women either conform to or reject the roles imposed upon them in patriarchal society. In “La muñeca menor,” Ferré tells the story of a maiden aunt who creates dolls in the likeness of her nieces. Through this story Ferré shows how the female protagonists adhere to and reject the roles imposed on them in a patriarchal society. As the aunt and the youngest niece try to come to terms with the role-playing expected of them, we witness the frustrations of women reduced to decorative figures.

Along with the use of doll-like figures, Ferré employs the use of fantastical elements to create the suspension of disbelief necessary to underscore the intensity of the presentation of the doll as a metaphor. The “fantastic,” as I noted in the introduction, is an acceptance of reasoning that is founded on creations that are not from everyday life. In “La muñeca menor,” Ferré juxtaposes real and imaginary worlds that deconstruct themselves to show what is false and contradictory in the lives of the female protagonists. In my reading of “La muñeca menor,” I discuss the

doll-like figures and fantastical elements that Ferré employs to show the traditional roles that are imposed on women. In their traditional roles as submissive compliments to male counterparts, women are often transformed into “the silent Other” in the sense that they are continuously referred to as an attachment without a voice.¹

“La muñeca menor” revolves around a wealthy family that owns a sugar plantation in Puerto Rico during the 1920’s. The story, narrated in the third person, begins with an episode that recalls a time when a maiden aunt was bitten as a young girl by a *chágara* while bathing in the river. The doctor summoned to attend the wound announces that the bite is nothing to worry about and does not administer any treatment therefore, he will be able to benefit from the situation. The doctor does not do anything for the aunt even though he knows how to cure her of the *chágara*, which has implanted itself in her leg. By leaving the *chágara* in the aunt’s leg, he is able to continue to make visits which allow him to pay for his son’s education: “Usted hubiese podido haber curado eso en sus comienzos, le dijo. Es cierto, contestó el padre, pero yo sólo quería que vinieras a ver la chágara que te había pagado los estudios durante veinte años” (*Papeles* 12). By not curing the aunt and using her for his personal gains, the doctor forces her to give up her dreams, to suffer, and to lose her identity because he perceives his needs as more important than hers. As Luz María Umpierre notes, “El sacrificio de la mujer se hace para edificar la profesión de un hombre” (121). Thus, the maiden aunt must forego any possibility of a future because of the doctor’s selfish wishes to further the education of his son.

The introduction of the *chágara* announces Ferré's initial fancy into the realm of the fantastic.² The *chágara*, a prawn, is an entity that exists in everyday life, but in the story it assumes a fantastic, malevolent role. The *chágara* plants itself inside of the aunt's leg, grows to unforeseen proportions, and forces her to relinquish her beauty--that which contributes to her value in upper-class patriarchal society. Due to the prawn's ability to implant itself inside of a being, thus causing an unattractive appearance, this is an action which requires the acceptance of a different logic, as stated by Italo Calvino (72).

As a young woman, the aunt was very beautiful. The *chágara* stripped her of her beauty and caused her to resign herself to taking care of her nieces and accepting that she would never marry. Since she has lost her beauty and has a deformity on her leg, she is not "marriageable material." The aunt locks herself in the house and refuses to see any suitors: "Había sido hermosa, pero la *chágara* que escondía bajo los largos pliegues de gasa de sus faldas la había despojado de toda vanidad. Se había encerrado en la casa rehusando a todos sus pretendientes" (*Papeles* 9-10). In order for the aunt to marry and fit in to society, she must be young and beautiful. What young man is going to marry her when she is not beautiful and perfect? By having closed herself off from society to take care of her nieces and make dolls, the aunt conforms to society's expectations. She accepts the destiny that was handed to her by the doctor (a figure of unquestionable authority) through her infliction with the *chágara*. She was unable to create her own being and her own identity and, thus, succumbed to the demands of society.

The aunt is referred to as “the aunt” throughout the story. By not assigning her a name, the narrative voice is emphasizing her lack of identity. The aunt’s lack of identity results from her inability to move beyond her “self” as a function of society and not as an authentic being. To refer to someone as “the aunt, etc.” is to place them among the faceless masses. She is not recognized for herself, but rather for her ability to fulfill the needs of others. As Pokorny has stated, “a beautiful woman after being bitten by a *chágara* transforms herself into a being without a name or identity; a mere shadow who appears to exist only in the service of the Other” (76). The aunt’s service to the “Other” is her service to patriarchal society, the doctor, and the *chágara*. We see this service when the aunt resigns herself to caring for her nieces and making dolls.

Since the aunt has to resign herself to living a limited life with the *chágara* in her leg, to fulfill her traditionally “feminine” needs, such as the need for motherhood, she begins to make dolls for her nieces: “Imposibilitada la tía vieja de casarse, se dedica a crear muñecas para sus sobrinas, actividad que paralela el papel que no fue capaz de ejercer en la sociedad—el ser madre” (Umpierre 121). The aunt makes a doll for each year of the nieces’ life; the dolls are replicas of the nieces. For example, one would be able to look at each doll corresponding to the child and know exactly what the child looked like at that particular age. After years of making the dolls, the aunt turned the activity into an art form. The dolls have wax faces, translucent porcelain hands, bodies made of translucent gourds, and glass eyeballs that were left at the bottom of the stream for a few days to recognize the movement of the *chágara*.

To place these eyes inside of a doll in the hopes that the doll will not be deceived by the *chágara* insinuates the acceptance of an imaginary world. A belief in a doll's ability to have eyes that will recognize prawns is not a logic that is known to the real world; therefore, it becomes an element of the fantastic. The combination of a doll--an entity from the real world--and the function of her eyes--an element from the imaginary world--intensifies the disbelief that is caused by the fusion of the two entities. This, in turn, enhances the doll's life-like characteristics, which allows the dolls to represent the female protagonists and become their "Pascua de Resurrección," or their exit from patriarchal society's barriers.

The nieces each receive the last doll the aunt will make for them on their wedding day. This doll is symbolic because it represents their "Pascua de Resurrección" which will eventually lead to the deconstruction of each niece's imposed identity: "El día de la boda la tía les regalaba a cada una la última muñeca dándoles un beso en la frente y diciéndoles con una sonrisa: 'Aquí tienes tu Pascua de Resurrección'" (*Papeles* 11-12). The likeness of the last doll to that of the niece at the time of her wedding is so similar that it startles the husband, although the husbands are soon reassured when they find out that the doll is only a decoration for the piano.

The aunt makes her very last doll when the youngest niece marries the doctor's son. The last doll is the finest the aunt has ever made; its resemblance to the youngest niece is impeccable. This doll is made with a finer quality of materials than the rest. It's face and hands are made of the finest mikado porcelain; its teeth are the

baby teeth of the youngest niece. Embedded in the doll's pupils are the aunt's diamond eardrops, and the doll is filled with the warm honey instead of cotton stuffing. As Ksenija Bilbija states,

The youngest and the last doll is so well crafted and human-like, that her body is warm and she has a full set of the niece's baby teeth. The sharing of body parts (teeth) insinuates the same subjectivity behind two apparently identical images the aunt "produce(s) a reality of the real through the image"; she produces the "real image" of her niece.
(883)³

The doll becomes an element of the fantastic as she represents the juxtaposition of the real and imaginary because of the sharing of body parts. A doll and a human entity which share body parts is not a concept known to the "real world" as the real world is understood to us. The creation of the fantastic with these actions aids in the process of the youngest niece's deconstruction by showing the falsity of her being.

The resemblance of the dolls in "La muñeca menor" to each stage of the nieces' life, childhood, adolescence, and womanhood shows that women are valued for their beauty, cleanliness, purity, and seeming lifelessness. As such, the dolls are perfect, and they are exactly alike; required to do nothing more than sit on the piano and look pretty. This metaphor becomes more evident as the young doctor orders his new wife to sit on the balcony and exhibit her beauty soon after they move to town. As Pokorny points out, the young doctor, "Not only appropriates the body/identity of the youngest niece to exhibit her as an object of luxury and as a symbol of social

status, but further victimizes her by forcing her to sit on the balcony” (79). The youngest niece has the same function as the doll--one is ordered to sit on the balcony and the other sits on the piano--and they both are not to do anything but sit and look pleasing.

The youngest niece stripped of the possibility of asserting her own identity, becomes nothing more than an object to be possessed by her husband. She is without a function in life and in this sense, she is exactly like the doll that was given to her on her wedding day. Also, she is continuously referred to as “the youngest niece” throughout the story and is never given the chance to be known. As with “the aunt,” Ferré’s refusal to name her characters underscores their lack of an authentic self. To be known, the niece needs a name and characteristics that are unique to her as a person. The niece does not have any of her own characteristics and is placed in a collective with her sisters who are also nameless. The only thing the reader knows about them is that they look exactly like dolls, which are perfectly made with translucent skin, white gloves, and Victorian clothes. The dolls/nieces are all pure, clean, and flawlessly beautiful. They are exactly how patriarchal society wants women to be. The nieces and the aunt are part of the masses that fall victim to the demands of patriarchal society because they are unable to choose their own destiny. To be able to create one’s own fate allows him/her to be unique, to be their own person and not have to live according to the norms.

Eventually, the greedy doctor sells the eyes of the doll, which then sits on the piano with her eyes lowered. When the doctor later tries to sell the face and hands of

the doll, he discovers she is missing. When he asks the niece, she says that the ants ate it because the hands and face were made of a porcelain-like sugar and the body was filled with honey. Life progresses and the youngest niece continues sitting on the balcony, and the doctor begins to notice that he is growing old while his wife remains the same with porcelain-like skin; she never ages. Then one night as the doctor goes to say goodnight to his wife, he notices that her chest does not move while she sleeps and out of her eyes come the antennae of the *chágaras*: “Entonces la muñeca levantó los párpados y por las cuencas vacías de los ojos comenzaron a salir las antenas furibundas de las chágaras” (*Papeles* 14). The doctor’s desire to have his wife conform to an impossible standard has turned on him in nightmarish proportions. The youngest niece and the doll have assimilated into one, or, as the aunt mentions earlier in the story, the doll has literally become the niece’s “Pascua de resurrección.”

Another sign that the doll further symbolizes a rite of transformation for the niece is that the doll is filled with honey. According to Cirlot’s *A Dictionary of Symbols*, honey is a symbol of rebirth or a change of personality. The niece’s assimilation is, in essence, a metamorphosis, which is the transformation of appearance, character, or condition. The youngest niece has completed the stages of metamorphosis by resurrecting through her doll, an essential element of the fantastic. This process defies the laws of the “real world” as we know it and becomes an element of the imaginary. As López points out, “La metamorfosis es uno de las temas esenciales de la literatura fantástica; el concepto que envuelve es la ruptura de los límites entre lo físico y lo mental; la multiplicación de la personalidad es consecuencia de la transición

posible entre mente (espíritu) y materia” (*la muñeca* 55).⁴ The youngest niece finds her exit from the barriers of patriarchal society through her literal and symbolic metamorphosis.

The doll is the niece’s way of rebelling against the injustices committed upon her, her sisters, and her aunt because they will no longer be adornments for their husbands’ society. As Pokorny points out, “The doll, after taking possession of the niece’s body and/or identity strikes against the emblem of the patriarchal order that objectified, appropriated and mutilated her body, her identity and her psyche” (79). The niece is gone and in her place is a rotting doll, which ceases to be the pure and beautiful adornment for the balcony. The youngest niece has dismantled her imposed identity by assimilating herself with the doll so her husband will no longer control her.

Throughout this story, we can see that in order to reconstruct her identity, the female protagonist needs to somehow fight against and begin to denounce the injustices that have been committed against her to show that she does not accept the destiny that is expected of her by society. Her expected destiny is her role as passive, mute woman who is an adornment for her husband. As Debra A. Castillo points out, it has been believed by many that “the place of woman is concealed within man’s heart, hearth, and home; her function is to represent beauty (a quality denied man), to serve as a display object in the niche assigned her” (138). Not accepting this destiny, the female protagonists need to show that they are fighting against what is expected of them in their role as “the silent Other.” Ferré demonstrates how the female protagonists fight against their expected roles at the end of “*La muñeca menor*” with

the assimilation of the doll and the youngest niece. This assimilation is the denouncement against the injustices committed against them and the reconstruction of the female identity that was taken away from the females in the story. The assimilation is the union or fusion of the doll and the youngest niece, but it is not only these two; it represents the aunt and the other nieces as well. As Beatriz Urrea points out, “Las oposiciones binarias desaparecen a medida que tía, sobrina y muñeca se entrelazan, y a través de su cuerpo violentado de muñeca desatan su venganza: este momento es su pascua de resurrección” (290). This action is a denouncement against what happened to them because all they leave behind is the rotting doll, which is not a beautiful adornment. Therefore, the assimilation is the reconstruction of the female identity because the women are able to escape their former roles and become their own person. The women are grouped into a collective throughout the story by not having a name and by looking like dolls but as a group, they are able to fight against patriarchal society.

In conclusion, Ferré has presented the reader with a typical object--a doll, which is a common toy to many--and used it to demonstrate the objectification of women. By presenting the women alongside dolls that look exactly like them, Ferré emphasizes the characteristics and roles that patriarchal society applies and expects of women. With the use of the doll motif and fantastical elements to emphasize the representation of the female protagonist, Ferré emphasizes the imposed roles upon the women while demonstrating how they are able to dismantle these imposed roles in the female protagonists fusion with the doll. Through the use of irony, Ferré

demonstrates how the women destroy patriarchal society's obstructions that are containing them because they use the instruments patriarchal society has created to oppress them to their advantage. The female's first step in this process is making the reality they are forced to live absurd. This, in turn, enables the women to produce a more authentic personality for themselves.

Notes

¹ “The silent other” is a term used by Elba D. Birmingham Pokorny in her article “(Re)writing the Body: The Legitimization of The Female Voice, History, Culture and Space in Rosario Ferré’s *La muñeca menor*.”

² The *chágara* in fantastic perceptions takes on a symbolic function as in Horacio Quiroga’s stories. For example, in “El almohadón de plumas” the female protagonist suffers from hallucinations when she becomes deathly ill and is bedridden. Her hallucinations are believed to be caused by an anthropoid in her pillow when really it is her husband who is the monster. The aunt in “La muñeca menor” is stripped of her beauty and has a deformity on her leg because of a *chágara*, although, it is really the doctor as a representative of patriarchal society who causes her to suffer.

³ Ksenija Bilbija paraphrases Julia Emberly from her article “The Fashion Apparatus and the Deconstruction of Postmodern Subjectivity.” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 11.1-2 (1987). (43)

⁴ Ivette López paraphrases Todorov Tzvetan. *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard. Cleveland/London: The P. of Case Western U. 1973. 116.

Chapter Two

Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres

In the second story that I am discussing from *Papeles de Pandora*, “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” Ferré employs the technique of juxtaposing black and white images to draw attention to divisions of race and social class with regard to the status of women within patriarchal society. This technique of juxtaposing black and white, reminiscent of the Baroque “chiaroscuro,” dramatizes the contrastive elements of a socio-historical interpretation of race and class divisions. In a figurative sense, this juxtaposition can be read as a game of revealing and concealing--in other words, a game of duplicity. Chiaroscuro is a technique used in painting or drawing which focuses on the use of dark and light in order to produce an “effect of volume” (Earls 60). In other words, “chiaro”--or “claro” in Spanish--emphasizes “the colors that are luminous or sparkling in their natures and “oscuro” accentuates those colors that maintain their obscurity, such as black, dark velvet, and brown” (Earls 60). In essence, Ferré demonstrates this technique through the two female protagonists, Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra. Isabel Luberza represents the color that is luminous in nature--white--and Isabel la Negra represents the color that maintains its obscurity--black. The fusion of the two produces a voluminous effect because of the continuous variances between light and dark (Earls 60).

Duplicity in the stories of Ferré is present as a function of language that represents the conflicts women have encountered in their role as social beings.

This is demonstrated through the deconstruction and reconstruction of the female identity. The deconstruction of the female identity is the dismantling of an imposed identity, while (re)construction is the re-creation of a new, more authentic identity.

This is further discussed by Lagos-Pope:

el uso del doble basado en la dualidad arquetípica cumple varias funciones: por una parte alude a las limitaciones que constriñen a la mujer en la sociedad patriarcal, y por otra, plantea la idea de la incompatibilidad de las funciones que ésta, como mujer, puede desempeñar, tales como esposa y amante, madre y mujer profesional (732).¹

In other words, the technique of duplicity emphasizes the various limitations that suppress women in patriarchal society while highlighting how women are incompatible with their typical, accepted social roles. Ferré dismantles the protagonists in this story by focusing on their shared limitations in society. It does not matter for Ferré that one woman is white and that the other is black. She focuses on the ways in which their oppression is similar; each being a victim of a social structure devised to meet the needs of a white, upper-class patriarchy. Throughout “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” Ferré uses the game of “chiaroscuro” to show the protagonists’ incompatibility with the social roles that have been assigned to them. She also uses this device to suggest ways in which they can reconstruct a new, more authentic identity.

“Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” revolves around Isabel Luberza, Isabel la Negra, and their shared relationship with Ambrosio, the husband of Isabel Luberza and the lover of Isabel la Negra. The story, narrated in the third person by the two female protagonists, is directed at the dead Ambrosio. The use of indirect discourse in this story allows the reader access to the voices of both Isabels’ while simultaneously exemplifying their inability to independently tell their own stories. They are nascent beings gradually coming into their own voices and identities. It would be less probable to have them tell their stories using the first person narration. The use of indirect discourse is also used to intertwine the voices of the two female protagonists. In other words, at times Isabel L. tells the story and other times it is Isabel la N. Ferré intertwines their voices so completely that at certain moments it seems there is only one narrative voice. When the women’s voices are intertwined, they are each attempting to portray the other; this is why the narration has the appearance of having only one narrative voice. By doing this, Ferré emphasizes the shared struggle of each female protagonists attempt to break away from social stereotypes in order to create a new sense of self that corresponds to their reality as individuals.

The game of “chiaroscuro” manifests itself from the beginning of the story, when Ferré uses two epigraphs, which foreshadow the roles of the two female protagonists. The epigraphs highlight “white”--“claro”--as being morally superior to “black”--“oscuro”--by the comparison of the saint to the whore. They define the given roles of Isabel Luberza as a saint whose duty is to follow the first epistle of the

Corinthians and Isabel la Negra as the most well known prostitute of the world who comes from the neighborhood of San Antón, in Ponce, Puerto Rico. The epigraphs also enhance the variances between black and white, creating a more powerful image of the two social classes presented by the female protagonists:

conocemos sólo en parte y profetizamos sólo en parte, pero cuando
llegue lo perfecto desaparecerá lo parcial. Ahora vemos por un espejo
y oscuramente, mas entonces veremos cara a cara.

- San Pablo, primera epístola a los corintios, XIII, 12, conocida
también como epístola del amor.

la puta que yo conozco no es de la china ni del Japón, porque la puta
viene de Ponce viene del barrio de San Antón. - plena de San Antón

The juxtaposition of the black and white imagery is initially used to distance one Isabel from the other, although later it becomes a method of bringing them together. Difference gives way to similarity, ironically facilitated by the force that once oppressed them: Ambrosio, lover and husband. The narration emphasizes the differences of the two Isabel's while blending them to point out how women are all considered the same, whether they are or not. Isabel Luberza, the wife of Ambrosio, is a saint, a catholic, a white, upper-class society lady, a caretaker, a seamstress; she is the epitome of a typical saintly woman created and accepted by patriarchal society. Isabel la Negra, the mistress of Ambrosio, is a prostitute, the exploiter of young girls, the whore of Puerto Rico; she is the typical lower-class woman not accepted and

exploited by patriarchal society. These characteristics are highlighted in the following excerpt:

Tú fuiste el culpable, Ambrosio, de que no se supiera hasta hoy cuál era cuál entre las dos, Isabel Luberza recogiendo dinero para restaurar los leones de yeso de la plaza que habían dejado de echar agua de colores por la boca, o Isabel la Negra preparando su cuerpo para recibir el semen de los niños ricos, de los hijos de los patronos amigos tuyos que entraban todas las noches en mi casucha alicaídos y apocados, arrastrando las ganas como pichones moribundos con mal de quilla desfallecidos de hambre frente al banquete de mi cuerpo.

(Papeles 24)

Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra are completely antithetical; one is the epitome of purity (white), and the other is the epitome of everything corrupt (black). These two women are juxtaposed together to not only show the black and white but also to show their similarity as women. These two women are victims of the same man and are conformed to the needs of patriarchal society, and to the ways in which Ambrosio accepts them. As Fernández Olmos explains, “Ferré presents these very different women as mirror images. She meshes their voices in an interior monologue that combines their flow of consciousness so as to demonstrate the commonality of their roles as women” (46). By showing their commonality, Ferré exploits society’s erroneous tendency to portray women as a collective group, whether or not they have

the same role in society. In this way, Ferré takes the tools of the oppressor and uses them to denounce the act of oppression.

Isabel Luberza, the wife of Ambrosio, plays her part as a “typical” upper-class “white” woman in Puerto Rican society. She is unable to break away from her given identity due to the unwritten rules of a woman’s place in society, as she is following the first verse of the first epistle of the *Corinthians*. For example, Ambrosio’s need to have a mistress is due to the fact that his wife is unable to satisfy her husband sexually. Isabel Luberza was taught to be the submissive and passive partner in their sexual relationship and in their relationship on a whole. If Isabel Luberza were to break away from her given identity, she would be going against her accepted role in society and, therefore, have her own identity, which is not allowed. As Augustus Puleo points out, “In following the existing models of Saint Isabel, Queen Isabel la Católica and the Virgin, Isabel Luberza leads a life governed by passivity, resignation and obedience to her husband” (229). However, as Puleo also notes, Isabel’s situation is very ironic since her social class, race, and status in society grant her many more opportunities than those that are afforded to Isabel la Negra (229). One would assume Isabel Luberza’s higher social and economic status in society would enable her to be better off and be able to gain and create her own identity. Yet Isabel Luberza is not better off, as she is only playing her accepted role in upper-class society rather than as part of the lower-class as is Isabel la Negra. Her place in society is even more constricting than that of her black counterpart because she has so much more to lose by rebelling.

As has been noted, Isabel la Negra is the opposite of Isabel Luberza. The mistress of Ambrosio, is a typical lower-class black woman in Puerto Rican society. Although Isabel la Negra demonstrates that she is able to gain a higher social and economic status by the end of the story, she is still unable to assume her own identity. Instead of playing the role of a virtuous, saintly and passive woman, like Isabel Luberza, she is instead expected to live a life of hard work in order to be able to maintain a living. As Puleo states, Isabel la Negra “is the living heir to the Queen of Sheba and Salomé. Her role was to initiate the white sons of Ambrosio’s friends to the world of sex, which meant simultaneously protecting the virtue and virginity of bourgeoisie women” (229). In other words, one of the only accepted roles for her in patriarchal society is as a prostitute if she wants to be able to make a living wage. In Puerto Rican and patriarchal society, it is not expected nor very easily accepted that lower class black women have or achieve a higher economic and social status than the one which is afforded to them. Therefore, Isabel la Negra is at first a lowly prostitute but, after the death of Ambrosio, she starts to gain status and power in society by participating in various charitable and societal functions. As is stated in Puleo’s article, “Indeed, the hardworking Isabel la Negra follows this theory as she launches into a money-making venture of using her arts of sexual gratification in order to gain power and status in society” (Puleo 230). The theory is that black women are better able to take care of themselves compared to white women who are brought up and rewarded for being passive and submissive². Even though Isabel la Negra rises above a lower economic status in society to a much higher one, she is still seen as a black

prostitute. Is it actually a woman's dream to become a high-priced prostitute? Like Isabel Luberza, Isabel la Negra is only able to assume an identity, which is given to her, rather than being able to create her own, even though she gains a higher economic status in society.

If Isabel la Negra and Isabel Luberza had been portrayed as protagonists capable of creating their own identities, the narrative might have contained a personalized language, which would emphasize the protagonists' ability to self-evolve. However, it is precisely Ferré's use of impersonal language that underscores the inability of these women to articulate an authentic sense of being. The language does not emphasize a fixed identity; it does not necessarily belong to any particular protagonist. If on the level of imagery, Ferré juxtaposes black and white, thus encouraging the free-play of the signifier/signified, on the level of narration she takes away all contrast. In this way, she shows that even with their differences of class and race neither Isabel has developed a voice that is authentically her own. Intertwining, confusing the voices and giving the two female protagonists the same name erases identity. As Vega Carney notes: "La dispersión de las voces de los discursos, dispersión que se utiliza con la aparente intención de borrar una identificación con el género sexual del hablante" (*Sexo* 121-22). The technique of intertwining voices and assigning the same name to the narrators or protagonists allows them to be without a specific identity and float freely throughout the narrative.

As I mentioned earlier, the deconstruction of the female identity is the dismantling of an imposed identity. Throughout the lives of Isabel Luberza and Isabel

la Negra, their identity has been imposed upon them by patriarchal society. As a result, neither has a “true” identity, which is of their own will. Therefore, they function as part of a collective in which they do not have a choice. They do not have the option to form and create their own being, which is acceptable to them and does not necessarily follow the accepted standards of patriarchal society. Ambrosio as a representative of patriarchal society has forced Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra to maintain their assumed identities because of the need to succumb to society’s demands or be banished from society. As Vega Carney points out, Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra are “dos mujeres de clases sociales distintas y opuestas, convertidas en víctimas de un mismo hombre” (185). Therefore, the female protagonists have little choice but to “play the game” in order to maintain any kind of status. When Ambrosio dies, he leaves his inheritance to both of the Isabel’s, thinking that he will be able to continue to control these two women. However, they do not end up fighting for Ambrosio as he assumed, rather, they join together to fight against him. As Umpierre points out, “La muerte del hombre en este caso hace que la unión de las mujeres sea posible. Era él quien dividía en clases y determinaba el *status* de cada cual” (124). Due to the fact that Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra work together, they make evident the deconstruction of their imposed identities by showing how they have more to their being than the “identity” that is imposed upon them by Ambrosio.

Nosotras, tu querida y tu mujer, siempre hemos sabido que debajo de cada dama de sociedad oculta una prostituta. Porque nosotras siempre

hemos sabido que cada prostituta es una dama en potencia. Porque nosotras, Isabel Luberza e Isabel la Negra, en nuestra pasión por ti, Ambrosio, desde el comienzo de los siglos, nos habíamos estado acercando, nos habíamos estado santificando la una a la otra sin darnos cuenta purificándonos de todo aquello que nos definía, a una como prostituta y a otra como dama de sociedad. De manera que al final, cuando una de nosotras le ganó a la otra fue nuestro más sublime acto de amor. (*Papeles 23*)

The narration stresses how within each woman are the characteristics of the other.

The representative of patriarchal society, Ambrosio, continuously tried to place these women in specific categories while imposing pre-fabricated identities on them.

However, what the narration continues to emphasize is the manner in which these two women and women as a whole have been growing closer together while fusing their identities. The fusion of their identities and beings is their act of dismantling their imposed identities.

The reconstruction of a new, more authentic identity for Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra comes about when the narration demonstrates how each wants to be like the other. By Isabel Luberza wanting to be Isabel la Negra, she is employing her ability to desire and create her own being. Isabel Luberza demonstrates this when she starts to tan and wear the makeup that Isabel la Negra would wear. For example,

Empecé a cerrar la sombrilla cuando salía a pasear por la calle para que la piel se me abrasara al sol. Esa piel que yo siempre he protegido

con manga larga y cuello alto para poder exhibirla en los bailes porque es prueba fidedigna de mi pedigree, de que en mi familia somos blancos por los cuatro costados. Exponiéndome así, por ella. (*Papeles* 36)

Isabel Luberza begins the reconstruction of her new, more authentic identity which has not been allowed to her. Isabel la Negra also begins her reconstruction of a new, more authentic identity with her desires to be and to have what her counterpart possesses. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt,

Pero el ansia de poseer aquella casa, el recuerdo de aquella visión que había tenido de niña, siempre que pasaba, descalza y en harapos, frente a aquella casa la visión de un hombre vestido de hilo blanco, de pie en aquel balcón, junto a una mujer rubia, increíblemente bella, vestida con un traje de lamé plateado” (*Papeles* 29).

When Isabel la Negra starts to gain a higher economic status, she starts to create her own being. Her dreams of a house with a balcony, a man in a white suit, and a beautiful “white” woman in front of the house are a continuation of her desires to be the being that is not allowed of her.

The culmination of each of their reconstructed, new, and more authentic identities takes place with their fusion. Even though their distinguishing characteristics have become blurred in order to blend their beings throughout the story, the only way they are able to complete their reconstruction is with the death of Ambrosio. His death makes their fusion possible, the culmination of which takes

place when they meet for the first time and realize that they both wear “Cherries Jubilee” nail polish, “Isabel Luberza se había acercado a Isabel la Negra sin decirle una sola palabra. Ahora me toma las manos y se queda mirándome fijamente las uñas, que llevo siempre esmaltadas de Cherries Jubilee. Noto con sorpresa que sus uñas están esmaltadas del mismo color que las mías” (*Papeles* 32-33). As Vega Carney points out, the reason that Cherries Jubilee is the completing factor of the fusion is due to the fact that it symbolizes equality between the women. “La transformación con la que cierra el cuento utiliza el esmalte de uñas que ambas mujeres usan, Cherries Jubilee, como una ecuación patética de la igualdad” (*Papeles* 188). This final act symbolizes the union between Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra and through this union, the women will break away from their pre-fabricated roles.

In conclusion, Ferré’s “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” takes the reader through a journey of the lives of Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra to demonstrate the typical roles that are expected of women. To accent these typical roles, I have examined Ferré’s application of the technique of juxtaposing black and white or “chiaroscuro,” which also draws attention to the divisions between race and social class. By accentuating the typical roles, divisions of race and social class, it becomes evident how the procedure of deconstruction comes into play and collapses the margins created by patriarchal society. Through the completion of the deconstruction process, it is then possible for the female protagonists to reconstruct and create a new identity for themselves. By doing so, Ferré demonstrates how these

women break through the barriers that have been created by patriarchal society
showing that they, too, are beings and not manufactured objects.

Notes

¹ “Professional woman” in this story refers to a prostitute rather than a businesswoman.

² This is discussed by Augustus Puleo in his article “Race, Sex, Gender and Class in a Short Story of Rosario Ferré.”

Chapter Three

Amalia

In the third story included in this study, “Amalia,” Ferré makes use of duplicity and the doll motif in order to dismantle the imposed identity of the main protagonist. As in the previously discussed stories, Ferré will deconstruct the identity of the protagonist before she suggests ways in which a new, more authentic identity can be re-created. While in “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” duplicity worked as a function of the language that is used to represent the conflicts women encounter by the intertwining of voices between the two female protagonists Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra, in “Amalia” duplicity works differently. This story is structured around the intertwining of the identities of the female protagonist and her doll, Amalia, which, in turn, underscores the portrayal of the female identity and the roles that women are reduced to because of patriarchal society. The doll motif in “Amalia” is similar to that which is utilized in “La muñeca menor” because Ferré also uses the dolls in this story to represent the characters. The uncle gives the female protagonist dolls which are named after her and the other characters in the story. Ferré uses the uncle to underscore the didactic function of role models being imposed upon the female protagonist. Ferré then turns the didactic function of the role models around and uses the fusion of identity of the female protagonist and her doll as empowerment rather than resignation. The emphasis of the roles implied for women by the dolls is equivalent to the indicated roles in “La muñeca menor.” Therefore, the

mixture of identities between the female protagonist and her doll, Amalia, and the doll motif continue to represent the victimization of women yet also demonstrate how women are able to rise above victimization to regain their being by eventually destroying the victimizer. The intertwining of identities in this story is demonstrated in the narration by presenting the female protagonist with the same name as her doll. By creating the doll as the duplicate of the female protagonist, one is unable to differentiate between the two and assumes they each have the same characteristics as the other. Therefore, Ferré creates the effect of duplicity, which aids in strengthening her portrayal of the roles women are reduced to because of patriarchal society.

“Amalia” is narrated by and revolves around the female protagonist of the same name. She is suffering from an unknown illness, which causes her to be very pale. However, it is implied that her illness may be a ruse employed by her family in order to keep her inside the house and therefore under their watchful eye. She is told that she is not to go out in the sun or she will begin to sweat which causes her skin to shrivel and color. The young girl’s mother, doctor, and entire family have conspired to keep her inside for her entire life; the maids have to keep a close eye on her so she does not go outside. Like the *chágara* in “La muñeca menor,” the family in “Amalia” uses the sun and the girl’s pale skin as a means to confine her and not to protect her. The young girl does not want to stay locked in the house. Therefore, she continuously sneaks out of the house to lie in the sun and sweat so she can feel free. While her mother claims to be concerned for her health, it becomes clear that she is really protecting a commodity. She doesn’t want her daughter to lie around like a

common girl and dirty her good white dress, socks and shoes, as is emphasized in the narration: “Cuando ve que no hay nadie sale y se acuesta en el piso ardiendo como una cualquiera, como una desvergonzada, ensuciándose el traje blanco y las medias blancas y los zapatos blancos, con esa carita inocente” (*Papeles* 55). The mother’s expectations of the young girl are clearly stated; she is to remain pure, innocent, and pale of skin as well as dress. Her mother believes that going outside of the house will corrupt her and if she is seen lying in the grass because she will be taken for a common “slut.” The young girl’s role as “object” is further emphasized when her uncle gives her a “bride doll.” Ironically, the young girl names her new doll Amalia after herself and then notices that the doll has a defect; it is made of wax, which is also in danger of being destroyed by the sun. The juxtaposition between the doll and the female protagonist begins here with the emphasis of their similarities, as they are both dressed in white and presumably they both become damaged goods through exposure to the sun. By going out in the sun, the young girl will cause her skin to color and she will become impure according to ancient myths of women. As Lagos-Pope notes, “La muñeca, vestida de blanco e incapaz de resistir el sol, se transforma así en el doble de la niña” (745). The duplicity between the young girl and Amalia emphasizes the assumed identity of the female protagonist and her ability to fluctuate between two identities since in a figurative sense she has a doll to double for her. In other words, duplicity works in two ways: first, women are able to use the reinforcement of patriarchal standards to their benefit while at the same time they are able to break away from the entrapments. The female protagonist shows this when

she pretends to succumb to patriarchal society's standards while using the doll as her double to rebel against their demands. For example, the young girl uses her doll to act out situations which rebel against the constrictions of her uncle. This is evident later in the story when Amalia, the doll, is seen lying with the male doll which did represent her uncle but the young girl painted it black to represent the chauffeur. The doll has committed this act but it is a desire of the young girl.

Eventually, the young girl's mother dies and from then on she is under the care of her uncle, who is continuously showing and teaching her what her accepted role should be. He starts by hiring three new young girls as maids to be supposed "role models" for the girl. The new young girls are presumed to be maids, but the uncle treats them as if they were call girls. He sends them to the beauty parlor, buys them gifts and perfume, and their job is to entertain the military guests that come to the house. Soon after, Amalia receives three more dolls from her uncle, whom she figuratively baptizes María, Adela, and Leonor after the maids. By naming the three dolls after the maids, Ferré portrays for the reader the impressions that the young girl has formed by observing the new maids. The young girl's impressions highlight the continuous representation of women as dolls. Also, the role models for the young girl show her the importance of primping, priming, and pleasing men. Through Ferré's use of sexually suggestive language, it is necessary to show men all the things that women can do. In other words, the maids' show how they are able to entertain the military men, wear sexy clothes, makeup, be exotic and assemble themselves however the men would like.

Al terminar cada reunión mi tío llevaba a sus invitados a la sala donde hacía que la María, la Adela y la Leonor les sirvieran pasta de guayaba con queso y refresco de limón. Después hacía que se sentaron con ellos a darles conversación, como son extranjeros es bueno que nos conozcan mejor que vean que aquí también hay muchachas bonitas que se hacen teasing en el pelo usan pestañas postizas y covergirl makeup, use Noxema shaving foam, take it off, take it off, Sexi Boom!

Executives intimate clothing fashion show Sexi Boom! Churrasco served en La Coneja, Avenida Ponce de León No. 009 next to Martin Fierro Restaurant y ellos yes how nice, are these girls daughters of the american revolution? All. But much more exotic of course, the flesh and fire of tropical fiestas, of piña colada and cocorum, lets start screwing together the erector set girls, my daddy wanted me to be an engineer and every year he gave me for christmas a yellow erector set (*Papeles* 60-61).

As well as showing what women are able to do and must do to please men in patriarchal society, Ferré's use of bold language and the mix of English and Spanish is a violation of the linguistic norms. Ferré's sexually suggestive language is an aspect of postmodernism which is used to challenge the reader into questioning its meaning because using vulgar vocabulary is not a part of the accepted norms in writing. According to Ferré, she uses sexually explicit language in an attempt to turn the tables. "Mi propósito había sido precisamente el de volver esa arma, la del insulto

sexualmente humillante y bochornoso, blandida durante tantos siglos contra nosotras, contra esa misma sociedad, contra sus prejuicios ya caducos e inaceptables” (*Sitio* 25). Ferré takes language, which is normally used to degrade women, and uses it to call attention to the ways in which tools of oppression can be used to destroy the constrictions placed upon women in patriarchal society.

In a similar view, by acting at the objectification of women Ferré exposes and appropriates societal evils. For example, she portrays the maids as “erector-set girls.” The uncle can put them together and create their identities however they want, to fill any need. The women will never be able to be whom they would like to be when they are known and perceived as girls who can be created however one would like. With the emphasis that the maids are erector-set girls, Ferré is also implying that the young girl will become like the maids and along the way she will learn how to disassemble and reassemble herself. This is an important part of her ability to dismantle her imposed identity at the end of the story, which enables her to reassemble a new identity for herself.

The uncle is continuously showering the maids and the niece with attention; he assumes they are all physically attracted to him. However, even with his gifts and attention they are not enamored with him and prefer the black chauffeur. The chauffeur for his singing and dancing especially captivates the young girl. At the girl’s first communion, her uncle asks her what she would like as a present. She asks for a boyfriend for her doll, which also insinuates the doubling between the girl and her doll. If the doll receives a boyfriend then there would be hopes that the girl would

also have one. The day of the communion arrives, and the young girl receives a gift from her uncle: a white soldier doll whose military uniform resembles his own. As Rivera suggests, the uncle is pleased to help the girl learn her place in society.

“Pleased that the girl has finally begun to understand her social roles, the uncle gives her a blond male doll in a military uniform with eagle insignias resembling his. Amalia manages to hide her horror, realizing that it is a suggestion to the incestuous relation her uncle has in mind” (97). The culmination of the assumed role and identity of the young girl is demonstrated by the uncle giving her the white soldier doll.

The idea of an incestuous relationship between the young girl and her uncle evokes horror in her when she becomes aware of her uncle’s expectations. Even patriarchal society does not condone incestuous relationships; the young girl’s uncle has gone too far. The female protagonist stands up to her uncle when she looks him in the eye with all of her hate to show her refusal of his insinuations of a relationship between them. This demonstrates her rejection of the implied role: “Entonces puso el paraguas abierto sobre el piso y dejó que el sol me acribillara por todos lados y puso su mano sobre mi teta izquierda. Yo me quedé inmóvil y por fin lo miré con todo el odio de que fui capaz” (*Papeles* 64). Her uncle has gone too far and all becomes clear to the young girl. Since, she chooses to refuse her uncle she begins the process of dismantling her imposed identity. The second step of the deconstruction takes place when the girl paints the boy doll black to be like the chauffeur. By painting the doll black, to resemble the black chauffeur, the girl infuriates her uncle who responds by throwing her out of the house:

Esto es obra tuya chiquilla del demonio, te parecerás a tu madre con esa carita inocente pero en el fondo no eres más que una puta, te lo he dado todo y tú no sólo no me lo agradeces sino que me faltas respeto, so pila de mierda descarada jódete con tu negro ahí tienes a tu pendeja muñeca y ahora quédense las dos ahí para que sepan lo que es bueno. Entonces te arrojó en mi falda y cerró la puerta de un portazo y volvió a entrar. (*Papeles* 65)

This act is symbolic of Amalia's breaking away from her assumed identity in order to re-create herself. An outcast from patriarchal society, she will never be able to be re-accepted. She has demonstrated too much disagreement with the expectations that are allowed for her. She has also chosen a black man over a white man, which is forbidden. Patriarchal society expects women to succumb to the demands of upper-class white men, for anything else would be a disgrace. This is also noted by Hart: "At the end of the story, both doll and child are cast out of the house for misbehavior into the pitiless heat to melt, in much the same way women who refuse to play the good bride doll are punished for rebellion by marginalization from traditional societies" (100). Societies are not accepting of the lower-class, especially if they are black. Since the young girl failed to assume her accepted role, she completed the dismantling of her assumed identity. The accepted role of the young girl was that of a pure, white, submissive young woman who would eventually maintain a relationship with an upper-class white man. The young girl chose a black man instead of a white man and refused to remain pure, white, and submissive by continuously going out in

the sun, a symbol of impurity in patriarchal society. The young girl completes the deconstruction of her assumed identity through the destruction of her uncle and his house by setting it on fire. All of these actions are a deconstruction of the binaries that are shown to be invalid because they no longer comply to the demands of patriarchal society since their representative of patriarchal society is destroyed.

The female protagonist's attempt at a reconstruction of a new, more authentic identity is demonstrated at the end of the story. After watching the house be burned and destroyed, the young girl walks out onto the patio, lays down with her doll, and opens herself up to take in the sun and sweat. The young girl is now liberated from the confines of society.

Después te acosté a mi lado y poco a poco fui abriendo los brazos sobre el cemento que late y estiré con mucho cuidado las piernas para que no se me ensuciara la falda blanca y las medias blancas y los zapatos blancos y ahora vuelvo la cara hacia arriba y me sonrío porque ahora voy a saber lo que pasa, ahora sí que voy a saber cómo es.

(Papeles 66)

The young girl is now free; she is able to leave the house and become who she would like to become. In essence, the female protagonist is now able to create a new, more authentic identity by lying in the sun to sweat and go against all that has confined her. There is nothing left to hold her back. As Lagos-Pope notes, the women in this story and the other stories are victims: “Estas, por lo tanto, serían víctimas de la organización social, que no les permite expresar ciertos aspectos de su personalidad ni

desarrollar una variedad de talentos y habilidades” (733). Patriarchal society has prohibited these women from expressing themselves and developing their personalities in a way that is suitable to them. When the uncle and the house that confined the young girl are destroyed, she is able to create an authentic identity for herself.

As we have seen in “Amalia,” Ferré has presented the reader with a representative of patriarchal society who attempted to preserve the status and privileges of his particular class. As Lagos-Pope also observes, “En este cuento, la opresión de la mujer a través de la imposición de los valores patriarcales no es independiente del sistema político, económico y social que quiere preservar un estado colonial y mantener los privilegios de una clase” (747). The representative of patriarchal society, the uncle, believes that his family could maintain its status through the female protagonist. In order to demonstrate the traditional characteristics depicted by the female protagonist, Ferré parallels her role to that of her doll with the same name, Amalia. Therefore, the intertwined identities of the female protagonist and her doll demonstrate how women are continuously identified with the characteristics of a doll. To further emphasize the female protagonists’ role in life, the uncle surrounded her with supposed role models, which are introduced as maids yet fulfill the role of call girl. Yet, these role models are not enough for the uncle; he must further insinuate the girl’s destiny in life by giving her a white, male, soldier doll that stands for the incestuous relationship he intends to have. While Ferré presents the imposed characteristics on the female protagonist, she demonstrates how she is

able to dismantle the imposed identity with the destruction of the uncle and barriers he created. This, in turn, enables all of the women to create a new authentic identity for themselves.

Chapter Four

La bella durmiente

In the last story covered in this study, “La bella durmiente”, I will continue to disassemble the imposed identity of her female protagonists and to re-create a new, more authentic identity. As discussed previously in “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” duplicity is a function of language which represents the struggles women face, and it is portrayed through the juxtaposition of black and white. In “Amalia,” duplicity is demonstrated through the intertwining of identities between the female protagonist and her doll to portray the roles women are reduced to in patriarchal society. Here in “La bella durmiente,” duplicity is the juxtaposition between the female protagonist’s real life and the part she plays in the ballets, *Coppélia*, *La bella durmiente*, and *Giselle*. In other words, the roles that the protagonist dances begin to tell the story of her own life. Life and art fuse and the reader is unsure of what is happening. As Rivera points out, “Among these narratives, ‘*La bella durmiente*’ stands out because of the multiplicity of roles adopted by the protagonist, María de los Angeles, and the various ways in which she uses such traditional elements as fairy tales and classical ballet to usurp those roles” (99). By playing traditional roles, María de los Angeles demonstrates how she is continuously playing the role of the “Other” while showing how women are constantly reduced to anonymous figures whose survival relies upon patriarchal society. Women who do not conform to the demands of patriarchal society run the risk of not surviving; it is not easy for women to create their own identity, be accepted, and remain in patriarchal society. While the

female protagonist is playing the various personalities and showing the victimization of women, she also demonstrates how she rejects the victimization of her own being.

The story is set around the correspondence between two representatives of patriarchal society, María's father, don Fabiano Fernández, and the Reverend Mother, who discuss the well being of María. In between these letters the reader is introduced to María through various excerpts describing María's ballets: *Coppélia*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Giselle*. Amongst these letters and excerpts are various newspaper clippings describing the well being of the upper-class--the "Beautiful People"—in order to emphasize what is expected of the female protagonist and the life that surrounds and awaits her. The women described in the social column of the newspaper are depicted as attachments or possessions of their husbands; their only importance is to show the latest fashions as described in the narration. For example, "Elizabeth, esposa de Don Fabiano, lucía una exquisita creación de Fernando Pena, en amarillo sol, toda cubierta de pequeñas plumas. Allí pudimos ver a Robert Martínez y a Mary... a George Ramírez y su Martha" (*Papeles* 123). This is what awaits the female protagonist--to be known, as somebody's "Other".

María de los Angeles is a young woman raised in upper-class society whose only desire in life is to dance, to continue being a ballerina and as a child this was acceptable. However, now that María is a young woman, her father, her fiancé, and the Reverend Mother deem dancing for a living unacceptable. The only acceptable path for María is to become a nun or to marry and have a family. Although, what María is essentially demonstrating through her ballet is living her life. In order to

dance, she must learn the steps, accept certain directions, and guide herself in a particular way. The problem with María guiding herself in her dancing or in her life is just that, she is the one guiding herself. This goes against patriarchal society's wishes, whose need for empowerment is fulfilled by controlling others. Therefore, the Reverend Mother in a letter to don Fabiano attempts show that dancing is a disgraceful spectacle especially with the outfits the women wear and the moves they have to make: "Por las fotos de la crónica social que salió en la prensa de esta semana, nos hemos enterado del desgraciado espectáculo de su hija bailando en un teatro vestida con un vestido impúdico" (*Papeles* 126). Since ballet is deemed unacceptable, the story is continuously emphasizing the importance of María not dancing and accepting her predestined role. As we shall see, María continues to defy patriarchal society and uses dancing on her terms as the escape through which she reconstructs her being. María plays a part in three ballets throughout the story, and in each one she attempts to break through the barriers that have been set for her. Also, with each ballet her defiance goes one step further until she successfully dismantles the restraints set by patriarchal society.

The first ballet, *Coppélia*, sets the structure of the role that María must play. María plays the part of Swanhilda, a woman in love with Franz. However, Franz is not in love with Swanhilda; he is in love with Coppélia, a doll, who only sits and stares out the window. Therefore, in order for Swanhilda to get Franz's attention, she must dress up and act as Coppélia. By doing this Swanhilda/María plays into the narrations' continuous emphasis of the relationship between women and dolls.

Franz, sin embargo, parece no hacerle caso, y todos los días sale a la plaza del pueblo a pasearle la calle a una muchacha que lee, sentada en un balcón. Swanhilda se siente devorada por los celos, y entra una noche en casa del Doctor Coppélius. Descubre que Coppélia es sólo una muñeca de porcelana. (*Papeles* 124)

Upon this discovery Swanhilda destroys the doll and takes her place; she realizes that the only way Franz will notice her is if she becomes Coppélia. The ballet goes on, and Swanhilda/María seems to be following her anticipated role in the ballet as planned until her dance with Franz. María begins dancing with Franz, then takes off on her own creation of the dance and leaves the auditorium. María's role in the ballet emphasizes the roles women should engage in while also demonstrating how María breaks these roles. She attempts to escape from patriarchal society by breaking from the routine of the dance. As Gisela Norat notes, "el ballet funciona como válvula de escape; representa ese espacio propio donde puede expresarse libremente y evadir la realidad. El baile, aunque sólo temporalmente, le permite despojarse de todas las restricciones que limitan y anulan su individualidad" (23). As such, the variation of the routine during the ballet by María becomes an escape from the restrictions imposed upon her within the actual ballet. A ballet is a dance that creates certain steps, routines, etc. for each dancer to follow. Given its highly structured form it becomes another means to confine or constrict an individual. When María breaks from her routine within the ballet, she is attempting to break through the barriers created by the ballet. María's actions within her ballet parallel her real life. She is

constantly being reminded of her accepted role in patriarchal society and how not to break from their confinements. María's repeated endeavors to continue dancing whenever she is able to is her way of violating patriarchal society's constraints. Therefore, María's actions in her ballet and in her life are paralleled in the sense that she attempts to go against the limitations. By going against these limitations, María is starting the process of dismantling her imposed identity.

After María's performance in *Coppélia*, the Reverend Mother and her father communicate frequently by letter, and the Reverend Mother highly stresses that María's dancing is not acceptable to the Catholic church and that she would like to see María join the order. María's parents decide against forcing her to join the order due to her being their only child; however, they do prohibit her from dancing. They see dancing as detrimental to her social position in society and decide that the most accepted role for her is to marry and have children. When María learns that she is forbidden to continue her career as a ballerina, she becomes seriously ill and is unconscious for ten days and nights despite her family's efforts to retrieve her. As Netchinsky points out, "Denied her only outlet, the Dance that had already become her private vehicle of fantasy and resistance, María de los Angeles is traumatized at the thought, and then the reality, of surrendering control of her body. She would rather sleep a hundred years" (114). The parallel between María's actions in life and in the ballet *La bella durmiente* continue to be accentuated by Ferré as María falls into a deep sleep just like the heroine of the second ballet. María's sudden lapse into a coma because she is not allowed to dance is another demonstration of her rejection

of patriarchal society's expectations for her life. If María is unconscious, she will be unable to abide by the expectations of patriarchal society; she will be unable to marry and have children.

According to the story, Sleeping Beauty can only be awakened by her prince. María can only be pulled out of her deep sleep if she is allowed to dance; thus, she needs a knight in shining armor who will allow her to dance. As Norat notes:

En su experiencia de vida, la mujer aprende que para realizar sus deseos necesita la aprobación del hombre. Por lo tanto, al tener literalmente al príncipe que le promete que podrá seguir bailando, la joven emerge de su aislamiento síquico y acepta la oferta de matrimonio. Al haber sido traicionado por el padre, el novio pasa a ser el nuevo héroe en su vida. (24)

The Reverend Mother and don Fabiano have both turned against María by prohibiting her from dancing. So she turns to the next person who will allow her to dance and continue being accepted into patriarchal society, Felisberto. Due to the standards of society, it is expected that women look to a male figure for answers and acceptance in life. María at first looked to her father and, now that he has betrayed her, she will look to her soon-to-be husband Felisberto (her knight in shining armor). Felisberto is the only one who is able to wake María from her coma because he promises her that she will be able to dance if she marries him:

En un profundo silencio durmió tanto tiempo que los huesos se le fueron poniendo finos como agujas hasta que un día oyó a lo lejos un

¡TATIII TATIII TATIII! lo reconoció era Felisberto que se acercaba trató de levantarse pero el lamé drapeado alrededor de su cuerpo...¿eres tú, príncipe soñando?...despiértate mi amor ahora vas a poder bailar. (132)

Felisberto will save María by supposedly allowing her to continue with her ballet as long as she marries him. This, of course, goes against all demands and expectations of society (the Reverend Mother and don Fabiano) because they have forbidden María to dance, as it is not acceptable to their standards. María wakes up from her coma when she hears that Felisberto will allow her to dance if she marries him. By marrying Felisberto, María succumbs to society's belief that every young woman's only dream is to get married. These events in María's life continue to correspond to those of the ballet. In the ballet, *La bella durmiente*, the young woman is awakened by the prince who promises to marry her and turn her into a woman, which also occurs to María.

The third ballet, *Giselle*, María plays the role of Giselle who is about to marry Loys, her fiancé. Giselle fell in love with Loys, who all along appears to be a peasant. However, Giselle becomes unsure as to whether or not the young man is really a simple peasant and wonders if he is a prince with vested interests. As the narration points out, "Giselle sospecha que Loys su amante no va a querer seguir siendo un sencillo campesino como ella creía sino que va a convertirse él también en un príncipe con muchos intereses creados" (*Papeles* 137-38). Giselle begins to doubt her lover's intentions because, if he is a prince with vested interests, their love will play second to

everything else: “Gisèle piensa que Loys dejará de amarla porque ella es astuta y sabe que cuando hay intereses creados por el medio el amor es siempre plato de segunda mesa” (*Papeles* 138). María’s role in this ballet continues to resemble her life outside of the ballet. She has just agreed to marry Felisberto believing that she will be allowed to dance; however, she begins to doubt Felisberto’s intentions, believing that he, too, has other interests besides marrying and loving her. Therefore, she wishes to escape her engagement with Loys/Felisberto because her only desire in life is to become a “Willy” and dance with the troupe. ** At this time in the narration, she initially assumes her only way of escape is through suicide. Later on, Gisèle/María convinces herself that she is being ridiculous and that Loys/Felisberto is being sincere. María decides to go through with the marriage but later on realizes that her initial suspicions were correct. The story of María’s role in this ballet foreshadows the events that will occur in the last part of María’s story.

María marries Felisberto, and he does retract his part of the agreement as María suspected by not wearing a condom and impregnating María on their wedding night. As Norat discusses, the promise to marry Felisberto changes the condition of the deal between Felisberto and María. “En una sociedad patriarcal este abrazo simbólico del héroe se cumple en el enlace matrimonial. Pero el matrimonio como institución social le asigna el papel dominante al hombre y el de subordinado a la mujer” (25). Not only does this prohibit María from being able to dance, it also breaks Felisberto’s promise of agreeing not to have children. As patriarchal society stresses, the role of the women is to get married, please your husband, have children,

take care of them, and succumb to everyone's demands. María is continuously fighting these demands and decides to attempt another defiance of "their" expectations. María shows this defiance by choosing not to baptize her son. According to Ivette López Jiménez, "María de los A. rompe con los valores del mundo de sus padres al negarse a bautizar su hijo, se resiste en ser la esposa abnegada, insiste en ser bailarina" (46). This act is appalling to the Reverend Mother, don Fabiano, and Felisberto as they have yet to understand why this young woman cannot be satisfied with fulfilling their expectations. Is it not every woman's dream to do as others wish rather than what she would like to do? In the case of María, all she would like to do is dance. Her continuous attempts to defy patriarchal society's expectations of her are only steps in deconstructing her imposed identity in order to dance, which becomes the ultimate key to reconstructing her new identity.

The last step in María's defiance of patriarchal society is her suicide; she returns to her initial idea. In the beginning of the story, along with the letters between the Reverend Mother and don Fabiano, there are anonymous letters to Felisberto informing him of his wife's whereabouts during the afternoon, leading Felisberto to believe that his wife is having an affair. Although Felisberto does not know who these letters are from, the reader realizes that they are written by María herself to provoke her husband into finding her so he will understand what he has done by betraying her. For example, "Si recibió mi carta anterior no lo puede saber, pero si así fue parece que no la tomó en serio, pues su señora ha seguido viniendo al hotel todos los días a la misma hora. A usted por lo visto lo mismo le da, y ella anda por

ahí como una perra realenga” (*Papeles* 122). María writes these letters to Felisberto after she has the baby because she needs to escape her situation. She goes to a cheap hotel to dance in her room like Carmen Merengue, a trapeze artist. María not only acts like this to show Felisberto what he has reduced her to, she is also demonstrating her rejection of upper-class society and its expectations of her. As Castillo also observes, “Rebellious María de los Angeles, in ‘Sleeping Beauty’ like Isabel Luberza, marks her rejection of high society by adopting the bright colors of the lower-class women. She paints her face and hair before prostituting herself, and she finds heavy makeup strangely liberating.” (164). By going to a cheap hotel, dressed as a lower-class woman and dancing as a trapeze artist, María has become and rejected at the same time everything that she is supposed to be. On top of all of this, María has an extramarital sexual encounter the last time she comes to the hotel. All of these acts will ultimately cause her expulsion from patriarchal society. By being fully ejected from patriarchal society, María has also completed the deconstruction of her imposed identity.

This dismantling allows her to reconstruct a new, more authentic identity for herself. María’s suicide is a desperate act committed by a desperate woman, but it still frees her from the confines of patriarchal society. Even though her suicide is self-destructive, the fact that it liberates her from her current situation enables her to create a new identity. Her death frees her from society’s demands; they are no longer able to enforce their expectations or control over María. María’s suicide is her revenge against the injustices committed against her because she controlled her death

rather than patriarchal society controlling her death for her. As Norat also points out, “El suicidio se convierte en instrumento para vengarse de todas las doctrinas inculcadas en su educación religiosa y en las cuales no consiguió apoyo ni alivio para su situación” (30). Ultimately, María realized the only escape or relief from her situation would be her death. The three representatives of patriarchal society in this story--don Fabiano, the Reverend Mother and Felisberto--create too many expectations and barriers for María to be able to live life the way she would like. Her various attempts to reject the expectations lead to betrayal, which causes her to resort to silence and finally death. In this way, she will be able to create her own being and continue dancing, which is all she wanted in the first place.

In “La bella durmiente,” Ferré has presented the reader with a young woman, María de los Angeles, a representative of white, upper-class who is expected to maintain her role by marrying and having children. To patriarchal society, it is imperative that María not veer from the path laid out for her because anything out of the ordinary will cause her upper-class family to lose prestige. María has one desire in life, to dance, something that does not follow her acceptable role and is deemed unacceptable. To demonstrate María’s outlined path in life, Ferré parallels her life beside three ballets, *Coppélia*, *La bella durmiente*, and *Giselle*, which not only demonstrate the roles María plays but represent her only outlet, dancing. Ferré’s use of traditional ballets intensifies the traditional characteristics depicted by the female protagonist. Through María’s depiction of these traditional characteristics, she demonstrates her rejection of her assumed role and eventually dismantles her imposed

identity through her suicide. Although a self-destructive act, it still makes possible the reconstruction of a new, authentic identity wherever it may take place.

Conclusion

An Authentic Identity

*Nadie puede consumir una mujer entera.*¹

Throughout the discussion of the four stories I have examined in this thesis, “La muñeca menor,” “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” “Amalia,” and “La bella durmiente,” I have shown how Ferré consistently confronts patriarchal society’s attempts to consume women by creating expectations and roles which confine their identity. While Ferré creates the female protagonists with limited identities, she also shows how they break through their limitations to develop a genuine identity. An applicable metaphor to this process is Ferré’s theme of cooking in her essay, “La cocina de la escritura” from her book, *Sitio a Eros*. “De cómo dejarse caer de la sartén al fuego” (How to let Yourself Fall from the Frying Pan into the Fire), the subtitle of the first part of this essay, is an analogy for the process the female protagonists go through to achieve the recreation of their identity. First, to be able to dismantle their imposed identity the women need to enter the “frying pan.” Being in the “frying pan” symbolizes the battle these women fight during the dismantling of their imposed identities. The deconstructed identity occurs when the women fall from the frying pan as they are then able to enter the fire and start the reconstruction of their new authentic identity.

In “La muñeca menor”, the youngest niece fights her battle in the frying pan throughout her married life while her only duty is to sit on the balcony. A complete

deconstruction of identity occurs when she assimilates with her doll (which represents her “Pascua de Resurrección”); she is able to fall from the frying pan and enter the fire to recreate her being. Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra in “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” fight their battle throughout their lives in the frying pan as they are never able to veer from their accepted roles. They are able to finally finish their battle when Ambrosio, the cause of their oppression, dies. They are then able to unite or enter the fire and reconstruct their identity. In “Amalia”, the female protagonist is only able to finish her battle, or fall from the frying pan, when her uncle, the cause of Amalia’s battle, is burned and destroyed with his house by the other characters. María de los Angeles, the female protagonist in “La bella durmiente,” fights what seems to be a hopeless battle with patriarchal society, until she falls from her tight rope (which represents the fall from the frying pan) and commits suicide. With her suicide, María is then able to enter the fire to recreate an authentic identity for herself.

The purpose of Ferré showing how the female protagonists dismantle and recreate their identities is, as she says, “una voluntad a la vez constructiva y destructiva; una posibilidad de crecimiento y de cambio” (*Sitio* 13). Her writing is a destructive and constructive process, which is demonstrated in the way she manifests the lives of the female protagonists in her stories. The deconstruction and reconstruction of identities in the female protagonists I have discussed are evidence of Ferré’s desire for change. In each story, it seems as if she is only presenting acceptable women in patriarchal society. However, while she presents these

acceptable women, she shows their ability to destroy the boundaries created for them. By the end of each story, the female protagonists are able to escape being consumed by patriarchal society and give evidence of growth because they do not succumb to society's expectations. As Ferré goes on to say in her essay, "La cocina de la escritura,"

Mi voluntad de escribir es también una voluntad destructiva, un intento de aniquilarme y de aniquilar el mundo. La palabra, como la naturaleza misma, es infinitamente sabia, y conoce cuándo debe asolar lo caduco y lo corrompido para edificar la vida sobre cimientos nuevos. (*Sitio 14*)

Through her writing Ferré attempts to obliterate the world and its problems.

According to Ferré, her words know when to destroy the run down, old, and corrupt, which are patriarchal society and its old system of values. This is what Ferré destroys with her writing.

Ferré's shows her desire to change the old and bring out the new in her stories. In "La muñeca menor", the doctor--the representative of patriarchal society--was destroyed by his young wife's metamorphosis. With her metamorphosis, she destroyed the values accepted by the upper-class. The youngest niece broke through a system of values that has been accepted for centuries in order to show woman's ability to change the system. In these four stories, woman's desire to change is her need to be an individual with the ability to create her own identity. Woman's ability and desire to fight back is evident throughout Ferré's stories as well. In "Amalia," the

female protagonist destroyed the colonial state and upper-class privileges by literally destroying everything her uncle and his house represented. In both of these stories, Ferré is not simply showing one woman's ability to destroy a particular representative of patriarchal society in order to gain her own identity. Rather, she uses one woman to demonstrate her ability to destroy the values of patriarchal society for all women. Ferré is concerned about women, inequality, and the problems they suffer, which is why the female protagonists in her stories represent women as a collective. In Ferré's world,

Es ineludible que mi visión del mundo tenga mucho que ver con la desigualdad que sufre todavía la mujer en nuestra edad moderna. Uno de los problemas que más me preocupa sigue siendo la incapacidad que ha demostrado la sociedad para resolver eficazmente su dilema, los obstáculos que continúa oponiéndole en su lucha por lograrse a sí misma, tanto en su vida privada como en su vida pública. (*Sitio* 23)

Her constant preoccupation with the problems women suffer and the way in which society is incapable of resolving the problems is evident in her stories as she shows how women are continuously confronted with barriers to confine them. However, her use of irony is evident as she uses the tools patriarchal society has created to confine women to destroy patriarchal society. As I have shown in "La muñeca menor," the female protagonist used the dolls created as replicas of her as the means with which she destroyed the values of patriarchal society. This is also evident in "Amalia," as

the dolls given to the young girl by her uncle eventually lead to her escape from the confinements and to his destruction.

In “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres,” Ferré continues to show her confrontation with the problems and sufferings of women through her destruction of the old to bring out the new. Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra are divided by race and social class for years by their husband / lover, Ambrosio. Ferré demonstrates her confrontation with this problem with the death of Ambrosio. With this act, Ferré makes it possible to bring out the new--for two women of different racial backgrounds and class to come together and break through the separation that patriarchal society has created for them. While showing women’s confrontation to the degradation and suffering, Ferré uses the profanity patriarchal society used to destroy women as the tool with which the women redeem themselves. According to Ferré:

Si la obscenidad había sido tradicionalmente empleada para degradar y humillar a la mujer, me dije, ésta debería de ser doblemente efectiva para redimirla. Si en mi cuento “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” por ejemplo, el lenguaje obsceno ha servido para que una sola persona se conmueva ante la injusticia que implica la explotación sexual de la mujer, no me importa que me consideren una escritora pornográfica. Me siento satisfecha porque habré cumplido cabalmente con mi voluntad de hacerme útil. (*Sitio 25*)

Obscene language is one of patriarchal society’s tools, which Ferré’s female

protagonists use to fight against the humiliation patriarchal society has caused them. Ferré uses this tool to not only redeem the female protagonists in this story but to liberate all women. As Ferré says, her goal is to fight against injustice and to help women stand up to sexual exploitation, which she makes evident in this story and others.

In “La bella durmiente,” María de los Angeles spends her life battling against the expectations of don Fabiano, the Reverend Mother, and Felisberto. These three representatives of patriarchal society are intent on making María live her life according to their beliefs rather than let her follow her dream of dancing. María confronts patriarchal society by committing suicide, resorting to the most self-destructive act to confront patriarchal society. María is still able to redeem herself because she controls her own death. Therefore, Ferré demonstrates her desire to change patriarchal society’s system through each female protagonist’s battle to dismantle their imposed identity and confront the system that confines them.

In each of these stories Ferré presents these women as symbols of a whole. Each female protagonist is not someone the reader knows; they are a type of person with which the reader identifies. Ferré presents us with women from different classes and racial backgrounds to demonstrate the oppression of all types of women. Therefore, women, collectively, are able to confront and fight against patriarchal society’s corrupt system of values. By showing how women do not succumb to and contest the system in order to create a new, authentic identity for themselves, Ferré demonstrates that no one is able to consume an entire woman.

Notes

¹ This epigraph by Juan José Arreola was taken from Debra Castillo. "*Talking Back, Toward a Latin American Feminist Criticism.*" Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992. xi.

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