Mothers and Sons in Hispanic Short Fiction by Women: A Quarter Century of Erotic, Destructive Maternal Love

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MOTHERS AND SONS IN HISPANIC SHORT FICTION BY WOMEN:
A QUARTER CENTURY OF EROTIC, DESTRUCTIVE MATERNAL LOVE

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ABSTRACT

During the last quarter century, the traditional division of works in Spanish into Peninsular versus Latin American has become obsolete. In a global literary market, increasing attention should be paid to themes or tendencies within genres. These short stories - “Omar, amor” by Cristina Fernández Cubas, “Viaje” by Luisa Valenzuela, “Ayer” by Herminia Paz, “Historia de amor” by Cristina Peri Rossi, “Piel adentro” by Griselda López, “Yokasta” by Liliana Heker, “Yocasta” by Alejandra Basualto, and “Yocasta confiesa” by Ángelina Muñiz-Huberman - are published between 1982 and 2000 and address the mother-son relationship in mythical contexts from the unique perspective of the mother, thus reversing the tendency to view them from the perspective of the emerging masculine identities.

Drawing on the feminist and psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva, Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow, Melanie Klein, and Donald Winnicott, this eclectic approach shows the role of the mother as it relates to rearing a son. It recognizes that the female’s development as an individual continues to unfold as she experiences the stages of motherhood which culminate not in the physical separation at birth, but in the emotional separation of the child as he enters adulthood and is reborn as a separate and distinct entity from the mother. Her role as the mirror has ended. The mother desires to maintain her mirror status with her son and struggles with the greatest incest taboo: that between mother and son. If he fails to comply with his innate matricidal drive, described by Kristeva, the dutiful mother kills him so that he may be reborn as an individual. Thus the mother witnesses and even provokes a cycle of birth-death-rebirth in her son.

This study explores the mother-son theme as written by both well-known and lesser-known women authors from a variety of countries. In fact, the chapters are organized by mythical theme rather than geographical origins of the authors. Chapter
One is “Kali, the Mother Goddess,” Chapter Two is “Echo, Voice of Narcissus,” and Chapter Three is “Yocasta, Mother of Oedipus.” The chapters expose the previously ignored mother’s perspective of the son’s transition into adulthood.
INTRODUCTION

Nearly one hundred years ago in *A Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf asked why women have not published more. She determined that women, for the most part, were denied an education and lacked private space. She believed that history (reality) was a male domain and fiction (invention) a female domain and challenged women to rewrite history to include women. Furthermore, Woolf asserted that despite England’s patriarchy and the contemporary culture’s perpetuation of myths about women, there was no need to hate or to flatter men. Woolf conceded that one sex was no more to blame than the other for this problem, and her charge was simply for women to recognize their situation and make it better. In fact, her solution to ensure that women occupy a space in literary production was that they have “a room of [their] own” and sufficient money to subsidize their writing. Woolf pointed out that one cannot write well if one has not dined well,¹ nor if one has not had an equal education.

The veracity of Woolf’s one hundred year-old observations is amazing. Women today, however, are admitted to some of the finest universities around the globe. In the United States, even science and military academies such as Johns Hopkins University and The Citadel admit women to undergraduate studies. This better prepares women to achieve the same level of familiarity with and competency in literature as men. This progress for women in literary production is preceded by a recently uncovered lineage of women writers.

Elaine Showalter’s groundbreaking study *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) established a literary history of women in England that had long been neglected and,

¹ Woolf’s assertions predate Abraham Maslow hierarchy of needs which he developed between 1943-1954 and published in 1954 in *Motivation and Personality*. At that time he recognized five needs. In the second edition (1970) he enumerated seven needs. His basic premise is that each of us is motivated by needs which must be satisfied in order to progress to higher concerns within the hierarchy.
worse yet, unacknowledged. Showalter showed that women in England indeed had a
“female literary tradition” but that their work lacked serious investigation.²

Hispanic women, however, and their literary tradition are still greatly unexplored. Jean Franco’s *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (1988) traces the specific history of Mexican women from the religious narratives of the colonial period to contemporary feminist revisionary views of the family. In her text, she asks whether women are capable of telling their story saying: “The circulation of power is between males, while women are the objects of desire and the guardians of death” (148). Franco attempts to rebut Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge who “argue that the modern culture industry prevents individuals from interpreting the self and the world” and states that “In this chapter I offer a counter example, though an ambiguous one” (184). Thus, the evidence might point to women not being able to create their own realities within literature. Franco has a different interpretation of that “evidence.”

Franco shows that even among the few women who have written literature, fewer still have seen publication of their work under their names, and she discusses biographical accounts of the lives of nuns, some published by men of the cloth and some by nuns using pseudonyms. Early on, mystic nuns: “were well aware of the danger of their words, since they constantly deny authorship. It was only by disappearing as authors and becoming mediums for the voice of God (or targets of the devil) that these women were able to speak of their experiences at all” (Franco 15). This is to say that these women recognized their position as outsiders in the written discourse and that they knowingly exposed themselves to grave danger in attempting to belong to the circles of writers. In addition, Franco also notes this marginalized status of females in the art of Diego Rivera in Mexico’s capital saying:

Rivera’s iconography is interesting both for what it does and what it does not depict. On the one hand, it suggests that postrevolutionary women have a new social space. They are teachers, comrades, and revolutionaries (*maestros* and *compañeras*), although in these positions

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² In the introduction to her twenty-year anniversary publication, she recounts criticism of contemporary feminists of her work.
they are still represented as “helpers” in the epic narrative; on the other hand, women are not only mothers but sexually liberated mothers. (106)

Her last assertion is still hotly debated. In fact, in the introduction to her book *Myths of Motherhood*, Shari L. Thurer reminds the reader of the changing views of motherhood throughout history and the distinct separation of motherhood and sexuality that exists today:

Sex and motherhood have not mixed well since the demise of the goddess religions, when men began to split women into madonnas or whores in every sphere. Presumably a good mother extinguishes her libido with conception or else expels it along with her placenta on childbirth. The extent of the anxiety aroused by the convergence of sexuality and maternity may be seen in the outraged reaction to a stunning photograph of the very pregnant and very naked actress Demi Moore on the cover of *Vanity Fair* in August 1991. The idea of subjecting a maternal figure to an erotic gaze was just too transgressive for many people, and the editors were forced to conceal Moore’s protruding abdomen by a white paper wrapper in some cities. (xx-xxi)

Thurer blames this saint/whore dichotomy on the declining status of women and the emerging prominence of men in society: “Since the onset of male domination, mothers’ sexuality has been split off from her maternity, and her bodily processes – menstruation, childbirth, lactation – have been deemed indecent” (xxvi). It is society’s (men’s) disgust with the maternal and the sexual that causes the stories in this study to be so unique for their central vantage point: that of the mother. Thurer acknowledges the recent shift in perspective:

On the psychoanalytic front, an upheaval of such dimension has occurred that psychoanalysts, who previously had ignored mothers, now find themselves scrupulously scrutinizing mothers’ behaviors during the first few weeks of an infant’s life. The watchwords vary – attachment, mirroring, attunement, empathy, bonding, unconditional positive regard – but the required maternal *modus operandi* remains the same – altruistic
love. “The ideal mother,” wrote the psychoanalyst Alice Balint, “has no interests of her own.” (xxvi-xxvii)

Psychoanalysts indeed have theories about motherhood, or more specifically child development, but even these foundational thoughts were formulated by men. The challenge for psychoanalysts since Freud and authors since Homer has been to explore the woman’s voice. In many cases, this work is in its genesis even today. In literature by women, there has been a recent effort to subvert traditional male narratives by replacing them with a female-driven variant. Women writing in Spanish are united based on shared themes in these new versions. One such theme is mother-son relationships. This study examines the “universal” theme of motherhood as it relates to the rearing of a son and considers the mother-son relationship as a stage of psychological development of both the mother and of the son. It shows that bringing the mother’s individual progression to the forefront of a text makes for an interesting reversal of previous male texts based on similar story lines.

The technique of adapting male-dominated stories to female purposes is a brilliant and much-needed one. In the introduction to the book The Castration of Oedipus, Ann Scales gives an anecdotal response to the criticism she received for applying psychoanalytic theory to feminist works:

Why should feminists accept the risks of entertaining psychoanalysis yet again? The short answer to that came again from J. C. Smith, during a faculty lunch seminar in January of 1993, while I was visiting at the University of British Columbia. In a fifty-minute span, Professor Smith shared the skeletal structure of this book, focusing on the relevance of Nietzsche to a postmodern, psychoanalytic feminism. One of our colleagues earnestly asked, But doesn’t this whole theory undermine the goal of equality? J. C.’s short response: “Equality is a male game.” (4) Thus, the “risks” of this type of theory are to subscribe blindly to them, but the more devastating risk is to ignore the female perspective in traditional narratives. Whether in mythology or religion, female writers today are exploring male-authored texts and illuminating the female role within them. As a result, these particular writings bear a
critical and unstudied message about mothers and their sons. Much attention has been
paid to the son; now the spotlight is on the mother. According to Adrienne Rich, “All
human life on the planet is born of woman” (11). This seems obvious enough, but the
staunchness reality is that even women sometimes need to be reminded that they possess the
magical creative powers of the goddess that is a mother rather than accept the position
allotted to them by men.

The case for the marginalized nature of women and mothers not only in society
but also in writing and other art forms has been adequately established. Furthermore,
there is a case for generic marginalization. In literature, women who have successfully
published their writings under their own names have typically only been welcomed into
certain genres. As Woolf noted in *A Room of One’s Own*, fictional works are believed to
be of lesser value than nonfiction. History, current events, politics, economics, and
health are the realms of male discourse, while female writing has been considered an art
for pleasure and not one to be taken seriously.

The generic conventions accepted by Russian Formalists at the beginning of the
twentieth century further label and classify fiction. Ultimately, the more respected genre
of poetry is considered male writing, whereas the genre of the novel, particularly the
romance novel, is considered to be a fitting place for female fantasies. The male-
established conventions not only alienate women, but they also inadvertently provoke
protest and rebellion. Janice Radway says in *Reading the Romance* that “the women who
seek out novels in order to construct such a vision again and again are reading not out of
contentment but out of dissatisfaction, longing, and protest” (215). Therefore, women
may comprise the primary audience for the romance novel but not because they are
superficial consumers of fantasy. Instead they read as an act of protest not yet manifested
in more overt ways. Additionally, Franco insists that American women subscribe to the
romance novel for the same reason that Mexican women prefer other methods of
romantic storytelling: “American popular literature for women used these romantic plots,
turning them into formulas of a marketable product. In Mexico, however, it was the
popular song, cinema, and orally transmitted culture that kept romance alive” (135).
Thus we see that women have adopted an attitude of protest when partaking of fictional
literature. They exploit the male conventions of genre in order to fulfill their own desires.

Theater and short stories are, however, generically more problematic. Theater is a democratic form that appeals to a wider audience, in part because its didactic nature reaches a less educated public. Nevertheless, theater is designed to be performed rather than read. Many dramatic works, in fact, are never written or published; hence, theater might arguably not qualify as a written genre at all. The short story, then, remains as the most marginalized genre within fiction. It is more concise than the novel and, notwithstanding its metaphorical language and symbols, it is not bound to the conventions of rhyme and meter like poetry. One encounters, thus, another problem of categorization: within the hierarchy of written works, the short story occupies the most marginalized and lowly space within the canon.

The very idea of the literary canon presents an additional concern. With respect to the standardization of reading lists and anthologies, the traditional literary canon has some merit, but the political aspects of selecting and maintaining a canon too often lead to its becoming another instrument of marginalization. “Spanish” departments, for example, do not limit studies only to strictly Spanish texts, but rather to Hispanic literature and culture. Moreover, the traditional geographic division of peninsular (one country: Spain) versus Latin American (twenty-three countries and the United States) has become absurd in postmodernity.

This study compiles short stories written in Spanish by women from the Hispanic world during the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century. Hispanic short fiction by women is herein united based on shared themes rather than traditional countries of origin. Though the entire project traces the mother-son motif, the chapters are divided by mythological representations of motherhood and characters with maternal functions: Chapter One is Kali, Mother Goddess; Chapter Two is Echo, Voice of Narcissus; and Chapter Three is Jocasta, Mother of Oedipus. In short stories, the narrative is, by definition, very brief; therefore, it is highly dependent on allusions. In her article
“Minicuento: paradigma y canon literario,” Karla Paniagua Ramírez claims regarding this literary genre:

El minicuento encuentra su materia prima en la anécdota cotidiana, la mitología, el chiste, los saberes colectivos sedimentados que emergen como refranes, adivinanzas, adagios, leyendas. Esta cualidad hace de él un género saprófito: “…saprófita, es la vida que se nutre de la descomposición orgánica; así también este tipo de escritura prospera a expensas del légamo residual de la cultura…” (no pagination)

She also recognizes that “el minicuento rescata una anécdota, que a su vez expresa la historia de una colectividad” (no pagination). Thus, the combination of the short story genre and the theme of motherhood in mythological contexts lends itself well to myth criticism.

In this way, the collective unconsciousness of C.G. Jung is made available to the reader through the woman’s version of the myth. The previously silent female speaks, if only in a whisper, through the mediation of the well-known myths in world societies. The mythological quest’s life cycle of “Night-Sea-Journey” is represented as the mother’s creative process of “Birth-Death-Rebirth” where the lack of separation from her son becomes a torturous lack of progression in the process of self-individuation. This need for separation is what myth criticism’s René Girard sees as ritual sacrifice and feminist Julia Kristeva describes as the “matricidal mandate”: “For man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation, provided that it takes place under optimal circumstances and can be eroticized” (27-28). Kristeva further postulates that because the child introjects the mother as part of himself, he finds it necessary to kill himself when he identifies with her. Then the child sees his mother as death-bearing. Therefore, the child kills his mother, and he blames her for the death of at least a part of himself. Ironically, the child requires the “death” of his mother as a necessary step towards individuation, yet when he kills her, he blames her (28). Even so, Kristeva’s “Death-Bearing Woman” can be held
responsible for the death of her own child, but only as it is seen as a motherly duty in fulfilling his matricidal drive. She kills him, because she is a good mother.

Just as Thurer asserts, the good mother’s primary motivation is altruistic love for her child. In that case, a son’s failed attempt at matricide must be assisted by the mother committing infanticide. Thurer states about the ideal mother that: “the diverse roles that women play in raising their children are not linked to timeless truths, but to more mundane things, like subsistence [sic] strategies, population pressures, biology, technology, weather patterns, and speculations about women’s nature” (xxv). That is why infanticide has sometimes been historically necessary for the survival of the “good mother”: “Usually the killing of infants is related to desperate poverty and illegitimacy – themselves related – but sometimes the cause is not at all clear” (xxv). Her study of the changing role of mothers does reveal at least this benevolent mother as also a death-bearing one.

In these stories, the final separation of a child from his mother is a necessary developmental stage that a loving mother will facilitate when necessary. This “death” is taken literally in these stories in which the protagonist serves a maternal function in her initial creation of the male character; in her severing relations with him; and in her finally, and sometimes forcefully, allowing him to exist as a distinct and separate person from her.

In Chapter One: Kali, Mother Goddess; the Hindu Goddess Kali, who has the dual characteristics of a loving and terrible mother, is the protagonist. This protagonist is creative in the act of birth and destructive in the act of death which she brings to all her devotees. However, her killings are benevolent acts as they allow her devotees to be reborn into another life. Thus, the short stories in this chapter have a female protagonist who acts as both the loving and terrible mother by birthing and then killing her son.

In Chapter Two: Echo, Voice of Narcissus, Echo is not the mother of Narcissus. Echo as a narrator and mythical figure is not the mirror image of Narcissus, but instead she serves as his aural mirror. In this chapter, however, the female protagonist is compared to Echo as she serves a maternal function in reference to him and is also a mirror for him as seen by the object relations school in modern psychology.
Psychoanalysts believe that each person begins life experiencing narcissism. This is a self-centered view of the world with the child seeing himself as the center of the universe. It is during this early stage of development that the child bonds to his primary caregiver, generally accepted as the mother’s role, at which time he sees her as his universe and as a mirror of himself.

Initially the child sees his mother in mythical terms. She is both idealized and internalized. It is through this primary caregiver/primary object that the child is socialized and gains his sense of self-worth. It is through her that he first experiences and expresses physical (sexual) desire. However, the process of maturation which began with the physical separation at birth now manifests itself with emotional withdrawal from her and her ultimate substitution. Sam Vaknin’s study “Object relations: The Psychology of Serial and Mass Killers” examines the abnormalities in this process of maturation.

Vaknin points out one such failure: “What determines the success or failure of these developments in one’s personal history? Mostly, the mother herself. If she does not “let go” – the child will not go. If the mother herself is the dependent, narcissistic type, - the growth prospects of the child are, indeed, dim” (no pagination). Echo’s maternal function, in relation to Narcissus, is firstly that she clings to an impossible desire to copulate with Narcissus. This is a desire for the primary object. Secondly, when Narcissus rejects her love, she is physically separated from him as she is banished and observes him from the forest. During this period, Narcissus begins to love his own reflection which is a separate “person” from her. Lastly, she observes his own self-knowledge culminate in his self-destruction: she does not administer this “death,” but she is in close proximity and observes it with great grief. Because Narcissus is in love with a reflection of himself, Echo plays the role of the second object in his own self-discovery. As Narcissus destroys himself, he commits a modified form of matricide in that he kills an idealized, internalized maternal figure. Thus Narcissus destroys the two of them so that each may experience separate new lives.

In Chapter Three: Jocasta, Mother of Oedipus, the familiar story of Oedipus is also adapted so that the mother is the protagonist. In earlier versions, Oedipus knowingly weds his mother, and they meet their deaths in the end as a result of this incestuous
relationship. In the versions compiled in this study, Jocasta plays the central role, and she knowingly enters into incestuous relations with her son. She harbors and acts upon her desire for her son, but she later destroys both him and herself in the process. In this way, Jocasta is the mother who gives him life, takes his life, and consequently takes her own life.

The selection of the individual stories is based on these criteria: each takes a “male story” and subverts it by placing the female drama at the forefront of the narrative, and each has a protagonist who fills a maternal function in relation to the second, male figure in the story. In this way, the authors have taken a male literary history and made it their own, a technique learned from the very men who silenced their words for centuries. The approach used to analyze the individual stories is eclectic but relies primarily on feminist and psychoanalytic theories.
The current chapter is one that considers stories with the theme of Kali, a mother goddess. To analyze these stories one must understand the traditional story of Kali. Who is this mother goddess, and why does she remain a vital literary motif? The answer is complicated.

In *The Women’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, the entry for “Kali Ma” begins:

‘Dark Mother,’ the Hindu Triple Goddess of creation, preservation, and destruction; now most commonly known in her Destroyer aspect, squatting over her dead consort Shiva and devouring his entrails, while her yoni sexually devours his lingam (penis). Kali is ‘The hungry earth, which devours its own children and fattens on their corpses… It is in India that the experience of the Terrible Mother has been given its most grandiose form as Kali. But all this – and it should not be forgotten – is an image not only of the Feminine but particularly and specifically of the Maternal. For in a profound way life and birth are always bound up with death and destruction.’ (Walker 488)

This Hindu goddess is also known as: “The Terrible,” “The Terrifying Goddess,” and “The Great Black One” (Coulter 257). Primarily, her function is one of a dualistic nature, for she rules over both creation and destruction today. Her origins, though slightly disputed, further emphasize the strong connection between her two seemingly oppositional functions.
In Early Hindu mythology, Kali was a minor goddess who, according to scholars, was either an aspect of Devi, the great mother goddess, or a minor goddess in her own right. Nevertheless, Kali and Devi (also known as Durga) are intricately related. In fact, during one particular battle at Kurukseta, Kali assisted by escorting away the dead. Then, at the bidding of Devi/Durga, Kali was called into the ensuing battle to kill attacking demons. At this point, her wrath overcame her, and she decapitated the demons and presented their heads to Devi/Durga as a gift. Later she began to feed off the carnage by sucking blood and devouring the carcasses. Thus, Kali became known as the opposite of and the complement to the Great Mother Goddess with whom she shared duties on the battlefield.

This dualistic nature is reflected in the two sides of her body. She has multiple hands - generally four, though sometimes ten - each holding instruments of creation and destruction. For example: in her right hands, she holds the instruments of death such as scissors and swords, while in her left hands she holds instruments of regeneration such as the lotus or food. Her two dimensions and four hands are “the ultimate double message” and a “striking image of total affirmation and total negation, representing a bold coincidence of opposites” (Kripal 49).

In visual depictions of her, Kali is always nude and displays her voluptuous breasts and prominent hips which are identified with sexuality, fertility, and maternity. Her only garment is that of a belt made of rope to hold the skulls of her victims/devotees. She is black in color which represents the destructive force she wields. Her face is smeared with blood, and her tongue protrudes from the mouth. Both of these facial qualities indicate the ultimate double meaning as they demonstrate complete sexuality in the female blood and the male phallus as seen in the tongue. Both of these “private” parts are depicted overtly on the face for all to see. Finally, even her physical position is over her consort, Shiva. Thus, though female, she occupies a position of power over him due to her female sexuality: Shiva may dominate during life, but she gives life and takes it away.

Today she is worshipped by Hindis and Buddhists primarily in India and Nepal, but her historical counterparts are many. The previously described characteristics are
reminiscent of the Egyptian goddess Isis, the Aztec (Mexican) goddess Coatlicue, the Celtic goddess Kele, and the Phoenician goddess Calpe (Walker 491, Neumann 153). The similarities are this: they each are triple or triune goddesses (possessing three distinct attributes or personalities) who dominate the elements of both creation and destruction, and they are closely associated visually with the mysterious moon and the serpent or kundalini energy.

Firstly, Kali is the goddess of war, fertility, time, mysteries, and death.³ She is master of so much that it would appear that she is master of all that really matters in the universe. In relation to a child, a mother is his/her universe. What makes this particular goddess pertinent is her recognition and embracing of what Julia Kristeva calls the matricidal mandate: “For man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation, provided that it takes place under optimal circumstances and can be eroticized” (Black Sun 27-28). This matricide is not an actual murder of the mother; instead it is a total separation from her as the child enters into adulthood. It marks a rite of passage for a son who abandons childhood as he abandons his mother. However, some children are unable to comply with this drive. In that case, it falls to the mother to kill her son and thus cause the separation that he is unable to complete himself. The mother kills him in order that he be reborn as a separate and distinct individual from her: so that he becomes an adult.

This killing, on the part of the mother, is an act of mercy. Therefore, psychologically, the mother gives birth to the child at which time he physically separates from her, and eventually there is a rebirth at which time he emotionally separates from her. This is seen as the natural order of things. In this, one sees that the two “opposing” functions of the Great Mother Goddess (creation)/The Terrifying One (destruction) are truly not so far removed from one another.

The three stories united in this chapter each have a female protagonist who plays a maternal function opposite the male character. In the beginning, she demonstrates great

³ Interestingly, Kali is the patron goddess of murderers. Also associated with her are the color yellow and the number five (Coulter 257).
fondness for him which later is not accepted by him, and, in the end, it is she who initiates a separation from him which leaves him “dead.”

“Omar, amor” by Cristina Fernández Cubas (Spain)

The Spanish author Cristina Fernández Cubas is well known for her inclination towards exotic locations and mysterious plots. Her bibliography, as well as those of the other writer analyzed here, can be found in the Appendix. Fernández Cubas lived in Latin America for two years and spent one summer in Cairo. This began her fascination with the exotic and mysterious for several of her works. In 1982 she published “Omar, amor.” This story of some three pages is about a woman who narrates in first person her so-called “aventuras” and ensuing “desventuras” with Omar. They spend three days and nights together during which the female protagonist alternates her identity in name and appearance from that of a female called Kali Ma to an obscurely covered person called Ibrahim. There is a forbidden love between the two, but their relationship is ambiguous and relies on insinuation. That is why a close examination of the evidence is appropriate to determine the exact relationship. This relationship is demonstrated from the first lines when the protagonist imitates his gestures in a Narcissistic manner: “Yo lo había planeado todo, Omar. El color de tu galabía, tu sonrisa, el corte de tus cabellos. Y me compré un kaftán a juego con tus ojos. Por eso, cuando nos perdimos en los pasadizos de la tumba de Keops…, tú te viste reflejado en mí… Sabía imitar todos y cada uno de tus gestos…” (Fernández Cubas 17).

They spend three nights in Cheops’s tomb surrounded by ancient treasures and enjoying what she calls “aquel amor sacrílego” (17), and they also understand each other in a secret language: “Entendía también tu árabe, tan claro, tan conciso, tan desprovisto de florituras innecesarias” (17). Upon analyzing the symbols contained in this story and applying the theories of Julia Kristeva, it is evident that this woman is really the mother
of Omar. She interprets his smile, his laughter, and his speech. A complicity exists between them that allows her to understand his “árabe” and his laughter; this is the infantile communication that only the very mother of the child comprehends.4

As Susan Lucas Dobrian points out in her article “Echo’s Revenge in Three Spanish Narratives by Women,” this story contains examples of Echo, Pan, and Narcissus. Specifically, Lucas Dobrian speaks about the story’s two characters in terms of subject formation:

the protagonist constructs her lover as a viewing subject and herself as the object that reflects his being. In other words, she creates and structures Omar’s desire for her by consciously adopting the role of the reflecting pool in which he sees himself (“tú te viste reflejado en mí, …en mi mirada,” 17). …[I]ronically, the narrador wields supreme power over her created subject. (174)

Lucas Dobrian continues this parallelism with Narcissus (and later Echo) and says that the protagonist creates this illusion and seduces Omar with the manipulation of his image. When the male character no longer sees himself reflected in the protagonist, she takes revenge, according to Lucas Dobrian: “The narrator’s vengeance rests upon seducing Omar into accepting the false acquiescence that she projects to him. She visually/orally reflects/repeats what he expects to see/hear; but since he is self-absorbed, he cannot see/hear the subversive intentionality behind her image/words” (175). At this point the protagonist feels the total destruction of Omar is necessary, and she robs him of his vision and hearing:

she both kills him physically and robs him of his identity-conferring sight. In fact, Omar’s death is appropriately stated in specular terms as “cerrar para siempre tus ojos” (20). In the end, it is she who has the last word, as once again she names him “Omar,” this time eliminating the necessary anagram that links him to the other that is himself. (175)

4 In Desire in Language, Kristeva points out that: “The simultaneity of laughter with first vocalizations has long been recognized” (284). This árabe and laughter shared by the two characters further illustrate the qualities of infantile vocalizations understood first only by the mother.
Lucas Dobrian explains the similarities with these mythological characters, but the part of her article dedicated to this story in particular is a mere page and a half. In her analysis, she focuses on the subject formation and uses as evidence the connections with Narcissus and Echo. Lucas Dobrian outlines the parallels which pertain to these characters and the two mythological figures, but she does not explain the relation between them.

A first reading of this short story might lead the reader to believe that the two characters are lovers; however, the evidence leads to a reading in which the two are mother and son. The fragmentation of an image is reflected in classic symbols of literature but also in the psychological mirror stage between a child and the maternal image, according to various psychological studies. Therefore, in addition to these few mythological connections mentioned by Lucas Dobrian, this story is an extremely erotic version which is full of other mythological, Biblical, and historical allusions which illustrate the idea of a filial mirror. Because the narrative is very brief, it is highly dependent on allusions. In her article “Minicuento: paradigma y canon literario,” Karla Paniagua Ramírez claims regarding this literary genre:

El minicuento encuentra su materia prima en la anécdota cotidiana, la mitología, el chiste, los saberes colectivos sedimentados que emergen como refranes, adivinanzas, adagios, leyendas. Esta cualidad hace de él un género saprófita: “…saprófita, es la vida que se nutre de la descomposición orgánica; así también este tipo de escritura prospera a expensas del légamo residual de la cultura…” (no pagination)

To begin the analysis, it is difficult to establish a fixed identity for the two characters. It is even more difficult to establish the relationship between them. The unnamed female narrator refers to the other character as “ya Omar,” “ya Hub” and “ya Habibi” which in Arabic mean: “my Omar,” “my love,” and “my beloved.” It is compelling that the protagonist refers to the male characters with Arabic names. Not

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5 There are many studies about the role of the mother, the maternal image, and relations with objects, etc. by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein, André Green, D. W. Winnicott, and Julia Kristeva, among others.
only does this frame the story within its Egyptian context, but it also allocates a special quality of meaning to the language between them. Firstly, using Arabic in a Spanish text allows the two to share a secret language understood only by them. Secondly, it places the two outside of the mainstream expectations in terms of their actions/relations. In this story it appears that the two characters are lovers enjoying a prohibited love, but, in reality, this amorous relation is between mother and son. To prove this erotic, familiar relation, the places in which the action takes place will be explored as well as the distinct facets of the protagonist’s identity which manifest themselves in the names she bears and her physical appearance. Finally, the feminist theories of psychoanalysis will be applied in order to help see the relation between these two characters.

In this story, the places represent the stages of life: the birth, the growth, and the separation of a child from his mother. Firstly, the protagonist divides the story into the “aventuras” at the beginning and the “desventuras” at the end. The story begins with their being together in Cheops’s tomb. The imagery therein is clear: Cheops was a tyrannical ruler from the fourth dynasty who forced his followers to build his great tomb. In order to do this, he closed temples and enlisted his daughter as a prostitute to raise the needed capital. His redeeming quality is that he also constructed a nearby necropolis for his family members and had boats left for all for the trip across the river to the afterworld (Hinnells 78-79). The history of this location alludes to the afterlife and familial promiscuity. Additionally, the feminist theorist Julia Kristeva, in her book Black Sun, postulates that the female body is a tomb after giving birth (71-76). Kristeva proposes that the Narcissist does not lament the loss of the object of his desire but instead the loss of the real thing from which he must separate, and this thing is simultaneously the origin of attraction and repulsion. More than anything, this thing is the origin of his sexuality (13). It is for this reason that the mirror created between a mother and her son has erotic attributes. With this in mind, it can be seen that the “aventuras” begin with the three days (representative of the three trimesters of pregnancy) in Cheops’s tomb which functions as a metaphor for the physical tomb, the maternal body, that the baby abandons.

The second place that the couple briefly visits is the Sphinx. After the three days in Cheops, the mother gives an explanation of the birth:
Jadeabas, ya Omar, en unas contracciones que a ratos se me antojaron extrañas e irreales. Y me amabas y cubrías mi cuerpo de besos antiguos y reías. Reíamos como locos, Oh Hub, ofreciendo a Keops los mejores instantes de aquel amor sacrílego, descendiendo por el ojo de la esfinge, sepultando nuestros cuerpos rendidos en el mar de arena. (17-18)

The Sphinx is a mysterious place. It is a temple very close to the tomb of Cheops which also has connections to the idea of mother-son. It is an allusion to the mythological conflict between the goddess with the head of a lion and Oedipus. This goddess was the great destructive mother who gave life and destroyed it. The Sphinx controlled the city through her seemingly irresolvable riddles until one day when Oedipus successfully solves the riddle posed for him by the Sphinx. As a prize the king of the city gives Oedipus his throne and the hand of his sister, Jocasta. Oedipus wanted to establish his power and, although he had resolved the riddle that the Sphinx had given him, he also wanted to kill her and eliminate her influence on his kingdom. This is what leads him to erotic relations with his mother, Jocasta, and eventually his own destruction.

The eye is symbolically as important to Oedipus as it is to Omar. In the mythological story of Oedipus, the destruction of Oedipus’s eye marks the end of a stage of life with his mother-lover that castrates him and leaves him impotent. In “Omar, amor” when the couple goes naked out of the eye of the Sphinx, Omar is a boy – therefore, in relation to her he is impotent. This exit marks the physical separation of the two. Carl Jung considered the eye the maternal container and the pupil the child. The eye also is the instrument with which the mother and child form the first amorous ties: the gaze. When they depart though the eye, the birth has just occurred and they look at each other.

The third place that the two visit is the monastery Macarios. The name of this place is an allusion to the Greek myth which relates the story of a woman who has incestuous relations even though it is with her younger brother who seduces her (and not her son). Her younger brother is called Macarios. In “Omar, amor” there is a similar

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6 The riddle of the Sphinx is: “What walks on four feet at dawn, two feet at midday, and three at sundown?” He responded to her: “Man” referring to the three stages of life. This is both another reference to the number three and another reference to the stages of self-formation exemplified in this story.
class of union. When the two characters enter the monastery, the protagonist has a strange attitude which is attributed to the fact that she is not accustomed to the power of the sun. Before this, she covered her hair and pretended to be a man, Ibrahim, while they went laughing under the sun in the desert. The powerful brilliance of the sun generally shows the solar power of the hero or the divine son. Here the sun also underscores the feminine and maternal facet of the protagonist which is now more prominent than ever. In addition, in the monastery, surrounded by monks, she nurses Omar. It is already known that they have amorous relations, but this is the first direct indication of this new facet of her person: maternity. She has taken her son to a monastery in a traditional act of purification following the birth. The baby receives a religious blessing through churching. The visit corresponds to the traditional time after which the Jewish ceremony of circumcision or the Catholic rite of infant baptism is held today. In the monastery the couple continues to enjoy this “amor sacrílego” in which Omar satisfies himself at her breasts. This private, mother-son relationship establishes the first stage of identification for the baby.

Nancy Chodorow investigates the development of children in a pre-Oedipal stage in which the identification with the mother (and not the father) is most important. She postulates that masculinity is defined as the separation from the mother. In her book *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, she recognizes that many psychoanalytic studies focus on masculine aspects in regard to object relations between the mother and her children. Generally the relations studied are mother-daughter and not mother-son. Chodorow explains that in some societies babies sleep exclusively with the mothers for the first two years of life and that, for a son, this creates problems in the development of his masculinity and independence. Also, she notes that previous studies indicate that the relations between mothers and sons become sexual for the mothers:

an explicit sexual relationship between mother and son may exist. Citing “clinical evidence from women in our own society suggesting that

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7According to Leviticus 12, after birth, mothers of sons remain secluded from the town for 40 days (while mothers of daughter remain in seclusion for 80 days). Following this period of purification, the mother goes directly to the church to offer a sacrifice and receive a blessing.
nursing is sexually gratifying to some women at least,” an informant reports in one society with postpartum sex taboo and mother-infant sleeping arrangements that mothers had no desire for sex as long as they were nursing, they suggest that “it is possible that the mother obtains some substitute sexual gratification from nursing and caring for her infant.” (106)

The sexuality present in the relations is the distinctive element which drives sons to this “amor sacrílego”:

I conclude, from the evidence in Bibring’s, Slater’s and Whiting’s accounts, that a mother, of a different gender from her son and deprived of adult emotional, social, and physical contact with men (and often without any supportive adult contact at all), may push her son out of his preoedipal relationship to her into an oedipally toned relationship defined by its sexuality and gender distinction. …. Because of this, sons (men) come to have different kinds of preoedipally engendered problems than daughters (women). (Chodorow 107)

Because of this, even clinical evidence supports that this “amor sacrílego” is maternal love, but it is in this third place that Omar begins to live for himself without being a mere reflection of her:

Te crecieron largas barbas, ya habibi, barbas que acentuaban la blancura de mi piel lampiña y delataban algunas de tus miradas y mi júbilo. No pudimos permanecer mucho más tiempo. Los rostros de los novicios se teñían ahora de púrpura en mi presencia. Me prohibieron faenar en el campo, en la huerta, en los jardines. Y tuvimos que huir, ya Omar. (18)

The new Adam and Eve have left the garden - symbol of all that is ordered, fertile, feminine, and divine - to live outside in the desert. 8 To recuperate this sacrilegious love, the protagonist takes him to the Nile to drink the almost magical water of life and to eat

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8 It is said that the desert is the birthplace of monotheism. In this type of religion, the patriarchy is dominant. For this reason, in parts of the story when the two characters are in the desert, the female converts into Ibrahim.
herbs and roots. Once in the desert, they discover forgotten temples and Omar braids the hair of Kalíma, but it is not sufficient to recuperate their love. From that point on they begin the so called “desventuras.”

The protagonist does not reveal the details of the places of the misfortunes, although they appear to be many, because she is not the one who has chosen to visit them. Now it is Omar who directs her. First, she “[se] encuentra en la tumba de Amenofis III, la más pestilente, la más insalvable de todo el valle de los Reyes…” (19). This is an allusion to the life of the pharaoh Amenofis III who has a fairly confusing lineage. What is known is that according to Leviticus 18:3, 7 God commands, “After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: …The nakedness of they mother, shalt thou not uncover: she is thy mother; thou shalt not uncover her nakedness.” This commandment indicates the level of incest that was apparently common among this people by the strong taboo against it. The first tomb is a witness of the physical change for the protagonist, but now Omar experiences a metamorphosis in the tomb of Amenofis III.

Omar changes his gestures and smile for the first time. It is a smile that the female neither initiates nor imitates. The misfortunes begin when the protagonist of the story finds herself in this pyramid - the worst of them all - which represents the emotional tomb that she is when Omar, this being who was a part of her, wants to abandon her completely. This second tomb, according to Julia Kristeva, would be a certain type of maternal cannibalism that allows the child to exist independently and allows the mother to exist alone. In Black Sun, Kristeva postulatesthat each individual has a matricidal mandate necessary for individuation (27-28). It is now that Omar recognizes the necessity for matricide and decides to take control of his own existence.

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9 In mythology, herbs traditionally have magical powers.
10 Even the “forgotten temples” have symbolic importance despite the lack of specific names. This refers to the fact that Omar, he who directs her, has forgotten or fails to recognize the divinity around him. He has turned away from true religion.
11 In accordance with the epoch and country of origin of the ancient beliefs, women’s hair contained magical powers. Their hair could be made into a talisman exchanged between the woman and her lover or a goddess’ hair could be used as a tool to control the weather, to create, or to destroy. The powers change if the hair is combed, braided, left hanging loose, or purposefully shaken. Most notably, it serves as a symbol of power over life belonging to the goddesses alone.
From there, Omar leads the protagonist to other places. In contrast to the first tomb where he bribed the guard to enter, this time the keys are in Omar’s hands. The protagonist complains about the “extrañas citas” saying, “Me hiciste escalar el más inaccesible acantilado, aguardarte en una barca junto a una imponente catarata, navegar en una chalupa sin mástiles ni velas. Querías liberarte de mí, ya Omar, de la mujer a la que tanto debías.” (19)

He takes her then to Cairo. The two are in public and urban places. Kristeva anticipates the madness and the anger that the protagonist will experience due to the suffering that Omar causes her through his changing. Kristeva sees private and public places distinctly:

> Hence madness is a space of antisocial, apolitical, and paradoxically free individuation. …In the view of an ethic and an aesthetic concerned with suffering, the mocked private domain gains a solemn dignity that depreciates the public domain while allocating to history the imposing responsibility for having triggered the malady of death. As a result, public life becomes seriously severed from reality whereas private life, on the other hand, is emphasized to the point of filling the whole of the real and invalidating any other concern. (235)

The narrator has been Kalíma in private and Ibrahim in public. The conflict of this dual identity is made worse, because she knows that Omar no longer loves her and will separate from her permanently. Now she pretends to imitate his new gestures while trying to match him in a trick and correct the problem. In Cairo, the city where he was born, she thinks:

> Y sucumbiste, amor. Paseamos por Jal-el-Jalil¹² cogidos del brazo, como los enamorados que habíamos sido. Tú apenas me mirabas, oh Hub, pendiente como estabas de tu imagen reflejada en los espejos del

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¹² *Jal-el-Jalil* means: (the) majesty or his (the) most exalted in Arabic. In Cairo it is a principal avenue where the most ancient café of the city is located: Fishawi (in the text *Fichaway* in Spanish). This café has been open day and night for more than two centuries. It represents the most well-known part of the city in which the people gather for social occasions.
Doane and Hodges explain in their chapter “Kristeva’s Death-Bearing Mother” the “dead mother” complex of André Green who is later studied by Julia Kristeva. This complex is what leads Omar to action. Kalíma recognizes the necessity for her son’s separation from her, and she converts herself from an active and obsessive mother to a vaguely disinterested one when he initiates the separation. Despite her understanding of this necessity, the mother becomes depressed. This crisis is exacerbated when Omar is not completely capable of committing matricide. If the child continues without another candidate to replace the mother, the mother is satisfied. But, as is the case with Omar, physically he has facial hair; he no longer looks at her but instead sees his own self reflected. In addition, he allows another woman into his life. It is then that the mother must complete what he has begun. The mother separates herself from him by killing her own son so that he may experience a new life separate from the one in which the two exist as reflections of each other. Kalíma sees that he is not capable of killing her, so she initiates her own plan: she must destroy him. She does not wish to harm him, yet she knows she must do it for his benefit:

Hice acopio de toda mi fuerza, superé el dolor y te proyecté sobre el asfalto. Tú, pobre vanidoso, no dejabas de sonreír. ¡No podrás conmigo!, gritaste, ya no te pertenezco! Pero tu suerte, amigo, estaba echada. Se llamaba Omar, dije con voz firme a quien quiso escucharme. Y tú al oír tu nombre, no tuviste más remedio que cerrar para siempre tus ojos. (20)

This death is a benevolent act on the part of the mother. From there she returns to San Marcarios, but this time to commemorate him rather than to nurse him.

In this story, the mother is a type of Narcissus, because she destroys her reflection, her son, Omar. Unlike Narcissus, the mother destroys him purposefully and benevolently so that he may be reborn as a distinct person. In addition to the places in which the action of the story occurs, the names of the protagonist reveal her true identity: she is Omar’s mother instead of his lover.
At the beginning of the story one knows that the narrator is a woman. She shares kisses and laughter with Omar in Cheops’s tomb and later in the Sphinx. Throughout the story the narrator has two distinct names, and she wears either men’s or women’s clothing according to her location. This female/male character has a dual identity. In private places such as the tomb of Cheops, the Sphinx, or in the cell at the monastery she is openly female. When they go out into the free air or are in the presence of others, she covers her hair, a symbol of sexuality and feminine identity, and she pretends to be a man. As a man, she is called Ibrahim, which is an Arabic name which means Abraham in Spanish and in English. This name is an allusion to the Biblical character of Abraham, father of the Jewish, the Muslim, and later the Christian faiths.\(^\text{13}\)

In the Biblical story, Abram/Abraham\(^\text{14}\) and Sarai/Sarah\(^\text{15}\) went to Egypt to seek food in a time of famine in their land. The beautiful Sarai complied with her husband’s desire that she assume another identity in Egypt in order to avoid the gaze and admiration of others (Genesis 12:10-20). She pretended to be Abram’s sister instead of his wife. She hid her identity to avoid the looks of other men and to remain a reflection only of him. The Abraham of the Bible\(^\text{16}\) and the protagonist of “Omar, amor” do not want their respective partners to be reflected in the gaze of anyone else; they do not want them to exist outside of a relation to them.

A second connection between the protagonist and Abraham is that the two kill their sons. According to Genesis, Abraham tries to sacrifice his son, Isaac. But, in contrast to Fernández Cubas’ story, Abraham does it in compliance with a divine order to demonstrate his unconditional faith. Before the sacrifice was actually carried out, God saw Abraham’s faithfulness and provided a ram to be sacrificed in the place of his son (Genesis 22:1-18). This story represents the binary opposition of Abraham as simultaneous destructive father and redemptive father. Abraham has to sacrifice (or attempt to sacrifice) his son so that Isaac could receive God’s salvation. It is a real

\(^{13}\) Although the Jews and Christians consider Abraham the father of the faith, the Koran describes him as a man who sought after God (3,60).

\(^{14}\) According to Genesis, God changed the name of Abram to Abraham (Genesis 17:5-6).

\(^{15}\) According to Genesis, God changed the name of Sarai to Sarah (Genesis 17:15-16).

\(^{16}\) This is an allusion to the name of the son of Abraham and Sarah: Isaac which means “he who laughs,” which is the precise reaction of Sarah to the news God delivered to her that she would have a son. “Omar, amor” also mentions laughter.
salvation following a symbolic destruction. The role of the son is also important, because he must allow his father to destroy him so that he may be redeemed.

The mid-point of the story occurs when “por la noche en la intimidad de la jaima, volvía a ser Kalima. Te gustaba llamarme así y tenías razón. Porque yo, Kalíma, te había dado la palabra” (18-19). The other name of the protagonist is revealed as Kalíma. It is a feminine and maternal name which alludes to Kali Ma who, according to Wendell Charles Beane, is a Hindu goddess and mother who destroys her devotees so that they can be reborn into a better life:

her devotees emerge as “new creations” through the conquest of “Self” - delusion…it is the phenomenon of destructive activity in the characterization of the goddess, which makes her one of the most remarkable symbols of the paradox of “Good” and “Evil”. “She is alternately hideous and beautiful and alternately terrifying and loving.” (Beane 262-63)

Many attributes of Kali Ma appear in this story. This Hindu goddess is the Mother Herat, the destroying mother. She is also known as mother and lover according to the Ramakrisna, a leader in nineteenth-century Hindu religion (Kripal 1, 55-56). He says that the word mother is: “she who gives birth” while the word lover is: “she who makes love,” however both words may be used to express “woman.” To be a woman, then, means to be a lover and to be a mother. For this leader and other Hindus, the goddess Kali Ma is a mother who consoles and a naked lover (Kripal 87-88). One hymn to her summarizes it this way:

O Kali why do you walk about naked?
Shame! Shame! Aren’t you the least bit embarrassed?....
O Ma! Is this your family’s way, to stand on your husband?
You’re naked. Your husband is naked. And you both roam about from cremation ground to cremation ground!
O Ma! We could all just die! Now, woman, put on your clothes!
RJS, no. 99 (Kripal 88)
In visual representations, Kali Ma is always nude; she has voluptuous breasts and prominent hips which are identified with sexuality, fertility, and maternity. Everything on her left side is destruction while everything on her right side is related to salvation. She has four hands: in the upper left she has a sword (her instrument of death) while the lower left has the head of a recently assassinated child/devotee/victim – a reminder of the destiny that she brings to all. On her right side is the opposite: of her two right hands, the upper consoles and removes fears while the lower gives life. This goddess, beautiful and sexual, is adorned with a necklace and a belt with the skulls of her children/victims. This reminds everyone of her duality. Her two dimensions and four hands are “the ultimate double message” and a “striking image of total affirmation and total negation, representing a bold coincidence of opposites” (Kripal 49).

Kali Ma is accompanied by tigers. She is the goddess who, like Devī: “may be projected as a ravenous lion or tiger” (Zimmer 189). In fact, in this projection: “she appears in the form of a black demoness, slavering over a battlefield in man-destroying wrath; this is a materialization of the exterminating aspect of the Mother of the World. In the same way, a curse can become personified” (Zimmer 189). In “Omar, amor,” the role of the great feline of the powerful Kali Ma is the Sphinx of Egypt. The Sphinx exists as the personification of tyrannical rule. She posed a riddle to her subjects who were killed when unable to solve it. Thus her rule was destructive. Additionally, the Sphinx is associated both with a destructive-mother goddess and also an incestuous relation between mother and son (Jocasta and Oedipus). The feline symbolism arouses the memory of the Egyptians who domesticated cats and praised them as a symbol of maternity. Ironically, even in their language the word Mau means cat; it is the imitation of the sounds they make and it is also the same initial syllable as the word mother (Walker Woman’s Encyclopedia 148). Kalíma here shows her powerful role of mother in relation to Omar.

In the story, after descending naked from the eye of the Sphinx the narrator states tjeu are “sepultando nuestros cuerpos en el mar de arena” (18). This creates the image of a cemetery. An important aspect of all religions is what they do with their dead. Also, the foundation of temples in the Hindu religion has always been over cremation grounds, that is to say, a cemetery of sand, in this case giving hope of a second life. The cemetery of the Pharaohs is over desert sand and is also a certain type of temple (Kripal 15, 49, 52, 111, 243-44). Even so, it removes the fear of death.
During the first part of the story, Kalíma and Omar are reflected in each other, they understand each other, and together they enjoy the “aventuras.” On the other hand, at the end of the story, she complains that Omar begins to change his gestures, to speak, and to try to lose her. She remembers that he made her stay “en una barca junto a una imponente catarata, navegar en una chalupa sin mástiles ni velas” (19). This aquatic symbol shows another attribute of Kali Ma: she is the protector of the fishermen and the boats in the water, which metaphorically represent babies in the maternal water of birth.\(^{18}\) She, together with the water, represents the maternal fountain of life and the voyage to the other bank of the river: the second life.

At this point, Kalíma realizes that Omar wants to abandon her. However, previously there were other indications of his desire to have a life independent of her, indications which center on food. At the beginning, she nurses him in the monastery, from which they must flee once Omar grows facial hair. He is no longer reflected well in her hairless face, although she justifies even this when she says that they do not reflect each other but instead complement each other. From thereon, they do not work in the fields (18), in other words, they do not share food originating from domesticated plants; instead they eat from wild plants. At the end of the story, Omar staves off hunger (20). According to Hindu tradition, food is a metaphor for sexual attachment. There is “a stable bond between eating and the erotic” (Kripal 275). For the Ramakrishna, or the Hindu leader:

> the sharing of food [is] a symbol for (or prelude to) intercourse. This pattern is extended and focused further in Ramakrishna’s secret Tantric life to the point where eating is sex, thus the Ramakrishna-homunculus licks the lotuses shaped like vaginas in order to arouse them into new states of consciousness. The female sexual organ, in some sense, is

\(^{18}\) The symbolism of the water as life, death, and resurrection is evident in the Christian baptism by immersion (Rom. 6:3-5). Here the water of birth is seen as the entity which gives life and carries away the baby from the boat that is the mother thereby killing the son in the separation. This brings the boat to the opposite shore which is the afterlife. In Egypt, when the god of the sun died, he was put into a boat representing his mother, the goddess Isis. Also, Norwegians maintain this tradition linguistically: the same word is used to mean “boat,” “crib,” and “coffin” (Walker, Woman’s Dictionary 121).
eaten…in a tradition that employs food and sex together in its central ritual. (Kripal 275)

Their incestuous relations have ended, and Omar wants his independence from Kalíma. This mother goddess, Kali Ma, knows that her son needs to die in order to be saved, and she has the sword in her left hand. However, she refuses the sword as her instrument of death this time in favor of her voice. The sword is the tool for the destruction of her children; even so, the voice of Kali is the tool of destruction for the entire world (Beane 119). The relation between mother and son is such a close one that for her he is her entire world and for him she is a goddess. Therefore, her voice is the most appropriate tool for this circumstance.

When the protagonist convinces Omar to take her to Cairo, his birthplace, they walk together “cogidos del brazo, como los enamorados que habíamos sido” (19). But, Omar, with his golden hair, sees himself reflected receiving the caresses of another woman (one the mother considers not good enough for her beloved Omar) in the windows or mirrors of Fishawuy. Kalíma thinks of the earlier ironic words of Omar with respect to how easy it would be to die in Egypt, and, once on Ramses Avenue, she projects him onto the asphalt with all of her force despite the great pain it causes her. Meanwhile, Omar yells, “ya no te pertenezco” (19) and she responds, “Se llamaba Omar” out loud so that all may hear. Upon hearing his voice pronounced by Kalíma, Omar dies, and she returns to San Macarios to offer alms in his memory.

Finally, the title: “Omar, amor” is an anagram which means it is a type of reflection of itself. They are two versions of the same thing which are yet distinctive and independent. In addition to signifying Omar as the source from which Kalíma’s love flows, Omar is also the personification of her love; Omar is her love made flesh and bones. For this reason, the mother is depressed and has fatal instincts. She has the obligation to destroy the early version of him that exists as dependent on her to enable him to be reborn as an independent being.

In “Omar, amor” Kalíma the lover is converted into the destructive mother and the redemptive mother. Omar and she share an amorous relationship, but what they share in mysterious Egypt is a “sacrilegious” love because it is really between a mother and her
son. After exploring the places in which the action takes place, the attributes of the characters after whom the female is named, and the psychoanalytic theories, one realizes the dual reality of this protagonist who is both mother and lover. It is not enough nor is it appropriate for this character to be merely a lover. She must be his mother recalling the fondest developmental moments of her son, even those most painful for her.

In the next story with Kali as the protagonist, she reveals her love for a son figure who no longer returns her emotion. He has begun to separate from her, and she must conclude this endeavor.

“Viaje” by Luisa Valenzuela (Argentina)

Luisa Valenzuela is a well-known, once exiled Argentine writer who now lives and works primarily in the U.S. and her native country. It is in her 1993 collection of short stories entitled Simetrías that we find the story “Viaje.” This particular story is about a female narrator whose love for Carlos is not reciprocated properly. This discrepancy leads the ordinary office worker to visit her travel agency in order to redeem her frequent flyer miles she earned on the job and take a personal trip to Bali, India. During this journey, she experiences a metamorphosis which enables her to return to her ordinary life empowered sufficiently to leave Carlos. The story begins: “Anoche una vez más lo llamé a Carlos” (49). The opening words are reminiscent of Echo’s calls to Narcissus. With this line, the author evokes images of a doomed love affair, a confused self-identity, and she names the object of the protagonist’s desire: Charles. According to The Best Baby Name Book in the Whole World (1984) the name means manly and strong; first and foremost, he is the epitome of masculinity. There is also an early reference to his voice, actually an echo of his own voice in the form of a recording. His voice is an independent and nearly defiant one: he is not at home to answer the protagonist’s calls, but she hears his voice on the answering machine. Her reaction is: “Volví a escuchar su
Voz en el contestador y corté” (49). The implication is that she has called repeatedly and that the recorded voice has begun to annoy her. Therefore, she negates his ability to speak to her by hanging up. This asymbolia\textsuperscript{19} is the first reference to the relationship between the two.

Valenzuela teases the reader with information the narrator recalls about Carlos before also revealing that the narrator is a female who adoringly worries over this “ingrate” who is not home to receive her calls and who visits her infrequently (though they seem to have a good time together). She reflects that he is “tan tierno. Por eso mismo, me digo, por eso se escapa” (49). She thinks of him as tender and gentle and simultaneously realizes that those qualities are the very means by which he escapes. Grammatically, it is interesting that the author chooses to write of this escape as a reflexive action.\textsuperscript{20} Does she mean to indicate that he escapes himself as he escapes her? If that is the case, this reference, combined with others, demands an application of object-relations theories and a clearer definition of the relationship between the two characters.

The object relations school of psychodynamics is preceded by nineteenth-century psychoanalysts with attention to the first theories of narcissism based on erotic desires and promoted by Sigmund Freud. Freud claims that a child has a libidinal investment in his mother which is also known as an anaclitic object choice.\textsuperscript{21} In this, the child forms an instinctual sexual attachment to the mother. Since the mother fulfills the early narcissistic needs of the child, it becomes the adult child’s expectation that a sexual partner will also satisfy his narcissistic needs. Thus he chooses a love object who is actually a mother-figure (for female children this love choice would be a father-figure).\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} Melancholia over a lost object (maternal-filial) results in asymbolia, a loss of meaning and speech ability, according to Kristeva (\textit{Black Sun} 42, 47). This loss of speech results in death. In the case of this story, the protagonist’s severing of his message foreshadows her total destruction of him. It is a natural step towards that end. A study devoted to the language in this text would be especially interesting. See also “Kristeva’s Death-Bearing Mother” (Doane and Hodges 55).

\textsuperscript{20} While it is true that “escaparse” is not necessarily a reflexive action in all contexts, the grammatical value points to “escaping oneself” which lends itself to escaping one aspect of oneself. In this case, the narrator escapes Charles as if he is a part of her.

\textsuperscript{21} An anaclitic object choice is opposed to a narcissistic object choice. The latter is when a person invests his libidinal energy solely on himself and not on an outside object.

\textsuperscript{22} Eventually, however, Freud’s former protégé, C. G. Jung espoused other theories about the object-directed and subject-directed libidos which characterize narcissism by viewing it as a continuum rather than a point in human development. Heinz Kohut later determined that pathological narcissism results from
Hence, it is a likely conclusion that later in life a mother/lover dichotomy would be a natural result of this early relationship for a son.

Karen Horney was also a precursor to object relations in that she is also interested in the Self, and she sees personality pathologies as the result of defective object-relations in childhood. However, she saw that a child’s fear of separation from the primary object led him to separate from it. This means that his fear of that separation prompts him to further it, thus it is a self-fulfilling fear which actually benefits the child. In the object relations school, a child’s natural progression towards individuation, towards a sense of Self, and a healthy appraisal of others is derived from his primary relationship with his mother and his ability to separate from her emotionally in adolescence as he did physically in birth.

This study does not take up Winnicott’s “good enough mother” who does not have to be the ideal mother projected by the child, but who is “good enough” not to create pathological neurosis in her child. This study does take up the matricidal drive and the “death-bearing woman” of Kristeva. It will show the protagonist to be the mother of Carlos. His mother is an altered version of his own eroticized self. It is as if she were his jealous lover.

Though the protagonist is unnamed,23 we begin to learn more about her and her undeniable jealousy at the end of the first paragraph: “…sé que no tendría que llamarlo tanto por teléfono y de todos modos nunca está en casa y me pregunto dónde andará, por no preguntarme con quién” (49). Carlos is rarely home, yet he is rarely with her either. The protagonist wonders about his whereabouts and his company. In “Reflexiones sobre Simetrías,” Margo Glantz writes:

el tema del amor alcanza una dimensión patética y repetitiva, con algunas excepciones. Los encuentros apenas se producen, o si se producen hay

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23 Rabuzzi talks about women who assume the name “Mother” or any of its variants to a given name with both their children and their spouses and thus prefer an alliance with the cult of motherhood over individual selfhood, “Women who delete their given names this way at home, making themselves ‘Mother’ to spouse as well as children, very much abdicate their personal identities in favor of that of the Mother Goddess” (54).
más bien el desencuentro … donde los sexos están perpetuamente separados, o, para terminar esta digresión, ”Viaje” en que la protagonista intenta darle una lección a un novio que no se entera de ese intento, aunque se accede a otro tipo de viaje, éste interior. Este desencuentro se anula en los cuentos en donde la relación entre los sexos se establece con base en el dominio del macho. (251)

Glantz’s observations may be correct in terms of the other stories in this collection, and they might even work for “Viaje” if one believes the two to be lovers in the traditional sense. The argument breaks down, however, when one approaches the story as a mother-son separation. In that case the desencuentro is equivalent to a stepping away from Mom before a final severing of that bond. The toddler wanders off temporarily, but it is the adolescent who moves out of the house altogether. This desencuentro has normal implications for the child’s development. For the mother, on the other hand, it is devastating. It sends her into an abysmal depression and a desire to kill him.

The protagonist’s jealousy shifts to revenge at the end of the second paragraph: “Y bueno, si es así yo también voy a entrar en el juego. Y cómo. Ya va a ver” (49). Immediately after the declaration of her intent, the narrator begins the third paragraph: “Es temprano, estoy lista para ir al yugo, decido cambiar de rumbo y enfilar mis pasos hacia la agencia de viajes para cobrar mi premio del millaje” (49). She is en route to a mythical place. The yugo is literally a yoke: it means job, work, duty; but it is also a colloquial expression which means a law which one must obey. In other words, the protagonist is on a path of emotional rebellion at the end of the second paragraph; and now, at the beginning of the third, her rebellious thoughts and words are made manifest in her actions. She is on a course of obedience before she willfully redirects herself to claim what is hers. She feels she is claiming something she has earned.

Her path to rebellion leads the protagonist to a travel agency to reap the rewards of her frequent flying. Once there, she speaks to an agent whose words she takes in carefully: “En la agencia me dice – uno de ojos verdes, vale la pena escucharlo – que tengo millas acumuladas como para llegar hasta Bali” (51). The only reason the protagonist gives for trusting his words is that he has green eyes, a symbol in Spanish
literature for sexuality and fertility (51). Because of that, one might assume he has knowledge about issues of life and love. She approaches this sage figure to alter her life’s course. Her previous flying, we learn later, has been done at the bidding of others; it has been business travel: “El millaje lo tengo acumulado por viajes de la oficina” (50). Yet, in traveling for others, she has earned a trip of her own; for the first time she travels to a destination of her choosing. She elects to visit a remote place where “Carlos circula sin mí.” (49). She decides on New Delhi, and if Carlos asks: “¿dónde te metiste que hace tiempo que no te veo? y yo le voy a contestar como si nada: en la India. / Así no más. Como me oyen” (50).

Already Valenzuela plays with the words she chooses: the narrator recounts that when Carlos mentions love she tells him it gives her “el síndrome de Goering, o de Goebbels, ya no me acuerdo cuál” (49). Again invoking an imaginary illness upon herself, the protagonist invents a cover story to disseminate to coworkers about her absence. She will tell them she had the flu, a runaway viral illness, and a broken telephone (“ese virus de la comunicación” is how she words it). This is another characteristic of Valenzuela: to undermine the patriarchy through language, multiple perspectives, and multiple realities/identities. The patriarchal tendency towards male-generated language with a single, male perspective, and ideas of Truth are therefore excluded from Valenzuela’s text as hers would likely be excluded in a male world. She enters the male format to undermine it in both form and content.

Valenzuela’s exploitation of language is so significant that it is noteworthy that on only the second page of her short story she begins to repeatedly use the number three: “En la India con tres guitas me arreglo,” “dos veces me tocó eso de triple millaje,” “Y sí, como tres días,” “puede hacer tres escalas,” “por tres días sabré lo que él sintió,” “por tres días me sentiré ciudadana de ninguna parte,” “ciudadana de tercera como de costumbre,” “Yo no soy ciudadana de tercera,” “tres mudas de ropa interior bastante

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24 Take for example the famous poem by Lorca, “Romance sonámbulo” in his book of poems Romancero gitano published in Madrid in 1928. The opening lines are “Verde, que te quiero verde. / Verde viento. Verdes ramas. / El barco sobre el mar / y el caballo en la montaña…” In this poem and uncountable others, he uses green as an overt metaphor for sensuality. This poem is well-known for its opening lines and its repetitive use of verde as a motif.

25 Figuratively this guita means money.
usada,” and “tres o cuatro remeras” (50-54). These references to three in a work by Valenzuela could never be coincidental; they have very relevant variants of meaning referring both to the most noted holy threesome found in the triune nature of God (who exists as both separate entities and one whole), to the three trimesters of pregnancy (here referring to a filial relation and yet also leading to a certain “rebirth” of self), and also to a Kristevian insistence on the third term which is necessary in pre-Oedipal narcissism/narcissist Break between the mother and child. The third person breaks the narcissistic relationship and is necessary to enter into the symbolic order. Here Kristeva follows Lacan. Finally, this story is, after all, a story of metamorphosis taking the form of a journey which leads to a destructive separation.

Sharon Magnarelli has a theory about the purpose of this type of destruction in Valenzuela’s works. She opens her article “Simetrías: ‘Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall’” with praise of these stories and an idea about the collection’s title: “Still, the fact that Valenzuela has titled the volume Simetrías forces even the most casual reader to seek just that: the symmetries and resemblances among the various tales and their topoi” (717). Magnarelli claims that the idea of “similarity (but not identity),” underlies many of Valenzuela’s works” (717), and she also reiterates the idea of the minicuento, remarking that the stories are brilliantly constructed, because they are short and seem simple, but every word is carefully selected in order to evoke specific images (718). Her idea of perceived infidelity and the resulting murders in other stories from this collection are pertinent: “More important, I would like to propose that both killings are motivated by symmetrical perceptions of having been cuckolded” (723). She continues citing the character Héctor Bravo’s “analogies among bullet, language, and phallus (synecdoche of masculinity)” and the showing of males as penetrating and piercing (723). Magnarelli writes:

Thus, in each case the military man, not unlike the wicked queen, must kill/“collapse” the other to get the right answer out of the mirror and maintain the desired image of power/potency. But what is easily

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26 Emphasis is mine.
overlooked here is the double play of reflections, for what is killed is not
the source of the desire but the object of desire. (723)

What one may conclude from Magnarelli is that Valenzuela includes ample acts of
violence and killings, but they are motivated by a desire to maintain a masochistic reign.
While that may tend to be the case in many of Valenzuela’s works, in this story it is quite
the opposite. The killing of Carlos is a liberating, self-empowering act that the female
protagonist must carry out in order to survive. Further, it is a psychological need of all
mothers implemented as a loving act as pointed out by Julia Kristeva’s theories on
mothers and their role in their children’s failed matricidal drive. “Viaje” traces one
jealous woman’s arrival at the point of ultimate violence, and it sets her free.

In Black Sun, Kristeva talks about the “Death-Bearing Woman” and describes her
child’s drive to kill her in order to separate from her and live an independent existence.
This theory of subject formation must necessarily be violent as it severs a part from the
whole. In addition, it considers the prior oneness of the two to consist of an eroticized
version of the self and the self. Therefore, any mother-filial relationship involving a male
child might, in a fictional account, be mistaken for the tale of two lovers. Kristeva
describes the matricidal drive this way:

For man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic
necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is
our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation,
provided that it takes place under optimal circumstances and can be
eroticized -- whether the lost object is recovered as erotic object (as is the
case for male heterosexuality or female homosexuality), or it is
transposed by means of an unbelievable symbolic effort, the advent of
which one can only admire, which eroticizes the other (the other sex in
the case of the heterosexual woman) or transforms cultural constructs into
a “sublime” erotic object (one thinks of the cathexes, by men and women,
in social bonds, intellectual and aesthetic productions, etc.). The lesser or
greater violence of matricidal drive, depending on individuals and the
milieu’s tolerance, entails, when it is hindered, its inversion on the self;
the maternal object having been introjected, the depressive or melancholic putting to death of the self is what follows, instead of matricide. In order to protect mother I kill myself while knowing -- phantasmatic and protective knowledge -- that it comes from her, the death-bearing she-Gehenna…Thus my hatred is safe and my matricidal guilt erased. I make of Her an image of Death so as not to be shattered through the hatred I bear against myself when I identify with Her. For that aversion is in principle meant for her as it is an individuating dam against confusional love. Thus the feminine as image of death is not only a screen for my fear of castration, but also an imaginary safety catch for the matricidal drive that, without such a representation, would pulverize me into melancholia if it did not drive me to crime. No, it is She who is death-bearing, therefore I do not kill myself in order to kill her but I attack her, harass her, represent her. (27-28)

After Kristeva makes it clear that the drive exists as a crucial part of formation, she addresses the role of the mother. In speaking of a mother’s anxiety over giving birth to a child with defects she says: “[The mother] would then kill it, before killing herself, mother and child becoming united again, inseparable in death as in pregnancy. The much hoped for birth changed into a burial” (89). This reminds us of Romeo and Juliet’s quest for death rather than life without each other. Romeo and Juliet are a couple whose union is opposed by exterior forces, and this leads to suicide; this story’s characters’ union is opposed by one of them, and this leads to homicide. Therefore, this serves to remind us of a mother’s strong drive to remain at one with her child and also of the child’s drive to separate. Obviously, these opposing desires cannot be reconciled without the total acquiescence of one of the participants. Therefore, the love of the mother must override her will to remain attached and lead her to succumb to the will of the child. Thus she will not hinder the individuation process. In her study of Dostoyevsky, Kristeva makes this observation:

forgiveness seems to say: Through my love, I exclude you from history for a while, I take you for a child, and this means that I recognize the
unconscious motivations of your crime and allow you to make a new person out of yourself. So that the unconscious might inscribe itself in a new narrative that will not be the eternal return of the death drive in the cycle of crime and punishment it must pass through the love of forgiveness, be transferred to the love of forgiveness. (204)

Forgiveness, according to Kristeva, “inscribes the right to narcissistic regression” (205) and is a required element in the “spiral that follows the path of death drive and of renewal/love” (205). Kristeva also states that “By staying the historical quest in the name of love, forgiveness discovers the regenerative potential peculiar to the loving bond” (205). Hence, the mother is, through the destruction, allowed to experience a rebirth alongside the new individual that is her child, and the cycle continues.

So far in the story, we have only a jealous woman and a man. The violence in “Viaje” is very specific and, moreover, is only part of a total transformation experienced by the protagonist. As the story continues, so does the woman’s journey or metamorphosis, as Roy C. Boland calls it. In his article “Luisa Valenzuela and Simetrías: Tales of a Subversive Mother Goose,” Boland devotes only part of a paragraph to this particular story:

In “Viaje” Valenzuela rewrites one of her previous stories, “Ceremonias de rechazo.” She takes her protagonist along a journey of symbolic death and rebirth as she undergoes a metamorphosis from a passive, besotted victim of male arrogance, into Kali, a ruthless, male-devouring whore-goddess (p.63). The metamorphosis is obviously a drug-induced hallucination, but what is left behind for the narrator-protagonist is the knowledge and self-awareness of a woman who has learnt the meaning of love: love is a courageous leap into a physical and spiritual “black hole” of experience. (232)

Boland here refers to Dorothy S. Mull’s article about “Ceremonias de rechazo” in which she aptly describes the metamorphosis experienced by the female protagonist. In that

27 This story is included in Cambio de armas (see Appendix for details).
story as well as in “Viaje,” the protagonists experience a metamorphosis from a passive to a goddess-like character in relation to her male counterparts. This could be assumed to be simply the process by which the protagonist becomes able to perform her violence. Magnarelli might argue that the protagonist feels cuckolded and thus necessarily must experience a metamorphosis which would enable her to kill the man. However, what is left unstated in both these stories and research about them is a definition of the precise relationship between the female and male characters. This is a fundamental and unanswered question. It is assumed that the two are lovers in the traditional sense, but the idea that this love is maternal/filial remains unexplored and would change the analysis entirely.

As stated earlier, short stories are akin to poetry in the utilization of symbols. Because of this use of symbols, the metaphorical values in this particular short story will be exposed to explore the possibility of this being a mother and son who experience Kristeva’s matricidal failure and thus the mother’s destruction of her own child. If Carlos is indeed the son, attention should be directed to the symbols embedded in the text.

Firstly, we begin with the protagonist’s affinity for aircraft: “acostumbrada a los aviones se puede decir que estoy acostumbrada” (51). The protagonist talks at length about a man she wishes to emulate who “decidió no ser ciudadano de ningún país, o ser ciudadano del mundo, y sin documentos deambuló durante dos años de sala de embarque a sala de tránsito, de un avión a otro y a otro.” (51). This millionaire entertained himself speaking to “distintos pasajeros de diversos aviones en multiples idiomas” (52). Aircraft is a symbol which related to the more primal “fowl of the air.” Birds, since antiquity, have been regarded as heavenly messengers. The more modern aircraft brings us closer to a spiritual plane, yet it also represents one’s quest for individuality and liberation as it releases the Earth-bound ego. This is a splitting into two parts of one person. The man the protagonist admires not only left behind his ego, but he also shed the roles and even language imposed upon him for those which he selected at his own discretion. Though the protagonist hints at the oddity of this example she recalls his friends who quietly assisted this man, the whole ordeal being “sospechoso pero inofensivo,” and those unnamed interests who “lo querían agarrar en un país” (52). She continues to admire his
mode of escape when she acknowledges that “en el fondo a nadie le importaba” (52). It is quite possible that she wishes to take flight from her own ego - Carlos - by running to the ends of the earth when the ego does not resist this separation but instead actually embraces it. In fact, immediately after the story of this man she mentions: “…por tres días me sentiré ciudadana de ninguna parte. Algo bien distinto a sentirse ciudadana de tercera” (52). Since she uses the word citizen, one sees that she is not merely mentioning the price of her seating, but instead she affirms that in abandoning her role(s), she is better off than existing in (an) unsatisfactory one(s). She thinks she’s freeing herself from her ego, but in reality she frees him/it. Carlos is representative of the country to which she belongs.

The protagonist’s next reference to her third-class citizenship is in reference to Carlos, because he is the only one who truly makes her feel this way: when he visits and makes her feel as if she is begging for his affection, “me siento mendigando mimos, reclamándole” (53). She feels like a fool. These *mimos* she begs for consist of petting, caresses, indulgences, and pampering and also his miming of her. This is an affection of mirrors or between mirrors. This relationship of love is also one of complete servitude and condemnation for her. However, as the protagonist tires of begging, she becomes more assertive: “Ahora no voy a pedir nada a nadie. Por unos días voy a ser una reina, con mis 550 dólares en Bali. La bellísima Bali. Eso me dicen. Que mendiguen los otros, que me pidan a mí” (53). She goes from being a beggar, to wishing that others become beggars, to demanding that they beg of her. She will live, for a time, as a queen in Bali. These thoughts are set into motion to become her later deeds.

In order to escape her house, she assumes a “cara de mártir” (53). She masks her intentions, so she can arrive at Ezeiza, the international airport just 35 kilometers (22 miles) southwest of downtown Buenos Aires. All the while her passport, instead of her heart, palpitates. She has ceased to have a human life and only this journey will return life unto her. The passport is a metaphor for the unborn potentialities in her. If she seeks freedom from her citizenship, then it is freedom from Carlos. This passport affords her that opportunity. There are various references to the importance of this trip and how it is different from her previous travel. This will be a metamorphosis. The only mention of
personal items left behind is of her two “malvones”: a begonia and a ficus “they” gave her.

Ficus is a non fruit bearing, weeping fig tree. Judeo-Christian symbolism regards the fig as the synagogue which, when it is not producing fruit, does not recognize the divinity of Jesus. To Muslims, a fig shows duality. The Chinese regard this tree as symbolizing spiritual immortality rather than physical longevity, and Indians see the god Vishnu as being born from under this tree, thus making it a spiritual womb. This belief is similar to the mythical birth of the Roman founders, Romulus and Remus. The protagonist’s trip to Bali, an Indonesian island, may suggest a preference for the Indian view that holds this fig to be a womb of sorts. These two symbols, Bali and the tree, make an allusion to the spiritual womb and the god or, in this case, the mother and the son. On the other hand, the begonia is the second plant. It is a flower meaning beware. There appears to be something treacherous about this particular womb. These are the only two items named from her house and the only two she says she will miss.

The first indication of this woman’s change is by sheer force of will: she became angry at Carlos’s indifference and unavailability before arranging this trip. Now, she embarks on the journey, and the process of change is measured through her travel journal. Travel literature as a genre was popular as early as medieval times when the majority of commoners were born, lived, and died in one locale. They wanted news of the exotic, and embellishment became one of the most notable conventions of this genre. Even so, this journal serves a distinct purpose: by writing she creates, and then she destroys by erasing it. Some feminists might see her erasures as her failure to express herself in a phallocentric system, but it is actually her endeavor to recall, confront, and dismiss the memories from her mind. This purge gives rise to violence: “borro con furia. Voy a tener que contenerme para no agujerear el papel. Igual, no debe escaparme palabra alguna sin borrar” (54). This trip is more than a spatial one; the change is of her volition more than her location.

If the first references to her two plants (the ficus and the begonia) seem vague, examining her second mention of them will confirm the cycle of life contained within them. Having established the travel journal as her willful creation and destruction of
elements of her own life, she writes, “Por lo pronto escribo: ficus, malvón rojo, malvón blanco, begonia. Y borro con ganas. No hay que tener piedad, en un viaje como éste no debemos cargar lastre” (54). The baggage she resists carrying is that of her two plants: a red ficus and a white begonia. Since these are not the actual colors of these plants, one must consider the symbolism therein. Red is universally seen as the color of fire and blood, both of which represent the life force. Consequently, the cycle of life, death, and rebirth is contained within it. In several eastern countries, women exclusively wear this color while in several European countries is it associated with the man-warrior. Thus, there is a dual nature shown in the colors as well.

Though the begonia means beware, white is a color associated universally with religion, spirituality, and philosophy as it represents the totality of life. It is the life potential of birth and rebirth and is, for that reason, utilized in rites of passage to show the possibilities of the initiation in a new realm. In the example of a wedding, the bride dons a white dress before the ceremony and yet, after the ceremony, the evidence of the change is manifested through red sheets. Her combining these two plants and colors strongly suggests that she and Carlos are in a relationship of a mother and son bound to a complete cycle of womb-to-tomb resulting in a birth-death-rebirth.

In her travel journal she says: “Llevo un cuaderno por si se me ocurre anotar ideas sobre Carlos o frases de él, que borraré cuidadosamente para írmelo sacando de la cabeza. Llevo como cinco lápices de la oficina, de esos con goma en la otra punta. Llevo también una goma blanda porque de eso se trata” (53-54). While this seems logical, it also imitates the sacred teachings of the quill and tablet which Muslims believe is similar to the book of life for Christians. The material prima for the world is what is written therein. Valenzuela thus gives the protagonist the power over life and death.

Because the protagonist is still obedient to the teachings of her mother, in her journal it is only Carlos and motherhood itself she wishes to erase. Enumerating the belongings she takes with her, she includes “preservativos (never leave home without them) para hacerme ilusiones, dos pares de pantalones por si se moja uno como decía mamá-la palabra mamá la escribo toda con mayúscula y la borro bien rápido, el cuaderno se está haciendo rico en marcas y así llego a Ezeiza” (54). She is careful only to notate
important facts she then erases, because “no hay sobreescritura, no hay sobreimpresión posible” (55). The writing/creation is followed by erasure/destruction; in this formula there is only room for new writing/new creations rather than writing on top of old writing which is reformation of something already existing. This is established before her departure from Ezeiza where she boards Garuda Airlines: “Garuda era el ave mítica de Vishnú, dice uno de los folletos” (55).

The overt reference to Garuda is to the mythical bird of the god Vishnu who, with his human head and eagle’s beak, descends to kill the serpent: “The war of birds and snakes is a constant motif of Asian iconography and may be seen as the battle of life with death, of good with evil, of the chthonian with the celestial powers, of as the image of the twofold aspect of Vishnu who kills and restores to life, destroys and rebuilds” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 421). Hence we have the battle of life and death once more. The formula for her work is creation in the heavens, destruction on earth: “decido tratar de escribir en vuelo, borrar en los aeropuertos, con los pies en la tierra” (55).

Previously, Carlos had given this narrator/courier the pet name “paloma mensajera” (56), which she detested due to its banality. She finds this, but not her tangible memories of him, worthy of recording in her travel journal. His gifts include useless, juvenile presents like the “boleto capicúa” she maintains under the glass on her nightstand table. By definition, capicúa is a palindrome. In other words, the number on this ticket is a reflection of itself as is maternity. This seemingly juvenile souvenir is yet another indicator of their relationship not as merely a couple but as a pair of mother-son. Suddenly it is she who feels she is under glass or in a fish bowl, living in Buenos Aires and breathing used air, unable to find her way and unable to dream. Valenzuela describes a typical airport scene: “Se empieza a hacer sentir, el viaje, y es larga la espera para el trasbordo y tengo que recoger largos corredores y avanzar por cintas transportadoras y llegar hasta el otro extremo del Kennedy para acordar el avión que me llevará a un París que tampoco he de ver” (57). The protagonist is running through a virtual labyrinth and is in a constant state of “duermevela” (58) akin to a reality of suspended animation. This symbolism of the labyrinth in early cultures represented the two “terminal” points in life: birth and death simultaneously. (Kristeva notes that linguistically womb and tomb are
related.) These goddess cultures recognized the tunnel as the passage of deliverance from one world to another:

Mythically the associations attached to this tunnel-labyrinth-spiral image strongly indicate that both sexes early connected it to the two limits of human existence, birth and death. Commonly, spiral and labyrinthine images decorate tombs, simultaneously reflecting passage into death and transformation into new life, a belief common to cultures everywhere.

(Rabuzzi 205)

The protagonist wanders through these moments in life virtually without feeling or meaning. Now she seeks to claim her prize for this labor as well.

Part of her receiving her prize is becoming prepared. She does this in her attention not to miss the meals, a communion of sorts. She also follows the advice of long-distance travelers and drinks plenty of water, an act of purification. She even meets a man who speaks to her in English and cares for her. This language swap and their celestial travels together bring her to a communication during the dream state. She falls short of her hoped-for prize, however, when she claims a relationship with Carlos to this man or so it first seems. She later precludes a potential romantic attachment to this passenger by declaring herself Carlos’s partner. In fact, this mysterious man may be the third person set up by the woman to interfere with her relationship with her son, as psychoanalysts would say. She is out to destroy Carlos, of course, but this destruction is a loving act. Never has she claimed to hate him. In fact, Adrienne Rich would argue that this is a type of rite of passage that a boy must pass through in order to achieve manhood. In that case, the role of the mother is one of mandatory support and assistance: “Tribal societies have always required a “second birth” of the young boy at puberty into the male group. … But whatever the ritual to be enacted, the child-with-a-penis is expected to bond himself with others who have penises. … And his mother, whatever her deepest instincts tell her, is expected to facilitate this” (199-200). That is why the mother suppresses any nurturing, protecting instincts and facilitates this change in their relationship.

29 All three were passages by water into another realm.
During this flight she physically changes and the face in the mirror and the passport picture play a pivotal role in her re-knowing her new self in the mirror: “sólo necesito pausas para reconocerme de alguna forma, re-reconocerme” (59). She no longer recognizes the pre-flight version of herself and, like Kalima, she repeats to give life: “En la foto casi no me reconozco, en el nombre y los datos sí, me repito y repito hasta que recuerdo mi deber: borrar todo lo escrito últimamente. Borro ya casi hasta las últimas páginas del cuaderno, donde por supuesto no escribí mi nombre” (60). She ends the paragraph with an affirmation of her eternal nature. She survives, because she does not write herself into existence, hence she cannot be destroyed. The mother-goddess always was and always will be. The metamorphosis of her self is complete. Strangely, even this trip will be written in her book and erased. She has no memory of it despite the evidence. Ambiguity is a signature quality of Valenzuela’s work. Whether this trip was real or imagined, psychological or literal, remains purposely vague.

After a jump in the text, the protagonist is back with Carlos, and though he addresses her in the tú form, the narration about her and her journey is written in third person: the prose captures the event as if it were about someone other than the narrator herself. There is an apparent splitting of her that is evident in the narration. The talk consists of meaningless excuses for her absence and another jump occurs in the story. The scene moves forward to months later when a narrator tells how the protagonist finally decides to tell her story to a friend. Returning to a first-person account, she tells how she remembers nothing of this trip. It is as if it all were a vague dream only remembered through photographs despite her having tickets as proof. In reference to her trip around the world and speedy return, she reflects: “tenés que empezar el vuelo con la compañía que te da el pasaje, pero la vuelta ya no importa” (61).

Upon this realization, a voice comes seemingly out of nowhere, “algún fogonazo, como la voz que le habla del festival de la luna llena en el templo de Besakhi, el templo madre, dice la voz” (61). This voice tells her to avoid the water and go up high. A narrator then recounts an entire scene of a religious ceremony before the protagonist

30 Besakhi is a Balinese temple at the foot of the Agung Volcano. It is thought to be the “mother of all temples.”
consults her journal. Yet the voice and the writing appear to be that of another. What appears in her notebook is a type of automatic writing as she channels the destructive mother goddess Kali, the one she temporarily became because of Carlos. Most importantly, she reveals herself also to be a mother:

Y en el cuaderno dice (y es su letra)
Soy toda, soy todos, soy, puta, desde lo más profundo. (62)
Con finísimas uñas desgarro carne humana y no es la mía pero sí, claro, es mía: la carne del otro es la propia carne y duele. Duele y no duele. El placer de desgarrar, destruir, aplastar o estrujar supera todo dolor puntual y todo dolor reflejo. (62)

There is a detailed account of the protagonist eating Carlos. This cannibalism is one that Kristeva describes in her book *Black Sun* in the section titled “Cannibalistic Solitude: The Body as Tomb or the Omnipotent Devouring”:

Like an Alice in distressland, the depressed woman cannot put up with mirrors. Her image and that of others arouse within her wounded narcissism, violence, and the desire to kill -- from which she protects herself by going through the looking glass and settling down in that other world where, by limitlessly spreading her constrained sorrow, she regains a hallucinated completedness. Beyond the grave, Prosperina survives as a blind shade. Her body is already elsewhere, absent, a living corpse. It often happens that she does not feed it or else, on the contrary, she stuffs it the better to get rid of it. (74)

In the text we have the mention of the antidepressant the protagonist takes, the importance of food during flight, the wavering from missing Carlos and the unnamed neighbor on the flight, the desire to be a citizen of nowhere (death), and the experience of not being bound to the Earth. Along with earlier symbols, this demonstrates that this is a mother who will destroy her son, Carlos.

Kali/the mother/protagonist experiences a reflective moment and wonders about the fear in which each person is created. This psychoanalytic reference to the splitting is
followed by a justification of her ingesting him as a final act of love in letting him live a
life independent from her:

Toda la vida en un camino. Todo desgarramiento es la señalización de
ese camino, un intento cada vez más preciso de mapeo. Todo amor es un
salto de ruta, de mapa, de universo. Todo amor es un salto que aterra.
Todo amor es un deslumbramiento tan pero tan deslumbrante que pocos
tienen el coraje de asomarse a ese gran agujero negro.

Yo no tengo el coraje.

O sí tengo, pero sin querer. Negándolo. (63)

“Ayer” by Herminia Paz (Spain)

Herminia Paz was born in Zaragoza and has published both poetry and short
stories, yet there is little research about the work of this Spanish author. Los muertos no
se resignan is a collection of her short stories published in Spain. From that 1992
collection comes the short story “Ayer” which appears to be a relatively simple two page
story. In reality, it is a rich narrative relying principally on allusions and symbols to flesh
out deep meaning under a strict economy of words. As demonstrated earlier, the short
story by definition is a brief narrative. Therefore, it depends on references to well known
cultural signs in order to build an allegory of larger meaning.

In this story, a man recounts a memory in second person. He reminds a woman of
the afternoons he used to go to a particular café and order coffee and toast while barely
speaking to the waiter. There is a detailed description of the locale followed by an
“event” that had transpired between the man and woman the previous afternoon or ayer.
He recounts it as the day he first saw her as a woman. He realized that she was a woman
when she sported an emerald ring. He creates a spectacle because of her donning it on

See earlier comments on the literary genre minicuento and quotes from Karla Paniagua Ramírez.
her middle finger, and she moves it to her ring finger. That marks the day he noticed her innocence was gone. The opening lines read: “Fue ayer cuando te miré a los ojos y ví algo. Comprendí que habías matado la inocencia y te sentí mujer” (57).

A first reading of these lines might lead one to believe this woman is a virgin who is seen by an older man as having lost her youthful flower of innocence: he might intuitively know she has lost her virginity. Indeed, his feeling that she is a woman might indicate that she has grown up. However, a close reading reveals this pair to be a mother and son. This son is seeing his mother for the first time as a separate entity from himself and recognizes that she is a woman. That is to say that she is a gendered subject who exists apart from him and is different from him.

Because this short fiction relies on symbols, we must examine those present in Paz’s story before beginning to put together a total picture or analysis of the work. The description of the environment provides a backdrop for the narrative and is the longest part of the story, so it is fitting to begin there. The café is “del otro lado de la calle, ese pequeño café de puertas de madera, con apenas cinco o seis mesas redondas, cubiertas con mantelillos bordados y adornadas por un jarrón de cristal con una o dos flores naturales” (57). In addition the narrator adds specific details on the lighting:

Allí la luz es del color del té porque las lámparas tienen cristales ahumados y un poco amarillentos, son apliques que están a lo largo de la pared formando grupos de cuatro tulipas. En el centro del techo hay una gran araña de diez brazos, pero no obstante, se mantiene una agradable penumbra, mientras sombras y luces se reflejan en el cristal que cubre la pared del fondo. (57-58)

This café is the one across the street where the street is a type of Styx River of death with one bank/side of the road being life and the other side representing the afterlife. The question not yet answered is on which side the two characters are. The implicit image here, however, is one of having crossed over to the afterlife.

Upon arriving on the other side, one encounters wooden doors. Both wood and doors are feminine symbols. Wood is a material that changes and evolves according to its purpose. Like woman, it gives birth to many things. In fact, it is the materia prima of
the universe which, in the Catholic Church, becomes synonymous with the cross. For Christians, the most well known use of wood is as the instrument of death and destruction for Jesus Christ who was later resurrected. This is the second reference to a life and afterlife. The doors are a facsimile of the female genitalia through which the seed enters and life returns. *The Women’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secret* explains the origin of the door as a sacred and feminine symbol: “Sanskrit dwr, Celtic duir, Hebrew daleth-meant the Door of birth, death, or the sexual paradise” (Walker 218). In addition, in the Cult of Demeter (*meter* being Greek for mother), the earlier centers of this cult and other ancient societies had:

*tholos* tombs with their triangular doorways, short vaginal passages and round domes, [which] represented the womb of the Goddess from which rebirth might come. Doorways generally were sacred to women. In Sumeria they were painted red, representing the female ‘blood of life.’ In Egypt, doorways were smeared with real blood for religious ceremonies, a custom copied by the Jews for their Passover rites. (Walker 218)

This is very much in keeping with Julia Kristeva’s aforementioned theories of the maternal body as a tomb after giving birth. Thus, the female body is at once the womb and tomb: it is the site of birth-death-rebirth. That is why Egyptians used the triangle as the female delta or genitals as well as the shape for their burial grounds.

Once inside the café, there are a few round tables covered with small, decorative tablecloths and vases of one or two flowers. Flowers demonstrate the transitory nature of youth and the beauty of the soul. Individual flowers carry symbolic meaning, but as a category they remind us to seize the day: *carpe diem*. In this context, the small, decorated table serves as a holy altar.

During the Middle Ages, Hermes Trismegistus wrote *The Emerald Table* about an alchemist work revealing many secrets. The table was called emerald, because emerald was said to be the “flower of Heaven” where all secrets were held. The table itself was the site of revelation which was available only to the initiate himself (Chevalier 964). At this table, or altar of revelation, the narrator/initiate orders his coffee and toast from a waiter who regularly attends to him and requires little or no verbal instruction as to the
desired tasks he should perform. The waiter is thoughtful and meticulous and anticipates the client’s requests. Instead of the body and blood, the narrator takes a communion of toast and coffee from this non-speaking, priestly figure. The narrator/initiate is sanctifying himself for what is to come: the sacrifice of the first-born son and the end of his life in its current state.

The interior light of the café is the color of tea. The lamps have smoky crystal which is a little yellow on the light fixtures arranged along the wall forming groups of four. Tea is an Asian symbol for the self. Therefore, in this environment, each participant is acutely aware of his self or individuality. In addition, smoke, yellow, and crystal all retain certain transparent qualities and are representative of the soul in some way. They collectively show the salvation of this narrator by fire along with the awareness and inspiration he receives after time spent in this place of revelation. Finally, the lamps are grouped by fours. Four is a holy number of wholeness in items such as North, South, East, and West and above, below, right, and left. It is also the number of the cross which has four terminal points. This is a reference to filial sacrifice and later resurrection that completes the life cycle. It is the third time life and afterlife are referenced. In addition to that binary, and that of the group versus the self, we now see another binary opposition in the interior. The description includes a wall towards the back. This is a masculine symbol which opposes the door. It is solid and impenetrable as is the male genitalia.

From the description of the café’s location, one repeatedly sees the image of life-death-afterlife. The description of the table alludes to a holy rite of communion and sacrifice in addition to the revelation of occult knowledge. Finally, the café’s interior clearly has contrasting elements of female and male symbols under something akin to mood lighting, which in a group setting reflects the sensation of knowledge of the individual spirit and self.

The next description of the café’s interior given by the narrator is the “gran araña de diez brazos” (57) in the center of the ceiling which maintains an agreeable reflection of light and shadow on the mirror covering the back wall. The spider, the infamous husband eater, is a creature known for weaving and spinning its webs. The web of fate in
mythology showed how fragile fate could be, and the greatest fragility was that between reality and illusion. This spider is a feminine icon with ten arms. The number ten signifies unity and totality while arms typically indicate power. Therefore, this ten-armed spider is a woman who holds the power over the creation of reality and illusion. This is a mother. The light reflected on the mirror is a Narcissistic image of one person seeing him/herself defined in the reflection of another admired person. This idea of reflection reveals the close relationship between the narrator and this woman as one of two differing parts of a whole. The narrator sees himself in relation to her. That fact is solidified for the reader through the intense oppositional imagery.

Until now, the narrator has inundated the account with visual images. Now, he moves to the olfactory to provide another sensual description. He says: “El ambiente está saturado con una mezcla de olores a colonias de lavanda usadas por las viejas damas que se reúnen allí a merendar y perfumes sofisticados de jóvenes <<snobs>> que reviven pasados ajenos con la fruición de la juventud. Por encima de todos ellos impera el aroma del café y el del tabaco” (58). The smells are derived from the wearers of fragrances, and they are divided by the age of the wearer of the scents. The women are labeled by their odor, and it is their odor which marks the café. The old women wear colognes that mark them as has-beens. They are obsolete. The younger women are all snobs who wear perfumes. Even with some remaining youth, they too live in the past. The women are powerless over one thing, and that is that they lack the ability to control time and live in a pleasant time in the past. For the first time, the description shows a female weakness. To further illustrate this, the narrator says the dominant aromas are, of course, masculine ones. The masculine aroma is not quantified by age or habit of the source. In the end, without mentioning actual men in the café (besides the neutral priestly waiter and the narrator himself), the odor of coffee and tobacco still suppresses the feminine smells.

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32 This narcissism in a relationship is when one member sees himself/herself in his/her partner. This is what the object relations school of psychology sees as a child’s initial recognition of his mother as a part of or an extension of himself rather than a separate, distinct being. While this couple in this story is together, they see themselves as one unit - as does the child. The couple, upon recognizing themselves as separate beings, disintegrates into exactly that: two separate people instead of one couple.

33 The obvious exception is that the waiter is male. However, he is a type of priest; and in such a role, he is virtually genderless. In the Middle Ages in Europe, priests were counted with the women and children and were not required to serve in the military. They were not considered male.
With approximately one page of background description, the narrator moves to the “event.” This marks the midpoint of the short story. He and the woman are seated at a table when he casually grabs her hand which she had positioned on the tablecloth, “Yo te cogí, como en un descuido, la mano que habías dejado sobre el mantel y, quizás atraído por el morbo que da el color de la sangre, acaricié tus uñas pintadas de rojo, una a una. En el dedo del centro llevabas un precioso anillo con una esmeralda” (58). The hand and its digits both alone and through gesticulation are important in the analysis of this act. The hand is another sign of power and domination, as seen earlier in the arm. The hand can be a critical part in taking oaths, denoting clergy or royalty, and demonstrating amorous ties. These two hands (that of the narrator and that of the woman) are intermingled in a sort of game of catch me/watch me run away. The narrator literally attempts to capture her hand while she flees from him. This marks a severing of the relationship as it once existed through her. The two have a love-hate relationship.

Each finger of the hand carries a specific meaning as do various combinations of digits forming distinct hand gestures. The index finger is the feminine, the maternal, the goddess. The middle finger represents the phallus and is the masculine, the paternal, the god. The thumb is a misfit smaller finger which is the divine male child brought forth from the union of the first two fingers. The three together form the triune family or trinity (Walker 326). Today the Pope continues to use this “hand of blessing” sign of the Christian trinity - Father, Son, Holy Spirit - when he greets his followers. He is constantly reminding them of their foundation of faith in the triune god. (Before becoming a Christian sign, the “hand of blessing” was the Mano Pantea of “Hand of the All-Goddess,” and it also became the “Hand of Fatima” for the Muslims [Walker 315]). However, the sign of the open hand which joins the index finger with the thumb is a different configuration of the family:

The yogi’s mystic gesture places the index finger and the thumb together, while the other three fingers extend and make the sign for the triad. This was once an expression of unity of mother and child under the protection of the Triple Goddess, connoting security, love, blessings, and other
fortunate qualities. This may be why the yogi’s mystic gesture was adopted as our ordinary “OK” sign. (Walker 326)

The woman’s fingernails are painted red. This is a sign of sexuality as women, not girls, wear red polish. Through the ages this color has been closely associated with blood and the life force therein. In the giving and the taking of life it is blood that is either given or shed. Therefore, this color symbolizes two opposing aspects of life. Additionally, alchemists thought red was the color of the famous philosopher’s stone, a stone which granted new life. Once again we see life and afterlife, both of which can be endowed by a mother.

The next stage of the description of this woman’s hand is the mentioning of her ring. The fact that the woman wears the ring (a female symbol) on the middle finger (a male symbol) suggests a sexual union with another man. This union is manifested by a special emerald ring. Various superstitions consider the emerald to be a mysterious stone, but one belief in particular claims that the emerald holds the power to relieve pain during childbirth. In that case, a mother would be the one to wear this green gem. The green is, most importantly, reminiscent of the renewing qualities, such as spring after winter. In other words, it is a renewal or rebirth after a period of lifelessness. The narrator knows this, because he remembers: “-Una espiga entre flores, comenté. / Te reíste confusa sin entender y los dedos pretendieron huir entre los míos. Apreté un poco más y sujeté el anillo. / -Trae mala suerte, dije jugando con él, no debes llevarlo en el dedo del corazón” (58). He speaks to her twice revealing his understanding of the secret contained in her hands: “Una espiga entre flores, comenté” (58) and “Trae mala suerte, dije jugando con él, no debes llevarlo en el dedo del corazón” (58). Even so, she fails to grasp the reference – at least she feigns a lack of understanding for her benefit and denies the consequences in his comment. Instead she laughs. This is the ultimate abjection met with comedy. It is an apocalyptic laughter described by Kristeva as a confrontation of the apocalypse which is met “with a horror close to ecstasy. …laughter is a horrified and fascinated exclamation. An apocalyptic laughter” (Powers of Horror 204). This protagonist meets the comment with laughter, because it disguises her horror. With the second comment the male character recalls: “Abriste mucho los ojos mirándome
Incredulously. Yo estaba serio, pero al verte preocupada rompí a reír. Haciendo coro a mi risa, hiciste un mohín mientras lo cambiabas de lugar, al dedo anular” (58).

Her reaction to his proclamation of bad luck is one of surprise and shock. When he notes this, not wanting to alarm or hurt her, he acquiesces and begins to laugh. Even so, she grimaces and relocates the ring to her ring finger. For the narrator, this was the first indication of this loss of innocence and her identity as a woman. She has an emerald ring on her middle finger: she had sexual intercourse with another man. This is the first acknowledgement of her as a sexual being and the first acknowledgement of another man in her life besides the narrator. It is not that she has been unfaithful to him but that he has seen her in a Narcissistic way as part of himself and in an oedipal way as his own. Despite his prior views, she is in fact another’s.

Upon changing the ring to the ring finger, the woman alters the symbol. She moves the feminine back to the position of love. In ancient Egypt, it was believed that the ring finger had a vein leading directly to the heart. If a person were in love, he would give a ring to his beloved to wear on that finger in an attempt to harness her love. This woman moves the ring from the phallus finger to the love finger and wants to know: “¿Cambiará mi suerte?” (58) She asks with “picardía” or cunning, so the narrator shrugs his shoulders and then looks to the sky. He responds to her question with one of his own, “¿Cambiará la mía?” (58). Thus he questions not only what he means to her but also what she means to him. He questions their roles as seen by each other.

The problem with this second question is that she then responds with yet another question. She must ask where it is that he wears his ring: “-¿Dónde llevas tu anillo?, cogiste mis manos. / Yo las abrí entre las tuyas y las mostré desnudas. / -Es todo lo que tengo, sonrei” (58). She has a ring and he does not. Only she has been initiated into a sexual relationship while he has not. That is not to say that she has previously been a virgin. Instead it means she has not been a married or monogamous woman. In fact, the ancient tradition of vestal girls or church harlots was one in which young maidens had sexual intercourse with priests or religious men in the temple as a part of religious rites. These women were called virgins because of their marital status and not because of their sexual status. Indeed many of these young women became mothers. These virgin-
mothers are believed to be at least a contributing start to the cult of Mary. It could have been said that Mary was a virgin because she was unmarried and a harlot because she conceived outside of a lawful union with Joseph. The maternal binary attributes of unblemished mother/raped whore is the variation of this tradition seen in the Mexican mother trinity: María, Malinche, Guadalupe. These three maternal figures embody the holiness and harlotry of a people which is mirrored in this story.

The woman in this story is a woman who is now recognized by the narrator as a sexed being. What a shocking piece of news to a child that his mother is a sexual object, a sexual participant. This continues to rupture the bond he has with her, because the child is not a partner in that way. This is the moment of the forewarned moment of self knowledge (the prophet warned that Narcissus’s destruction would come once he “knew himself”): “Tú ya eras mujer. ¡Qué bonita eras! Me quedé mirándote al salir, observando reflejos de oro viejo entre las olas negras que agitabas sobre los hombros. Hacía calor. ¡Si hubiera sabido que…! ¡no! Pagué la cuenta. Fuera empezaba a anochecer y yo..., no quise saber qué fue de tu inocencia” (58-59).

His first words of the story were: “Fue ayer cuando te mire a los ojos y vi algo. Comprendí que habías matado la inocencia y te sentí mujer” (57). Compared to the lines of the last paragraph - “Tú ya eras mujer. ¡Qué bonita eras! Me quedé mirándote al salir” (58) - his remarks at the opening of the account are abrupt and appear to be cruel; she killed the innocence. His closing remarks, on the other hand, appear to carry an air of nostalgia and forgiveness by him - she was a woman, a beautiful woman, and he observed her as such for the first time. The shift in emotion underscores the shift in perception: it is as if he understands as well as accepts this change in his perception of her. Nothing during the course of this recollection has changed save his perception of her.

In her 1976 book Of Woman Born, Adrienne Rich devotes a chapter to “Mother and Son, Woman and Man.” That alone is notable since many object-relations studies focus on the mother-child bond or even, more specifically, the mother-daughter bond.

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34 There has been much research on this very subject including studies by Jean Franco, Gloria Anzaldúa, etc.
while totally negating the unique bond between a mother and her son. Furthermore, these studies deny any agency to the mother, who undoubtedly experiences a renewed vitality in the death drive described by many psychoanalysts, but object-relation followers would ignore or refute her ability to act on it. Rich focuses on the mother-son dynamic and describes the paradox-ridden mother as seen by her son:

As her sons have seen her: the Mother in patriarchy: controlling, erotic, castrating, heart-suffering, guilt-ridden, and guilt-provoking; a marble brow, a huge breast, an avid cave; between her legs snakes, swamp grass, or teeth; on her lap a helpless infant or martyred son. She exists for one purpose: to bear and nourish the son. (149)

If this is the archetypal mother’s appearance, then Rich must state also her function as object to the son: “The mother as seducer, with whom the son longs to sleep, against whom the invest taboo is strongest: Jocasta, Gertrude. Despite the very high incidence of actual father-daughter and brother-sister rape, it is mother-son incest which has been most consistently taboo in every culture” (149). Finally, Rich defines the identity of the mother as the embodiment of the death drive and gives her the unhampered ability to avenge what Kristeva sees as a failed matricide on the part of her son:

And, at the two ends of a spectrum which is really a continuum, she is Kali, the “black mother” of Hindu religion, fangs ecstatically bared, a necklace of skulls round her neck, dancing on her dead husband’s body; while in Michelangelo’s white-satin-marble Pietà she bends her virginal mannequin’s face above the icy, dandiacal corpse of the son on her lap. Somehow her relationship to him is connected with death. . . . he has chosen, for burial, case, and tombs and labyrinths imitating caves which represent the female body. (151) 35

In this story, the narrator neither gives a ghastly physical description of the woman, nor does he mention death. He does distinguish between the old women and the young

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35 See comments on “Omar, amor” earlier in this chapter which mention linguistic links in English between womb and tomb and the Norse cradle, womb, womb, ship. Kristeva’s womb as tomb is related to the pyramid where the protagonist of that story is born and the tomb which is the mother’s body after giving birth.
women, thus verbally defining his two existing categories of women. Then, he uses the digits on the hand of his female companion to represent the three members of the family - father, mother, son - and the fourth or ring finger occupying the seat of true love. Finally, we do have a physical description of her at the very end: “Me quedé mirándote al salir, observando reflejos de oro viejo entre las olas negras que agitabas sobre los hombros” (58-59). Gold is a symbol of the divine male child, but this old gold is the departure from youth and child status in reference to the woman. She agitates black waves over her shoulder. By purposely moving her black wavy hair as she leaves the narrator behind, the woman in this story thus reemphasizes her sexual identity and manifests her active role in his separation from her.

This reference to a black mother is yet one more in a series of black mothers. First, the black links her to the Hindu goddess Kali and the Black Madonna. Kali is the black mother to the Hindus as the Black Madonna is a mother to the Roman Catholics. Secondly, her hair is reminiscent of Isis, another mother goddess who is said to have protective powers in her hair, and who, interestingly, also wore red. She is the giver of life and is able to resurrect the dead. It is also said of her that she gave birth to Horus by shaking her hair over him. This mother goddess-divine son dynamic is the prototype of Mary and Jesus in ancient art and literature. About Isis, Egyptian scripture said: “In the beginning there was Isis, Oldest of the Old. She was the Goddess from whom all becoming arose. As the Creatress, she gave birth to the sun ‘when he rose upon this earth for the first time.’ Her title, ‘Giver of Life,’ was applied also to the queen mother of Egypt” (Walker 453). She is a goddess who protects her divine son and offers him an afterlife in paradise.

Isis swallowed Osiris the savior and brought him back to life. He was reincarnated as the child Horus, or else as the ithyphallic moongod Min, or Menu, ‘He who impregnates his mother.’ He was annually torn into pieces and reassembled except for his lost penis. Isis made him a new penis of clay, then gave it - and him- new life by invoking her own holy name as life-giver and death-giver.” (Walker 455)
She is the perfect mother save that she actually swallowed her husband and resurrected him as her son, thus forever blurring the line between divine father and divine son.

Despite the binary oppositions throughout the text, the change occurs the afternoon the woman arrives with red fingernail polish and an emerald ring. Thus, she has destroyed the reflected image. By his noticing a difference in her, he no longer sees himself in her. Finally, she moves her black hair over her shoulders. Undoubtedly, he does not have this hair and feels again a separation from her.

Like Kristeva, Adrienne Rich addresses the mother’s separation of her son as a necessity for him which is difficult for her. Rich abandons traditional mothering and takes the point of view of a woman pursuing feminist ideals when she speaks of the mother-son separation:

But it is absurd to think that women on the path of feminism wish to abandon their sons, emotionally or otherwise. Rather, the mother-son relationship -- like all relationships -- is undergoing revaluation, both in the light of the mother’s changing relationship to male ideology, and in terms of her hopes and gears for her sons. (167-168)

This comment comes after a lengthy rebuttal of Freud’s theories of penis envy which a woman might satisfy with her male child. Freud blames the woman for lacking and wanting an external phallus. In fact, it is more likely that antiquity relished vagina envy when one examines the ancient rites of castration and coming of age rituals when a boy entered puberty. This “second birth” into adulthood for girls is her initiation into her first blood cycle, but the boy experiences no noticeable change. Instead of emasculating him further, ancient rites of castration actually caused boys to squat to urinate. Rich cites ancient rituals of this type which include animal castration, sacrifice, symbolic wounds, etc. She even discusses the symbolic rejection of the mother which ranges from actually striking the mother to raping unknown elderly women and then killing them in conquest of the mother figure.

The rather ambiguous ending of the story leaves the reader to simply see the mother as shattering the Narcissistic image for the son. The narrator’s final words are “¡Si hubiera sabido que…! ¡no! Pagué la cuenta. Fuera empezaba a anochecer y yo…,
no quise saber qué fue de tu inocencia” (59). Grammatically, it could read in first or third person subjunctive meaning, “if you knew that…,” “if I knew that…,” or “if she knew that….” Clearly one of them withheld knowledge from the other which only now is revealed. Would it have changed prior attitudes? No, the male character dismisses even the hypothetical. He simply carries on with societal duties (paying the bill) and looks outside (leaving the comfort of the café and his mother bond). He notes the oncoming night, which is a parallel with his/her coming of age or his obligatory entrance into individuality from her – obligatory, because she flaunts her sexual identity and thus reiterates her separateness from his and total abandonment of him. Finally, his refusal to consider how she lost her innocence is more a commentary on his losing his own innocence. Either way, the innocence of a pre-sexed child is a thing of the past.

As we have seen in each of these three stories, “Omar, amor,” “Viaje,” and “Ayer,” the female character is compared to the Hindu goddess Kali, a creator/destroyer maternal figure. This comparison, paired with many significant other ones allow the reading of the protagonists to be seen as a mother/maternal figure to the male character in the texts. In the following chapter, the female protagonist is compared to Echo. Although Echo is not the mother of Narcissus, she does, in fact, play a maternal function in relation to him which is explored therein.
CHAPTER 2
ECHO, VOICE OF NARCISSUS

This chapter traces the theme of Echo in relationship to Narcissus and her role as a verbal repetition of him. Generally speaking, Narcissus occupies the central role in tales of the two, but these stories reverse the millennia old tendency in favor of examining Echo’s role. Because of that reversal, more attention is given to the origin and progression of this individual.

If the identity of the figure of Echo in Greek mythology is varied, then the explanations of the origin of her infamous attributes are even more assorted. In pre-Hellenic times, Echo was known as the birth goddess Acco (Walker 269). Thereafter, she was known simply as a nymph. According to Classical Mythology nymphs are described as being:

Of a different order, too, are the divine spirits who animate nature. These beings are usually depicted as nymphs, beautiful young girls who love to dance and sing and, in some cases, are extremely amorous. Very often nymphs act as attendants for one or more of the major gods or goddesses. The muses are a kind of nymph, and so are the Nereids and Oceanids, although some of them assume virtually the stature of deity. More typically, nymphs are rather like fairies, extremely long-lived but not necessarily immortal. (Morford 86)

This description of a nymph concurs with her previous close association with the goddess of birth since many ancient religions and myths contain a creation goddess or mother goddess who is associated with both birth and with nature (“Mother Nature”). Even so,
this mythological character’s dual duties are secondary, as it were, to her most famous attribute: her lack of voice.

There are at least two stories that account for the reduction of her voice to an echo. One version tells that when Zeus’ wife, Hera, discovered that her husband was having affairs with various nymphs and that one of her attendants – Echo – was believed to be concealing these infidelities, she removed Echo’s voice from her, thus silencing the entire affair. From that point forward, Echo was unable to express original words of her own but was able to repeat words or ends of sentences of others hence, the “echo” effect (Coulter 162).

At this time, however, Echo was actually in love with the god Pan - a half man and half goat, amorous god - who seduced young women in the forest through the haunting playing of his namesake pan-pipe.36 However, Echo left Pan, for reasons unknown, in pursuit of the beautiful Narcissus. It is Narcissus who eventually met his demise in her reflecting pool.

A second account states that Pan’s attempts to seduce Echo went unanswered, and it was he who spread “panic” among local shepherds who killed her by tearing her body into pieces. The only thing of her that remained was her voice – and of it, only the echo remained (Morford 227).

These versions account for both the bodily and the articulated fragmentation Echo suffered. However, the Greek myth originates with Ovid (43 B.C.-A.D. 17) in his poem Metamorphoses (circa A.D. 8). Taking directly from the story of Echo and Narcissus in Metamorphoses 3. 342-510, Ovid states that:

At that time, Echo was a person and not only a voice; but just as now, she was garrulous and was able to use her voice in her customary way of repeating from a flood of words only the very last. Juno brought this about because, when she might have been able to catch the nymphs lying on the mountain with her Jove, Echo knowingly detained the goddess by talking at length until the nymphs could run away. When Juno realized

36 Pan also made unwelcome advances on the nymph Syrinx who was transformed into a bed or marsh reeds (Morford 227). It was from these reeds that he fashioned his pan pipe.
the truth, she exclaimed: ‘The power of that tongue of yours, by which I have been tricked, will be limited; and most brief will be the use of your voice.’ She made good her threats; Echo only gives back the words she has heard and repeats the final phrases of utterances. (Metamorphoses 3. 360-75)

In the end, Echo had only a partial voice, in that she was only able to repeat the words or ends of sentences of others. Therefore, she became a verbal mimic of others who could express no original utterances of her own. In this way, she became a verbal mirror of others with no identity outside of her repetition of others. That makes her story parallel to that of a mother in the traditional sense of the psychoanalytic mirror stage for her child. This is where her relationship with Narcissus becomes central.

Once Echo became a disembodied verbal mime, this nymph pursued Narcissus. Unlike others, Echo was unabashed in her pursuit of this beautiful one. She relentlessly attempted to copulate with him. He scorns her, so she flees to the woods. Narcissus sees his own image in her reflecting pool and falls in love with the beauty therein. Yet, the real drama of Narcissus, however, is that he cannot distinguish that which is the original version from that which is the copy. Thus he loves part of a whole instead of a complete, distinct entity. This is the dilemma experienced by a child who, in the psychoanalytic mirror stage, sees himself reflected in his mother or primary identification. He has not yet discovered himself to be separate from her. His love is a delusional, misplaced one in that he is fixated, to the detriment of all else, on his own image, and he cannot realize that it is time to move on and find a true love which is external from himself. Narcissus meets his own demise as he shatters his own reflection in an attempt to copulate with it. This act leaves Echo to come from the woods and mourn him. She witnesses him taken over the Styx River, where he looks for his own reflection, and she witnesses the water he leaves yellow. The Styx River provides a second instrument which is not Echo in which he might see himself reflected. Therefore, once he terminates the potential identification with Echo, he seeks one in the river of death.

In Narcissus’s killing of himself, he actually kills a replica of himself. This, again, is in keeping with Julia Kristeva’s matricidal mandate. The child must kill his
mother in order that he be reborn as a separate, distinct individual from her. He must 
“know himself.” Echo, in her role as a mirror version of Narcissus, was rebuked and fled 
from him and allowed his fatal error in the reflecting pond. She realized that he must 
leave the mirror stage and permitted herself to be separated from him.

When the world is finished examining the drama of Narcissus, the more 
fascinating psychic development and emotional maturity of Echo will remain. It is her 
role which allows for Narcissus’s emergence of self.

“In Historia de amor” by Cristina Peri Rossi (Exiled in Spain)

In an interview with Parizad Dejbord, Peri Rossi herself claims, “coordonadas 
espaciales y temporales son irrelevantes a la hora de escribir” (102), and about her own 
writing process she adds, “La verdad es que no pienso en un lector, ni en un sexo 
determinado, ni en un país determinado, ni en una época determinada” (103). Of course 
this Hispanic author’s formation has been Uruguayan, but Spain has been her home for 
the most recent half of her life. She was born in Montevideo in 1941, was exiled to 
Barcelona in 1972, and has been a Spanish citizen since 1974. In fact, the majority of her 
literary production has taken place during her years in Spain. In addition, Peri Rossi has 
no plans to return to Uruguay permanently, though she makes visits to her birth country 
every two years (Dejbord 101). This is hardly an exceptional case of multinational 
identity, but it is something that is becoming standard in a modern, transnational 
community of literary partakers. However, literary critics continue to divide her work 
into two periods based on geography, the Uruguayan period and the Exile period (1972-
present) (Schmidt-Cruz 145), and she is never considered a Spanish author. The focus in 
her work “explores how language and power relations impose a socially-constructed 
identity” (Bell no pagination).
Cristina Peri Rossi explores identity and psychoanalytic stages of subject formation and sexual identity in her short story “Historia de amor.” This is the only story in this study with a male narrator. This fact alone would seem to support the idea of it not being a female version of a male story, but it is actually a cleverly constructed story whose dominant character is the voiceless female at its center. In fact, it is the male narrator who exhibits a doubting, weak attitude and is unable to fulfill his matricidal mandate while the female remains an unwavering presence who will dutifully facilitate his “death” if necessary. The story is entirely about the separation/death of the two as a unit and their rebirths as individuals. Initially, they walk uphill together, the narrator physically carrying the female. He recounts the discomfort this causes him and his inability to rid himself of her. The ascension leaves him deformed and causes him to liquefy under the strain. He realizes that he is growing old and will never reach the peak of the mountain. With this realization come the closing lines: “Te amo - me dijo - . Te he brindado mi vida. ¿Cómo no ibas a darme la tuya?” (115)

“Historia de amor” was originally published in a collection entitled El museo de los esfuerzos inútiles. About this collection Andrea Bell says:

Cristina Peri Rossi reasserts the legitimacy of the marginalized in her 1983 collection of stories, El museo de los esfuerzos inútiles [The Museum of Vain Endeavors]. El museo is a collection of short and very short prose fiction pieces that display for us, like curiosities on a shelf, the empty hopes and frustrated efforts of our lives. (no pagination)

Bell claims that Peri Rossi “defamiliarizes by means of the fantastic, effectively recasting accepted behaviors and attitudes as something strange and outrageous in order to provide us with a new perspective from which to consider them” (no pagination).

Cynthia Schmidt-Cruz echoes the perspective of Bell’s defamiliarization and transgression of cultural attitudes when she says of Peri Rossi’s work:

Cristina Peri Rossi uses the child figure to deconstruct both the traditional psychoanalytic concept of patriarchal sexual economy as well as a paternalistic authoritarian regime as interrelated, overlapping, or

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37 See Cynthia Schmidt-Cruz.
analogous structures which oppress individual identity by “naturalizing” culturally-transmitted values, including gender-based power relations.

(Schmidt-Cruz 147)

In this, however, she notes the use of a child as a protagonist as a technique of defamiliarization. The child not yet inaugurated into the normative values tends to question the rules understood by elders. She describes these child characters this way:

While the children may be physically oppressed, psychologically they are freer than adults because they are not yet totally co-opted by social institutions and cultural practices. Peri Rossi’s children invariably display precocious wisdom and corrupted innocence which draw attention to the perversion which attempts to disguise itself as normalcy in the world around them.” (Schmidt-Cruz 147)

From there, the space of the transgression becomes central.

In her article entitled “Cristina Peri Rossi: El esfuerzo inútil de erigir un museo natural,” Ana Rueda argues: “En la narrativa de Cristina Peri Rossi, los museos son espacios cargados de significaciones, hasta el punto de que abandonan su valor puramente simbólico para convertirse en alegorías que dramatizan las contradicciones que asedian al ser humano” (197). Rueda categorizes the trilogy of works by Peri Rossi with “museo” in the title as three types of allegorical museums:

Así, el museo sirve de escenario a tres alegorías: una alegoría del amor (“Los museos abandonados”), una política (“La rebelión de los niños”), y una del arte (“El museo de los esfuerzos inútiles”). A través de ellas, Cristina Peri Rossi se rebela explícitamente contra lo disecado, contra la categorización de la vida por parte de una sociedad sin imaginación.

(197-98)

When addressing specifically El museo de los esfuerzos inútiles, she says the collection catalogues “empresas destinadas al fracaso” (201). The purpose of this cataloguing is to offer a “multipicidad de experiencia” (201). Furthermore, she proposes that these

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38 Noguerol notes that “Peri Rossi ha reflejado su interés por la alegoría en numerosas ocasiones, pues este mofo oblicuo de expresión le permite aludir a problemas concretos de su existencia dotándolos de un carácter universal” (125). She later shows the allegory is the basis of her style of writing: “La alegoría es
museums are parodies of capitalism which reduce everything to small usable units, and yet the museums are a type of temple: “La visión fina de este museo es un templo. El museo-templo de los esfuerzos inútiles es un espacio simbólico, un punto culminatorio en el que se produce el efecto visionario del relato. La divinidad de este templo es la encargada del museo y se llama Virginia” (199-200). From there, Rueda cites a passage from the text: “(el director del museo) ha inventado un nuevo cargo, que en realidad es el mismo, pero ahora (Virginia) tiene otro nombre. La ha nombrado vestal del templo, no sin recordarle el carácter sagrado de su misión, cuidando, a la entrada del museo, la fugaz memoria de los vivos (12)” (199-200). “Historia de amor” explores a religious aspect of the mother-son motif while utilizing a multitude of allusions to flesh out a full text of Narcissistic oppression. Francisca Noguerol sees the collection as a unit where “Cada relato va aumentando el sentimiento de desesperanza del lector, preparándolo para un nuevo fracaso que culmina en la última página del libro” (126). This story is the nineteenth of thirty, and, according to Noguerol, it is about a protagonist who “sufre la vampirización virtual de la mujer, a la que debe cargar en la espalda y que termina adhiriéndose a él como una costra” (“Historia de amor”) (126-27). Few articles about this collection exist, but there is a vacuum of research on this story in particular. Thus this study will demonstrate that though this story is simply about a protagonist who narrates in third person the burden he carries on his back, it is actually the son’s story of his overbearing mother from whom he wishes to separate not only physically (as he did in his birth process) but also emotionally (as he should in his coming of age process). This is a story about the mother-son relationship.

A single, isolated sentence forms the paragraph that begins the narration and creates a mood of dutiful compliance: “Dijo que me amaba y me ofrendó su vida” (112). The male narrator describes his obedience in carrying the burden despite the discomfort he experiences. He persuades himself that “No hay vidas livianas. Todas son difíciles de llevar” (112). The inculcation of guilt and sense of duty drive this unnamed character to uno de los principios básicos de la literatura del absurdo, pues permite al lector extraer múltiples significados de una situación” (126). She argues that this collection of short stories by Peri Rossi falls within the absurd tradition in Latin America which uses the allegory as one of its primary tools to enable the narrative to remain short.
comply with the desires of “ella.” His only goal is to reach “la montaña.” The immediate and obvious comparison is to Jesus Christ on his way to Calvary with the heavy cross on his back which would be the tool of his destruction whereby later he was resurrected.\(^3\)

Even idiomatically, one refers to having his “cross to bear.” Figuratively, the weight of the cross represents each individual’s struggles in life whereas Christ’s enormous cross is the universal struggle with sin that he bears personally on behalf of others.\(^4\) The scripture itself states it this way: “If a man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Following after Christ means choosing good over evil. Indeed, the crucifixion is a symbol of binary oppositions which is generally depicted visually with other pairs of opposites, such as the sun and the moon, the female and the male witnesses, the physical and spiritual worlds, the angels and the humans, the dark and the light. The very formation of the cross itself is binary (vertical/horizontal). These opposites illustrate that man must choose the path he will follow, just as this narrator must choose his course of action. The comparisons of him to Christ, however, continue as the narrator reflects: “No había transcurrido aún la primera parte del camino cuando observé que una de mis costillas cambiaba de lugar, clavándose en mi estómago. Entonces me alarmé, quise despojarme de mi carga, pero ella, solemnemente, declaró que me amaba, y se acomodó mejor sobre mis hombros” (112). This too is a reference to the life cut short at approximately half a normal life span. It evokes the picture of Jesus being pierced in his side. “But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. …For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, a bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, ‘They shall look on him whom they pierced’” (John 19:34, 36-37). Jesus also had a moment before his death when he prayed, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew \(^3\) The Christ figure at Calvary is also seen in Greek mythology in Prometheus who was cursed by Zeus to become a rock on the mountain. Indeed an eagle daily picked at him and destroyed his liver which, miraculously, regenerated. It is another story of destruction on a mountain later resulting in the rebirth process.\(^4\) Matthew 10: 38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; Philippians 2:8 all refer to the cross that Jesus bore and state that any man who is worthy of Christ will also take up his cross.
He did not wish for this difficult role but affirmed that he would comply with the desire of his heavenly father. He later dissuaded his friend Peter from physically defending him by saying: “Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11) Like Jesus, the narrator realizes his plight and yet chooses obedience to his parent over convenience for himself.

The idea of self-sacrifice and divine order is clear, but the journey to the mountain top has an additional correspondence to a Biblical couple. The additional Biblical passage alluded to in this citation is of the rib shared between Adam and Eve. In the case of this short story, we see again that these two characters, the obedient male and “ella,” are mother and son genetically linked through the imagery of the rib.

The narrator continues to lament his physical discomfort while noticing others’ reactions to him: “Observé que, mientras andaba, mucha gente se detenía para felicitarme: se había extendido la noticia de su amor y yo me había vuelto relativamente famoso” (112-13). This “famoso” describes a scene typical of a mother with her recently born child. Everyone stops to greet them, and the child becomes the center of attention for a time with no effort on his own part.

The bodily inscription of his pain is part of what makes him who he is. He suffers from bloodied feet, an aching back, a hunched back, a downward glance, a crisis of nostalgia, a resigned spirit, and a constant thirst. He refers to the various parts of his body without ever mentioning the word body. In fact, he speaks of “ella” this way: “Bajo el peso de su vida, yo caminaba inclinado” (113). Immediately thereafter he speaks of her saying: “Al principio, cuando me detenía al borde de una corriente cristalina para beber o descansar un rato, ella aceptaba que yo depositara brevemente su vida sobre el suelo (comía o bebía vigilándola atentamente para que no se extraviara o un desconocido se la llevara)” (113). This male narrator is a type of Narcissus who refers to parts of his own body and to her “life.” Initially, they are complementary parts of each other. Sarah Kofman notes:

The child is conceived as part of the woman’s own self. The ruse of nature or of ethics consists in guiding woman towards object-love in spite of her narcissism and by means of this very narcissism. The woman can
love someone else besides herself on the condition that this other person represent a part of her own ego of what she herself once was: ‘In the child which [women] bear, a part of their own body confronts them like an extraneous object.’ (40)

The mother figure cannot accept the son as growing up and becoming less dependent on her. In fact, she thus far rejects any notion of his having his own desires and needs which are different from her own. Adrienne Rich and others have shown that a mother sees the child as a part of her which is not a part of her, in other words, the mother sees her child as another who is not othered. Claire Nouvet points out the difficulty of differentiation in the Narcissus-reflection or mother-child relationship this way: “’Iste ego sum’ does not reduce the problem of the other but instead brings it to the foreground in a rather provocative manner. The sentence ‘I am that one,’ ‘the ego is that one’ indeed defines the ego as the other, an ‘other’ which is not, however, another subject, a subjective otherness” (124). This reiterates the fact that a child is a part of the mother’s body which exits the womb to exist separately though not quite independently. It creates some confusion for the mother as to when the child is an extension of herself and when it ceases to rely on her for its life. However, as Julia Kristeva points out, the child must necessarily separate from the mother for its own survival (Black Sun 27-28). Matricide is a mandate.

Nouvet refers to Ovid’s original version of the Narcissus character:

Asked by Narcissus’s mother if her son would live to be old, Tiresias, the blind seer, answered “Si se non noverit.” If he does not know/recognize himself. … When he states that Narcissus will die if he recognizes himself, Tiresias preserves, however, the possibility of an escape; Narcissus can escape a premature death if he manages to avoid any self-recognition. (104)

Nouvet, when discussing Narcissus’s error argues that “he mistakes an image for a body, that is, he cannot tell the difference between an ‘imago’ and a ‘corpus’ (122). She claims he needs to “be initiated to the secret of representation. He must learn to differentiate
between the representation and the thing that it represents” (122). She then says that in Ovid’s version:

The narrator privileges the body as the main differential trait between the representation and what it represents. Addressing Narcissus, he enjoins him to turn away from the disembodied image, the elusive simulacrum, the “unbodied hope,” “spem sine corpore,” that he loves. From this description, we could expect the body to play an essential role in Narcissus’s recognition of the mirror effect. (123)

John Brenkman, in his 1976 article “Narcissus in the Text,” shows that Narcissus begins to make a distinction between his own body and the image which is similar to him: “The recognition that he has been deceived, that the imago is not the corpus, occurs not because Narcissus recognizes the simple, simultaneous duplication of his own gestures in the pool, but because he recognizes a difference within duplication” (312). In the case of Narcissus, Brenkman further states that desire must be overcome to bring Narcissus from danger to security: “Narcissus needs only to realize that what he sees is the image of himself, an image he can separate (decedere) himself from” (323). In “Historia de amor” the mother’s desire to continue to be the son’s burden is what he must overcome. It is from her body, her image, and her desire that he must separate. Brenkman points out that this desire can only be overcome with complete destruction: “Narcissus experiences an eroticism in which desire is inexhaustible except in death” (323).

Half-way through the story (the second page of the four total) the narrator begins to see his co-existence with “ella” as detrimental to him. He acknowledges privately her exploitation: “Pero un día, cuando llevábamos andando ya algún tiempo, me anunció su decisión de no separarse jamás de mí. No pude levantar la cabeza para mirarla, por el peso, pero de todos modos comprendí la obstinación de su propósito. La resolución nacía, según me dijo, de su profundo amor por mí” (113). He continues to list his physical ailments and says, ever so sarcastically: “pero el privilegio de su amor era todo mío” (113).
The narrator recognizes that this relationship is no longer to his benefit. He sees that he does the work of carrying her, he cares for her (so that the strangers don’t pick her up while he rests), and his body is growing deformed because of it. He begins to reflect to himself: “<<No podrá continuar pegada a mí si yo no quiero>>”. This reflexive moment is a type of mental self-reflection akin to a visual self reflection (like the decisive moment earlier when Omar sees himself reflected in the window of Fichawuy). This narrator for the first time thinks of himself/sees himself outside of a reference to “ella.” He plots and tests his hypothesis:

<<Por más que quiera –continué diciéndome- podré desembarazarme un instante de ella para beber o para dormir, aunque llore, me riña o simule estar enferma: bastará que sacuda mis hombros para que caiga.>> Pero me equivocaba cuando intenté sacudirla de mis espaldas para depositarla un momento en el suelo, comprobé que no podía hacerlo. (113-14)

It is only in these few reflexive moments that we witness his thoughts. Those thoughts include the word desembarazarme or unimpregnate myself. It is noteworthy that he is never named in this story nor does he ever speak directly. It is as if he has no voice of his own. In fact, the only audible voice in the story is that of the mother. Evidently she, as Echo, was disembodied by the rejected demand for love from Narcissus: “With the sentence ‘Emoriar quam sit tibi copia nostril!', Narcissus rejects Echo who soon, out of grief, loses her body and becomes an echo” (Nouvet 112). Now, as Gayatri Spivak notes of Echo:

At first there is nothing but voice and desiccated body. Finally there is nothing but voice, “for they say that her bones were turned to stone.” Ovid uses a peculiar formulation: vox manet (M 152, 1. 399). Received wisdom has it that it is scripta that manent. It is writing that remains. But in this singular space, voice remains, the body becomes stone. (26)

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41 Also, “Although delusory, this belief in selfhood produces deadly effects. It provokes Narcissus’s refusal of Echo’s love, a refusal which triggers her disembodiment. Out of pain, Echo loses her body and becomes an echo, or rather, as the text puts it: ‘there is a sound, which lives in her’ ‘Sonus est, que vivit in illa;’ 1.401. Narcissus’s unresponsiveness disembodies Echo but does not kill her; at least not completely” (Nouvet 113).
The narrator purposely avoids the word body and yet makes it clear that “ella” speaks, thus making her a conscience, a subject, a character. She is perfectly complementary to his voiceless body. Spivak notes that in the original version, “Echo’s punishment turned into reward” (26). That might be said here also for “ella” because, as Spivak shows, the lithograph of Echo’s remains “has no identity proper to itself” (27).

The problem now is that although he realizes his condition, feels it unbearable and correctable, he is physically unable to outdo her. It is his failed attempt at matricide, a necessary drive of a child which enables him/her to separate from the mother and live independently of her, according to Julia Kristeva. He initiates but is unable to complete this separation in the form of committing matricide, so the mother becomes depressed. She is left with no alternative but to destroy her own child so that it may be reborn to a new life separate from her. Until then, she maintains control over him.

This mother has not yet reached the acceptance of her child’s need even after the son recounts:

Con la obcecación del naufrago, intenté romper con las manos la dura costra que nos unía. <<Es inútil –me dijo ella, justo encima de mis riñones-. Mi amor es eterno, indisoluble, indestructible. De mis senos mana esta corriente que al llegar a ti se solidifica y de mi útero fluye este metal que se adhiere a tus costillas.>> <<Ya no nos separaremos más>>, dijo, triunfal. (114)

What is this liquid flowing from her vital organs? Why is it yellow? What is the current spilling out of her breast which solidifies? And why does her uterus contain metal which adheres to his ribs? These apparently unusual liquids are the symbolic union between their bodies. Her vital liquids, breast milk and uterine blood, sustained him during her pregnancy. It is from those liquids he was formed and made solid himself. The metal is symbolic. Carl Jung showed that metals represent the desires and lusts of the flesh. Solid metals are believed to have powers of liberation, thus the flowing metal binds him yet to her uterus as a permanent ex-resident of it. Both properties are symbols of

42 Hélène Cixous speaks of the fluid maternal body from which proceed breast milk and a voice (the uterus) that equate with eternity. In this story, the fluid forms the child; all he lacks is his own voice to realize an independent immortal life/afterlife.
inversion; that is to say that solid and liquid metals are differing forms of the same substance similar to a mother and child. The color yellow is the color of Apollo, the sun god. The sun is also associated with the first-born male child who is a god as a son. Finally, this yellow is reminiscent of Omar’s “cabellos de oro” in the first story analyzed in Chapter One.

Claire Nouvet describes Narcissus’s death as one of liquefaction through the “dissolution of an imago” (126). She further makes the point that Narcissus’s body comes from a fluid mother of water:

When he rapes Liriope, Cephisus imprisons her in his sinous, curving embrace; in other words, the rape violently imposes a sinous shape on a shapeless water. This violent imposition of a shape on the shapeless produces a ‘child’ which can now be reassessed as the figure imposed on a liquefaction, a figure nonetheless endowed with a beauty which liens him to gods and statues. (126)

In this drama of the self, Nouvet sees the self as “Godlike” and also as “watery” (127). It both embodies that which has no body and returns to a bodiless state. She claims that the death of this figure of the self is actually the birth of the self. Therefore, the death must occur for the self to emerge.

Spivak criticizes Nouvet by pointing out that:

It is perhaps this that makes for the peculiar blind spot of the essay: the reading of Narcissus’s death a liquefaction (IR 125-28). It is indeed an “ambiguous” death, not because it is a liquefaction, but because it is a burning as well as a liquefaction. The two vehicles of the similes that describe Narcissus’s demise are “yellow wax” and “hoar frost.” (33)

Though she recognizes the ambiguity of the method of destruction, she focuses on Echo’s role in it since “vox manet.” Concerning the word *infans*, in regard to the role of speech,

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43 She quotes the original text here:

Spectat humi positus geminum, sua lumina, sidus
Et dignos Baccho, dignos et Apolline crines
Impubesque genas et eburnean colla decusque
Oris et in niveo mixtum candore rubores
Cunctaque miratur quibus est mirabilis ipse.  

[Ll. 420-24]

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she argues that this “feminine infancy of speech” (33) is outgrown when Narcissus comes to self-knowledge. Thus it is not Narcissus’s disaster but Echo’s reward in not ordering an evacuation from a flawed self: *a-phonie*. If *a-phonie* is Echo’s reward, then she must resist fixing and categorizing the words of Narcissus as authoritative. Her own words are limited and, thus, cannot fully convey her dilemma as a subaltern. Even so, she struggles in a productive dilemma to express herself. Despite the underlying struggle of Echo in the text which can never be fully expressed or resolved, it is what Spivak would term a “deconstructive embrace” or an attempt at that end. Still, despite the ability to express himself, Narcissus is on the road to certain death following self-knowledge.

The “famoso” tries to shake her off, and the more he fights against her, the more he tires himself. He comes to the conclusion that he is like a snail, “En efecto, igual que estos torpes caracoles que avanzan lentamente con su concha encima, cada vez que yo me movía, sin querer la trasladaba” (114). Again he elects an object representing their oneness that is not one. He literally carries her on his back as the snail does its shell. Figuratively the snail in nature represents a spiral - a holy icon representing the cycle of life: birth, death, and rebirth. Now, the narrator must figure out how he will remove his shell without killing himself. He must deduce a manner of ridding himself of her by separating from her.

From there he begins the ascension up the mountain. He gives a detailed description of the growing problem of the yellow liquid. He says it flows everywhere and makes parts of him stick to parts which do not correspond. One organ which is affected is his mouth:

Una mañana, desperté con la boca completamente cubierta por un tejido pegajoso, amarillento, de sólida textura, que no me permitía hablar; comprendí que al moverse, en sueños, había exhalado algunas de esas hebras cartilaginosas que se endurecieron sobre mis labios. Luché por romper la cáscara, pero fue imposible. (115)

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44 Spivak uses the novel *Fantasia* by the Algerian Assia Djebar as an example of *différance* and of *a-phonie*. *A-phonie* is a non-speech (non-verbal and non-written) which resists fixing and categorizing.
Like Ovid’s Echo, the narrator’s punishment is the removal of his voice. In this way, this male character is the antithesis of Echo: he is a body without a voice, and she is a voice without a body. However, neither is able to express himself/herself. Though Echo has a voice, she does not have the ability to originate language. She merely repeats the words of others. In reality, she alters the words of others in order to express herself as she sees fit. Therefore, rather than simple repetition, what she speaks gives a variation of meaning of the original utterance. That is to say that Echo twists words and thereby alters meaning. Echo lacks a voice of her own, yet she is only voice (with no body); she cannot speak original meaning, yet she creates meaning (through repetition of others). In “Historia de amor,” “ella” is our Echo who is the only speaker. The narrator is an unspeaking consciousness. From his realization that he has no power to speak, he continues to acquiesce to her desire.

Climbing up the mountain, the ascension is difficult, and the place is desolate. Even so, he is hunchbacked to the point that he can only see the ground. Finally he claims, “Mi fama, por otra parte, se ha extinguido: no creo que alguien me reconozca, con los huesos al aire, macilento y lleno de costras teguminosas” (115). He is being eaten alive with the weight she is putting on him in her refusal to let him go. If he cannot kill her first, he will be utterly destroyed.

The last paragraph reiterates his inability to commit matricide and her destruction of him:

No me preocupa el final del recorrido: la cima de la montaña está muy lejos y jamás conseguiré llegar allí. Además, ya estoy viejo, o por lo menos, lo parezco. Sé que moriré pronto y he tratado de advertírselo: cada vez estoy más flaco, mis pies ya no tienen piel, los huesos asoman por los agujeros del cuerpo. (115)

Like Moses, he has seen the Promised Land but knows he will not be among those who make it there. As he once received nourishment from his mother, she now feeds off him. He was too weak to follow through with his separation, and now he suffers physically for it. His incapacitation is about to be final: “Como no puedo hablar (ni comer) a causa de
These last words are directly quoted from the speaking “ella.” They echo the first words of “Historia de amor” in declaring her love for him. The difference lies in the fact that initially it was she who gave him life, now it is she who would take it: “Dijo que me amaba y me ofrendó su vida.”

The title of this short story, “Historia de amor,” is similar to that of a fable designed with a moral. It is didactic in nature and intends to demonstrate the suffering endured by those who do not sever maternal bonds themselves. In this story there is physical martyrdom experienced by the son who does not comply with his matricidal mandate. Thus, the mother takes his life herself.

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“Piel adentro” by Griselda López (Panama)

The Panamanian journalist Griselda López was born in Guararé, Provincia de Los Santos, República de Panamá. She earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism in Mexico City, and she has earned a variety of national and international distinctions as well as published two collections of short stories. López published “Piel adentro” in her native country in 1986 and again in 1995\(^45\) in a collection of nine short stories with the same title. Her two-page text combines an omniscient third-person narrative and a first-person recounting of an event which even includes the female narrator addressing the male character, Rafael, in second-person. This is a story in which a woman narrates her desire to do a very grand, but unnamed, act. She is afraid to perform and postpones the act. Because her narration alternates with an omniscient third-person account of her fears, it is as if these fears have a well-known, universal quality to them. Halfway through the

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\(^{45}\) The second edition of her book with the same title is dated 1995 under the Centro de Impresión Educativa del Ministerio de Educación.
narration, the protagonist speaks directly to Rafael telling him that she will allow any physical pleasures that he requires of her. Finally the narration culminates in Rafael’s doorbell ringing and the reader encounters only the silhouette of that which composes Rafael; but, in the final moments of the story, he sees nothing.

In the opening lines of the story, the female protagonist literally voices her hopes for living in a tomorrow beside a river of noises - the sounds of echoes, of laughter, and of cries. These are maternal sounds: the echo is an aural double of her own voice, the laughter is associated with the first vocalizations of infants (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 284), and cries from a child enlist the utility of a mother. The protagonist longs to escape the infinite multiplication of her solitude through having her own child. The second paragraph shifts to third person, and it reiterates that she lives only in the future tense. This third-person narrator describes her as a woman who longs for a life with emotions that go beyond just her own skin.

The female returns for two paragraphs in first-person voice. She again denies her dreams saying that today is not a good day, and then she somewhat accepts them but only as a possibility for tomorrow. This woman uses excuses to postpone her dreams. The climate, her ability to speak, her own body, none of these things are prepared for her to excel. At the close of the first page (at the beginning of the fourth paragraph), the woman names “Rafael.” She speaks to this second character in the second-person, though he does not respond to her; and, in fact, he does not appear to be present at all. She tells him what she could not say to his face: that she wants him to kiss her, to stir her body, to drink from her breast, to bite her lips until blood is drawn. She wants him to return to her. This paragraph not only adds detail to the presentation, but it also presents the beginning point of the complication: their relationship was an aborted physical one.

Beginning in the next paragraph the reader experiences the last of the protagonist’s own words. She appears to speak to both her son and to Rafael. She says she will find her son with Rafael. At this point she curses the house she wishes to leave behind. Following these words, there is a jump in the sequence of the text to an actual event from the past retold in third person.
The doorbell rings twice at Rafael’s house - first once and then twice. First one echo sounds and then two. Counting down from seven, a silhouette appears in his doorway which represents everything that is in Rafael. This strange scene ends with an ellipse leading to the next paragraph describing in third person Rafael’s experience that night. It says he: “Buscó en vano en la noche perdida… Sus ojos revolvieron con ansias la oscuridad, mas no encontró nada. Recorrió la calle, devoró el espacio que le fue devuelto íntegro, solo. / -No era nadie- se dijo Rafael. A lo mejor fue el viento. A lo mejor será mañana” (36). The text ends with the story’s only direct quote. These are the first and only words not originating from or concerning the protagonist.

While this story may appear to be a woman’s account of a lost love named Rafael, a man with whom she desperately wanted to conceive a child and maintain a bond, this is actually a mysterious account of a woman’s quest for and realization of the creation of Rafael: he is double, as he is actually her son. Though the protagonist is a sort of goddess-mother, she is unlike the Hindu mother goddess Kali seen earlier who creates and then destroys her devotees in order that they be both born physically and reborn spiritually. Instead this protagonist is the double of her creation. This woman finds herself to be the voice and her son the body for the entity that they together comprise. She is physically replaced by her son, and it is she who dies in the process of his self recognition. She is Echo, and he is Narcissus.

To unfold the vision of Echo and Narcissus in López’s two-page text, one must first address the rich symbols abounding therein. The narrator begins the story with the protagonist’s words. She wants to find herself together with the dawn, the birds, and a river of sounds:

“Mañana me encontraré realmente junto al alba, junto a los pájaros, junto a un río de sonoridades, de ecos, de risas. Sí. Me encontraré junto al río humano, el río de la vida, ese de las risas y de los llantos. No el del silencio; no el de la soledad, no el de mi pensamiento que rebota dentro de mi cráneo, que vibra, que hace ecos, que se multiplica infinita, indefinidamente.” (35)
To begin, the dawn is “infinite potentiality” (Chevalier 275). It is a time of day which represents both an awakening and an unending youthfulness of one who sees the generations come and go while remaining joyful and steadfast. At dawn she is together with the birds and the river. The birds are well known as heavenly messengers traveling between the two worlds while the river is the substance of life. Like blood, water is the life force which together with the earth makes the *materia prima* of life. Water connotes fertility and creativity as well as length and abundance of life. If this is where the protagonist wills herself to be, it is because she wishes to (pro)create. In this act of creation, she returns to a youthful state through her creation and experiences the pleasure of creation/duplication. This is further proven to be an act of procreation when the river is described in more detail.

The river the protagonist dreams of is one of sounds. Noise in general is evidence of life, but it is also reminiscent of the Biblical power of God made manifest in creation. For example, the Biblical account of the Word found in the gospel of John states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14 KJV). Of course, the God of the Bible spoke the world and its contents into existence. Specifically, God spoke his own son into existence (John 1). God, like the protagonist, uses language as an initiatory stage in the creative process. However, this protagonist is no ordinary

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46 According to Adrienne Rich:

The words for mother and mud (earth, slime, the *matter* of which the planet is composed, the dust or clay of which “man” is built) are extremely close in many languages: *mutter, madre, mater, material, moeder*. The name “Mother Earth” still has currency, although, significantly, in our time, it has acquired a quaint, archaic, sentimental ring.

In winter, vegetation retreats back into the earth-womb; and in death the human body, too, returns into that womb, to await rebirth.” (108)

This reference in López’s text clearly delineates the protagonist’s role as mother.

47 According to the Genesis story of the Bible, God’s voicing his wishes resulted in creation. Therefore, the voice contains the power of creation, and speech is a creative act. Women without a voice, then, are condemned to an existence of infertility and childlessness.

48 The personified voice of God was likened to the wind. It “is held to be the primary Element by virtue of its connexion with the creative breath or exhalation” (Cirlot 373). The wind and its association to acts of creation/destruction are found in the word *Huracán* (wrath of God). Further, the wind was called Mariah by Native Americans. Mariah is etymologically linked to the name Maria and hence to the mother goddess. In popular culture, the Broadway and movie musical with Alan Jay Lerner’s lyrics to the song “They call
mother; this is Echo. Ovid’s narrative shows that because of her unreciprocated love, Echo has been reduced to voiceless stone. Hers is a quiet world, because she is unable to initiate sound. Therefore, she longs for a world of sound, life, and fertility which can only be fulfilled in Narcissus.

The absence of speech is such a crucial lack for this protagonist that, in fact, many of her thoughts and actions are written in the text through the perspective of a third person omniscient narrator: “Vivió arracimada junto al miedo, arrebujándose en el hueco de su propio corazón” (35). She does not have her own voice, and, in fact, she does not have her own writing either. Since Plato’s time, speech has always been favored over writing. Because of the transparency that exists between an idea and its expression through the spoken word, speech was considered to be a more accurate form of communication.\(^{49}\) By its very nature, writing itself demonstrates an absence as the body is not present during the discursive exchange, but it depends on an instrument to convey thought.

Of course, this a written text, but within it the distinction between the direct words of the protagonist (discernible with quotation marks) and the words of the narrator on behalf of the protagonist is notable. The writing of her thoughts and actions by an outside entity further alienates the protagonist as it exhibits the utter inability to express herself through language of any type. She can neither express herself through speech nor in writing, and, most importantly, this lack impedes her procreative drive. Echo’s desire is first for the creative power of speech,\(^{50}\) which leads to procreative power with Narcissus.

“In Narcissus in the Text,” John Brenkman explains Echo’s desire for Narcissus as sexual. He further purports that this unfulfilled desire is the cause of her ruin and his search for another with whom to remain:

\(^{49}\) See Jacques Derrida’s work (including *Of Grammatology*) for a more detailed explanation of *différence*.
\(^{50}\) The creative power of speech is evident in the Biblical account of creation. When God spoke, the world was. See Genesis 1:3, 6, 11, 14-15, 20, 24, 26, 30. See also the Biblical explanation of Jesus the human, the Christ as the personification of the “Word” in John 1:1-14. Thus, creative power through oral expression makes the speaker a god or co-creator with god.
When Echo first sees Narcissus, he has become separated from his hunting companions. Following him through the woods and answering his cries with full or partial echoes, she emerges and tries to embrace him. Her intention is openly sexual: she cries “coeamus” (let us meet, let us come together, let us copulate), tries to throw her arms around Narcissus’ neck, and as he flees replies to his rebuke with the words “sit tibi copia nostril!” (let my abundance be yours). … Finally she wastes away until only her voice “lives in her” -- which is to say that her (sexual) body dies -- and her remains turn to stone. Then Narcissus, again alone in the woods, comes upon a clear pool where he falls in love with his reflected image. (296)

Brenkman explains that in Ovid’s version, it is Echo’s insatiable desire for Narcissus that is the cause of her bodily demise. His rejection of her is what pushes her to that end. Brenkman reiterates that: “as the stories of Echo and Narcissus illustrate, when desire is neither reciprocated nor suppressed, death intervenes. By suspending Echo’s desire, putting its aim out of reach, Narcissus pushes her toward death” (298). Moreover, Brenkman links Narcissus’s rejection of Echo to her loss of both speech and body so that: the full shape of his crime now becomes clear. He at once interrupts the reciprocal circuit that would fulfill desire and breaks the channel of communication that supports that reciprocity – namely, the dialogue exchanged by two integral subjects. He refuses all communication, sexual and verbal, with another. For Echo, the consequence of that refusal is death.

The narrative precludes any doubt concerning how Narcissus’s act, the death of Echo’s body, and the encounter at the pool are related. As soon as the separation of Echo’s voice from her dead and transformed body has been narrated, we are told of a youth whom Narcissus has also spurned. (304)

She seeks to procreate with him, and, because he is self-absorbed, this cannot transpire. In the end, Echo’s voice is first removed, and thereby her sexual body is also
removed. In “An Impossible Response: The Disaster of Narcissus,” Claire Nouvet points out that:

Narcissus’s unresponsiveness disembodies Echo but does not kill her: at least not completely. The failure to respond provokes the death of the body, a death that Echo nevertheless survives as the “sonus” which goes on living after the body has evaporated. To all appearances, Ovid’s text is here indulging in the rather classical representation of the voice as both live and unattached to the body. However, once again, it suggests another reading which contradicts the narrative description. With Echo’s disembodiment it comes dangerously close to recognizing what must remain unrecognized if the narrative is to maintain the figure of a subject. By turning Echo into an echo, it indeed demonstrates that a subject can become a mere echoing “sound”, that is, no subject at all. (113)

Ovid’s text takes the perspective of Narcissus’s rejection of Echo as a purposeful act, but this text takes the perspective of a son’s attempt at what Julia Kristeva calls matricide: “For man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non of our individuation” (Black Sun 27-28). Therefore, the necessary separation of a child from his mother is evident in the short story. Despite there being a reversal in the stages of separation found in the drama of Narcissus and this text, the effect on the female is clear: destruction. Echo is not Narcissus’s mother, but she does serve a maternal relation in reference to him. Their separation is also one in the process leading toward his self-knowledge and his individuation. In this story, the first separation for the female protagonist from her son results in the loss of her voice, and the final push for separation will result in the loss of her body as well. The matricidal drive that pushes toward the extinction of the mother on the part of the son is constant despite varying hierarchical stages. Brenkman defines the hierarchy in the text of Narcissus as one: that is familiar in the history of Western thought: voice-consciousness (vox)/body (corpus)/reflected image (umbra or imago). Sexuality belongs to the body, and its non-satisfaction is tied to death. The unity voice-
consciousness, however, possesses a life that is independent of the body, sexuality, and death. That is why Echo’s feeling for Narcissus is pity [and] not desire after the death of her body. (308)

In this text, the voice representing the creative force is absent, and the body, a mere instrument of this power, is rejected, useless, and demises alone. The death of Echo’s body, the mother’s body, is critical to the Narcissus’s self-recognition, the son’s self-recognition. This self-recognition not only completes the separation of mother and child: “This nondisjunctive union of vox and imago collapses the hierarchy vox/corpus/imago” (Brenkman 321).

Matricide is then part of the natural progression of a child to leave his mother first physically at birth and finally at a “rebirth” that allows him to exist independently of his mother. A child must necessarily separate from his mother so that he may find happiness in the love of another who is outside of and independent from the mother. Therefore, Narcissus’s initial act of rejection of Echo is portrayed as his lack of recognition of her. Regardless, this forces her to distance herself from him, and it leaves Narcissus to admire his would-be lover in the reflecting pool. This is symbolic of his coming to self-knowledge: rejection of the mother and internalizations of her allow his rebirth into independence. This separation of Narcissus and Echo, the symbols of the surrounding sounds, and the narrative technique interspersing direct quotes from the protagonist and the words of an omniscient narrator present the first clear evidence that this is a variant of the Echo/Narcissus story – told from the perspective of Echo.

To further illustrate that this female character shares the role of Ovid’s Echo from a maternal perspective which is latently libidinal, one notes that the sexual desire for Narcissus and only him is found in a mother’s love for her child. In “The Narcissistic Woman,” Sarah Kofman confirms that: “if such a woman loves to be loved, she loves only herself, is sufficient in herself, and so leaves her lover unsatisfied. She always keeps “an enigmatic reserve,” gives herself without abandoning herself, and when she gives herself, “the fruits of her giving abide in her bosom” (38). Thus a mother takes true
pleasure in the other which is not an other: she fulfills herself in her child.\textsuperscript{51} Clearly Echo is not Narcissus, she is a separated being from him; however, his dilemma is that of a son’s when he reaches the pivotal moment of matricide and begins the harsh rejection of the mother figure: there is blatant rejection which leads to destruction. Unfortunately, Narcissus’s destruction was in part due to his own selfish exclusion of persons outside of himself whereas a son’s destruction comes as a result of his separation from his own mother who is a part of him. Following this comparison, the remainder of the details is revealed through a careful study of other symbols in the text.

The next symbol employed by the author comes through the words of the omniscient narrator who says the protagonist wants to escape the four walls for a free space. In an effort to free herself, the symbol of choice is that of skin:

\begin{quote}
No podía desprenderse de esa capa herrumbrosa que la protegía, que la separaba del mundo vivo, para obligarla a replegarse a su propia, sola, única, indivisible, nunca compartida vida. Muchas veces había querido llegar más allá de su piel, desembarazarse de ella, quedarse en la carne viva para correr hacia la vida mostrando que su cuerpo también estaba lleno de nervios, de músculos… anegado de sangre. (35)
\end{quote}

Skins have been used in so-called primitive cultures through the ages. A person wearing an animal’s skin is said to take on the admirable characteristics of that animal. The pre-Columbian cultures of Mexico, for example, admired the jaguar and wore its skin in ceremonial dances. Even today American sports teams don an animal likeness and rally around its abilities. The protagonist of the text, however, reverses such practices by wishing to rid herself of her own skin. In this case, it is her skin which identifies her as a limited, encaged woman lacking the power of creation. She would then prefer to shed her skin and take on a new likeness without limitations. She describes her skin as a rusty cape that forces her to fall back to her solitary life. In \textit{Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico}, Jean Franco examines the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo’s work which often depicts women or herself with mutilated bodies or exposed organs and blood

\textsuperscript{51} In “Questioning the Maternal Voice.” \textit{Genders} 3 (1988): 82-91, Claire Kahane quotes the “radical alterity within the mother” studied by feminist psychoanalysts.
in otherwise peaceful settings: “Frida’s paintings on the other hand shock because they reveal the painter’s ‘inner’ life not as spirit but as bodily organs. She often turns the body inside out, placing the heart and the organs on the outside. Woman’s inner life is on display because her inner life is her inner body” (106-07). Having made this observation in the visual work of a Mexican artist, it is fitting to say that, like Kahlo, López attempts, in her written work, to expose the inner life of her protagonist. However, the protagonist makes an interesting choice of words: “Muchas veces había querido llegar más allá de su piel, desembarazarse de ella” (35). In other words, many times she had wanted to go beyond her skin, to “get rid of it.” Desembarazar means to get rid of, but in Hispanic America, it can also mean “to give birth to.” This signifies her desire to make a double of herself through giving birth to her own flesh - a child. According to this description, the protagonist longs to walk without any skin and show that she has gone beyond simple skin and is made of nerves and muscles and inundated with blood. This is precisely what she does in the final episode of this narrative. The literal nature of the scene is explained through the use of symbols. This desire for wholeness and youth can be manifested only through the birth of a child.

When the following paragraph returns as the words of the protagonist, she says:

“No, hoy no. No es un buen día. El sol no ha salido, el cielo está lleno de nubes y el hollín de las chimeneas está quieto en el aire. No estoy lista. No me saldrán las palabras. Sé que no podré decir nada, que no podré expresar nada. Tendré el rostro duro, los músculos tensos y las palabras llegarán hasta mi boca y regresarán nuevamente a mi cerebro, se harán un ovillo … me enredaré toda … no me comprenderán….” (35)

The entire paragraph is replete with symbols of creation/procreation. The protagonist first denies the currency of her ability as a creator, because, as later learned, her voice fails her. She also blames the day as being less than ideal: the sun has not yet come out, the sky is full of clouds, and soot is in the air. The sun is the physical sign of the first-born son. This is the derivative of the word Pharaoh who is the son of God on earth to rule God’s children. The sun as a symbol of this divine authority is found in Asian cultures as well and is today incorporated into the Japanese flag, for instance. The sun in
the text is her future son. This religious son/consort is the prototype of the hero in mythology (Rabuzzi 32). In fact, in *Motherself: A Mythic Analysis of Motherhood*, Rabuzzi shows that in religious forerunners:

The worship accorded [to] this divine child was originally that directed to the Mother Goddess. The cases of Ishtar, Astarte, and Cybele, all of whose son-consorts were originally of secondary importance, are illustrative. With time, however, in each pairing, the child (originally of either sex as suggested by numerous Sumerian female Marduks) ceases to be merely the child or sacrificial consort. Instead he becomes more and more venerated in his own right. Christianity epitomizes this process whereby the Divine Child eventually eclipses his own mother. (32-33)

Furthermore, the son is surrounded by the symbolism of the clouds and the soot. The clouds mark indecision or uncertainty undoubtedly about this son’s ability to emerge. Superstition holds that a downpour of soot marks an impending death; therefore, soot in the air threatens death, if not actually delivering it. The idea of this protagonist seeing soot in the air shows that someone will die. However, it is not that the son will die, but that she, without a double (a child), dies. Having fulfilled her maternal function, she is left without further use and dies.

In the fourth paragraph, the direct words of the protagonist name the second character: Rafael. She gives him a promise not unlike the one that Naomi makes to Ruth in the Bible. According to the book of Ruth, Ruth bids her last remaining daughter-in-law to return to her people after the death of all the sons in the family. Naomi clings to her mother-in-law, Ruth, and tells her: “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me” (Ruth 1:16-17 NASB). Just as Naomi promises Ruth, the protagonist promises Rafael she’ll go with him wherever he wants to go, thus removing the possibility of separation in anticipation of the eternal future together:

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“Te diré: Me voy contigo cuando quieras, como quieras, donde quieras. No te hará esperar más. Te amaré como tantas veces me lo pediste, como tanto me suplicaste. Estaré dispuesta a hacerte feliz. Dejaré que me beses, que hurgues mi cuerpo, que bebas de mis senos, que me muerdes los labios hasta la sangre, hasta que no sienta esta angustia que me invade, hasta no darme cuenta que pude perderte… Rafael, devuélveme tu risa, tu ternura, que no supe comprender que nunca me enseñaron a comprender. Nunca supe que la sencillez, que la vida, que la inmensidad estaba en tu palabra.” (35-36)

The beginning of the passage compares well with the actual words from Ruth. Because it is known that she addresses Rafael, a woman addressing a man, the protagonist appears to address a lost love until she describes their anticipated physical relationship. From this point it becomes more difficult to define the relationship.

Rafael’s kissing her, poking her body, drinking from her breasts, and biting her lips until blood comes may make her forget the invading anguish, but it will also mean she has neither a son nor a lover but a son/lover. Further complicating the confusion about Rafael’s identity in relation to the protagonist, she directly addresses both him and her son in the next paragraph:

“Y a ti te encontraré mañana, hijo de mis entrañas, hijo de mi presentimiento, hijo de mi sangre. Lo encontraré contigo, Rafael. Junto a tu costado. Lo encontraremos juntos. Te hundirás en mí buscando la blandura de mi cuerpo y vertirás en él la vida. Lo encontraré contigo, Rafael… lo encontraremos juntos.” (36)

The two together will find her son. Rafael will poke in her body and spill out life in it. Clearly, this is a procreative act between lovers. Next, the protagonist describes her aching desire to shed her own body. She likens it to wanting to walk out of a house and leave behind the terrible rooms and silence therein. Once she leaves, she will lock the door behind her and enclose “Las monedas, las enmohecidas monedas, más mohosas que mi cuerpo, más llenas de mi lenta, pegajosa tristumbre. Quedarán aquí encerradas, condenadas a no salir nunca, a asfixiarse en su propia tenebrosa asfixia” (36).
The house is her body. Since no person can shed his body, he can only create a double: a child who can provide eternal youth to his parent. This is a new body made from the former. The coins are a reminder of the mother goddess symbolism. Money takes its name from Rome’s Great Mother, Juno Moneta (Juno the Admonisher), whose capitoline temple included the Roman mint. Silver and gold coins manufactured there were valuable not only by reason of their precious metal but also by the blessing of the Goddess herself (Walker 667). Therefore, the coins are the internal power and identity of the mother goddess. Her coins are moist, as is the female body. She locks the coins also in the house she abandons, because her child will not be equal to her in masculine form. After proclaiming this desire, she abruptly ends with the sentence she declares for the coins: they will stay here enclosed, condemned never to leave again, to asphyxiate on their own dark asphyxia.

The narrator returns to tell of the only actual event in the text. It is an episode told in the past tense but referring to or explaining the desires of the protagonist. Twice the doorbell rings at Rafael’s house. It rings once at first and then twice followed by one echo and then two. This has double meaning. Firstly, the one ring is the lone mother and the two rings are the mother and child. Secondly, the ring and the echoes show the mother’s utter inability to create. She may only echo the first ring of her beloved Narcissus.

Next, there is a countdown from seven-six-five-four-three-two and finally one as steps to the door which are heard. This is sound with no visible bodily form. The number seven in connection with a child is a superstitious one, as it is believed that the seventh child - a son in particular – was endowed with supernatural abilities such as that of healing. These seven steps lead to a birth witnessed by unspecified others:

Se escucharon venir siete-seis-cinco-cuatro-tres-dos pasos, hasta acercarse a uno. Y una silueta larga llenó la abierta puerta, llenó la puerta abierta con todo lo que había en Rafael; con el esqueleto de Rafael, con

52 The entry goes on to say, “The attendant spirit of Juno Moneta was the erotic Cupid, corresponding to the Greek’s Eros, who was both child and companion of Aphrodite” (Walker 667). This is one more reference to the idea of son/consort.
los nervios de Rafael, con los músculos de Rafael, con sus minúsculas gotas de sangre, con toda la piel de Rafael. (36)
The silhouette is, in fact, Rafael who passes through the door to life. This is a vaginal entrance into the physical world in which one requires a skeleton, nerves, muscles, blood, and skin. These items are listed from the interior or foundational level to the exterior. The skeleton is the personification of the death of the mother, and the building upon that death of another life is the birth of a child. Paul Olsen says about the physical separation of mother and son:

All these separations between mother and son have this in common: it is like the moment of truth in a bullring where the abyss of mortality opens wide and one is aware that time is coming to an end. I can die. Which is really contained in that at times overwhelming sense that I, mother, am old now, am useless now, and the world is spinning away from me, and it can get along without me. I am going to die. (162)

Strangely, this episode was willed in the words of the protagonist herself earlier in the text. It was she who “Muchas veces había querido llegar más allá de su piel, desembarazarse de ella, quedarse en la carne viva para correr hacia la vida mostrando que su cuerpo también estaba lleno de nervios, de músculos… anegado de sangre” (35). Thus, she fullfills her own desire even though it carries her closer to her own physical death.

For the first time, the narrator turns his attention to Rafael, the Narcissus of the text. It says, “Buscó en vano en la noche perdida... Sus ojos revolvieron con ansias la oscuridad, mas no encontró nada. Recorrió la calle, devoró el espacio que le fue devuelto íntegro, solo” (36).

The mother’s ultimate destruction as a direct result of Rafael’s matricide is complete as is her maternal function. She is left without him – without her body, just as Echo was left bodiless when Narcissus failed to copulate with her. This protagonist emerges, from behind the veil of a mythical story to tell of her grief and loss here. She is the mother who speaks for the first time and tells her side of the drama.
Another such mother is Jocasta, the mother of Oedipus who, in the stories in Chapter Three, for the first time occupies a central role in the tale of Oedipus and begins to narrate her own version of the well-known story.
CHAPTER 3
JOCASTA, MOTHER OF OEDIPUS

The present chapter examines the role of Jocasta or, as the poet Homer calls her, Epicasta. Like the maternal figures from the previous two chapters, Kali and Echo, this actual mother is like them in that she reveals her perspective in these previously male centered stories. The problematic issues with this female figure begin with her name. In fact, she is known by multiple variants including: Epicasta, Epicaste, Iocasta, Iokaste, Jocasta, Jocaste, and in Spanish Yocasta and Yokasta. This is a very telling and provocative fact, because, as theorists including Michel Foucault point out, a name often reveals the character’s function within the work. Io means moon; Jocasta (Iocasta) means “Shining-moon” and is “another mythic combination of the Moon-goddess and her sacred king” (Walker 478). In this case, the name reveals the character’s multifaceted identity and development in regard to the typically more central character of Oedipus to whom she is both mother and wife.

The origin of this tale of familial dysfunction is a Greek myth. As with most myths, there are several versions; two remain from Homer and one from Sophocles. The most widely known and accepted version is the later one from Sophocles. This myth presents a story in which Laius returns from exile to fulfill his birthright and become king of Thebes. Apollo warned him of a curse about which he consulted an oracle at Delphi who warned that he would have a son and would die at his hands. Laius attempted to thwart the prophecy of the oracle and ordered that a servant drive a spike through the ankles of the son born to him and his wife, Jocasta, and that the child be left on the

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53 Oedipus’s story is recorded by Homer in both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad.*
mountain. Instead, the servant pitied the baby and gave him to a shepherd. Thus, the son was spared, given to be raised by the king of Corinth, named Oedipus meaning “swellfoot,” and the prophecy was set into motion (Morford 297-98).

After being raised in Corinth, Oedipus was told that he was not the king’s natural son, so he went to the oracle at Delphi who warned him to avoid his homeland. The oracle claimed that Oedipus was to murder his father and marry his mother. This warning was mistakenly interpreted by Oedipus to mean that he must avoid Corinth and not Thebes, his true homeland. Because of this, Oedipus headed to Thebes on the road from Delphi where he met a pair of men who greeted him violently, and he killed them. One of the men was a herald; the second was his biological father, King Laius.

Once he arrived in Thebes, Oedipus found a city in distress: Hera, the sister and wife of Zeus, had sent a monster named Sphinx, meaning “strangler.” Hera sent the Sphinx to punish Thebes for the immoral acts of its king, Laius who fathered Oedipus. The Sphinx ruled as a tyrant and used a riddle given her by the muses to test her subjects: “What is it that has one name that is four-footed, two-footed, and three-footed?” (Morford 298). Those unable to answer the riddle were killed, but Oedipus was able to answer it: man. Upon hearing this, the Sphinx threw herself off the acropolis and left Oedipus to become king and marry the widowed queen, Jocasta, his mother, and the prophecy was therein fulfilled.

As noted earlier in Chapter Two, the poet Homer again has a slightly different account of this Greek tale. Homer does not credit Jocasta with being the mother of Oedipus’s children, and other details are changed. However, the most significant points of the story remain: Oedipus kills his father and has an incestuous marriage with his mother.

Beyond simply being a Greek myth of failed family fortunes, the fame of this story emerges in the early twentieth century with the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and thereafter Carl Jung. In 1910, Freud’s interpretation of this myth was published, but both Sophocles and even Ovid via Jocasta herself say: “Many men have in

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54 This is one of several explanations for why the Sphinx came to Thebes. In each case, however, she did kill those unable to correctly answer the riddle she posed.
dreams lain with their mothers” (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 981). Hence, men throughout the ages recognize in themselves a desire to marry their mothers and eliminate their fathers as an obstacle to that goal. Freud’s examination of this myth centered, as did all the others before him, on the character development of the son within this incestuous context. His basic premise is that this particular myth explains the curse on all men and the formation of the patriarchy at large. Hence it is the foundation of human societal organization resulting in the deification of the father figure that is seen in predominant religions of the world today.

Today there remains a story which favors the position of a male character who acts on his desire and a woman who is a passive participant in his perverse drama. The stories gathered in the current chapter are most notable in that they reverse the position of the woman bringing her to the forefront of the drama. This, in turn, reduces the role of the men – especially Oedipus – to that of a player in a drama orchestrated by her. Previously, Oedipus is shown to be unaware of the identity of his mother who he later marries before discovering her relation to him. In these stories, Jocasta not only is aware of the identity of her son but also continues to desire him despite or even because of it.

In each of these stories, we see that the son attempts to separate himself from his mother in what Julia Kristeva calls a child’s matricidal mandate (*Black Sun*). However, the mother refuses to accept her son’s attempts to exist independently of her, and she is highly critical of the women with whom he keeps romantic company. Thus, it is clear that Jocasta is the one who desires to maintain an exclusive, erotic relationship with her son. She refuses to accept his departure from her world. Even as Jocasta is incapable of sustaining her dream, she makes every effort to prolong the inevitable and believe that her Oedipus only has eyes for her.
“Yokasta” by Liliana Heker (Argentina)

“Yokasta” is a story belonging to a recompilation of all this Argentine author’s short stories under the title *Los bordes de lo real* (1991). Her publications of short stories began in 1966 when she was yet a teen. Today she has worked in a variety of fields and has written stories, novels, and one book of essays. This Jewish-Argentine writer’s literary career spanned the Guerra Sucia and countless military atrocities. David Foster says of literary works of the period and place:

> The enormous preoccupation in Argentina with questioning and deconstructing the patriarchy, whose violent hand was so clearly evident in recent military tyrannies, has led to important contributions in feminist and, indeed queer writing, as it has also led to the need to give representation to multiple other social subalternities, with the result that writing by Jewish authors has never been more intense in that country. (37)

Still, in a 2000 interview with Liliana Heker, María Claudia André asked if she considered her writing feminist. The author would not answer affirmatively despite multiple questions attempting to elicit just such an declaration. Again in 2001, Walter Cassara asked her in an interview if she believed there was something like an “escritura femenina.” She responded: “No, creo que hay mujeres que escriben y hombres que escriben. Nadie sustrae de su propio sexo para escribir, como no se sustrae de su propia historia, de su propio lenguaje y de su propio carácter” (no pagination). This question is most likely posed, in part, to clarify Heker’s response to the body of work that has built up around her writings in which academics continue to categorize her according to being a female writer, of Jewish descent, Hispanic from the River Plate, or a literary product of the 1960s. However, Heker eludes self-definition and simply allows others to consider her work on its own merit. She does concede that her characters have a knack for finding disaster. She reveals the catalyst, “En muchos de mis cuentos algún episodio de la
Indeed, the title of her short story “Yokasta” conjures the mother of Oedipus herself. Feminists might be tempted to portray this story as a subverted version of the male-centered story with an alternative ending. Heker, not admitting entirely to being a feminist, has chosen not to do that. Instead she does something even more valuable than subvert the existing story: she allows the woman to speak for herself and provides readers with another point of view from which to consider the events. The only thing subverted is the role of the silent woman, for this is the story of Oedipus told from his mother’s point of view. Studies of the Oedipal complex, beginning with Freud, center on the development of the child as a speaking being with desires and drives of his own which lead him into selfhood as a well-adjusted adult. In other words, this complex is a stage of child development in which, naturally, the mother is of secondary importance to the child. She is objectified and serves only as an enabler for the advancement of her offspring.

In this story, Heker creates a world in which the traditionally objectified Yokasta, the mother of Oedipus, speaks. She is humanized by her emotions, needs, and fears; her own desires are seen for the first time. Heker has made the usual unusual by showcasing the mother’s development as the child limits her involvement in his life. This short story’s title places Yokasta (Jocasta), the mother of Oedipus, immediately in the most prominent role, thus evoking a popular myth while simultaneously subverting it in order to give the previously silent mother a voice in the drama. In this account, Yokasta’s son is actually named Daniel, but his nickname is Edipo (Oedipus). The story begins with the mother’s admission that it is a silly and passing fancy of her son’s that he cling to her – so much so that she encourages him to play with a girl his own age, Graciela. Eventually, Daniel grows to prefer Graciela over his mother. This shift prompts the mother to hate her new rival; and concurrently in the text, there is an unannounced shift in the voice of the narrator mid-paragraph. Now, Daniel speaks and notifies his mother that Graciela offers him what she cannot: a mature, sexual partnership. Upon hearing this declaration, the mother’s denial and melancholia are pervasive. She recognizes that her utility to him
is gone, and though she wants nothing but his happiness, she fails to see Graciela as capable of facilitating that. The mother simply dreams of a return to the very activities of which she once tired and virtually dreaded: playing horsy and giving piggy-back rides and the like.

This study examines the development of the mother from her own point of view found in “Yokasta.” Erica Frouman-Smith notes Heker’s tendency toward the female Bildungsroman and divides this genre into two types:

In discussing the contemporary female Bildungsroman, critics delineate two broad paradigms. The first, the apprenticeship novel, is most similar to the classical model in that development into adulthood is presented in chronological and linear fashion and shows the protagonist moving out into the world (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 11). Whether or not closure is possible is still, according to critics, a matter of debate. The second paradigm, the awakening, represents a dramatic contrast to the first. Its structure and concerns aptly reflect the contemporary woman’s inability to progress in a fashion similar to that of her male counterpart. Her “awakening to limitations” (Rosowski 49) is manifested in this novel’s more circular or episodic structure. As a result of experiencing one or more epiphanies, the protagonist moves inward toward self-recognition and, therefore, toward a rejection of the values of a male-dominant culture (121-22).

Heker clearly then uses “Yokasta” as the mother’s awakening to the gradual separation of her son from her in his quest toward individuation. She sees her impending death through matricide at his hands, and, in this case, she rejects the notion entirely.

In addition to reversing the point of view of the content, the style with which Heker creates this voice is most noteworthy. In terms of Heker’s style in providing a voice for the maternal figure, one remembers Julia Kristeva’s 1977 essay, “Stabat Mater.” Clearly the ground-breaking technique employed in Kristeva’s essay was that,

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55 See Kristeva’s “Death-Bearing Mother” in Black Sun.
aside from the content, she used parallel texts of both theoretical and actual voices of the weeping mother of Jesus as He was crucified. The maternal voice is full of emotion and humanity. The two voices are present; they co-exist for us in undeniable ink and are at times even united. Like Kristeva, Heker changes voices from that of the son to that of the mother and back without notice. The author switches from second-person address to third-person narration and at times includes an omniscient point of view. She marks the fragmentation of the mother-son this way.

The story opens with Yokasta’s acknowledgment of an unresolved emotional conflict that she knows one day will seem silly to her. It is a story about a mother who affectionately plays with her son. He is a son like any other who has great expectations of his mother, and it is she who must deny his relentless demands for attention, “Como si los otros no pidieran un ratito más mamá, y una qué va a tener el coraje de echarlos con esos ojitos que lo están esperando todo de una. No, ya basta, Daniel; es muy tarde” (112). The mother leads him to play with Graciela, a girl with whom he eventually falls in love. Initially the mother cannot free herself from her son’s presence or from his gaze, yet later in the story it is the mother who feels abandoned by her own child who once insistently pursued her. She recognizes her impending aging and death now that this phase of life has come to a close.

As Michel Foucault and others point out, the names of the characters often reveal their functions in the text. The protagonist calls her son Daniel. He is the first character named as he plays a central role in the argument. His namesake is the Biblical prophet who warned King Nebuchadnezzar of the impending doom of his kingdom for the king could not read the ‘writing on the wall.’ This expression has come to symbolize any person who ignores an obvious consequence. Daniel is, after all, a boy who will prophesy his own mother’s demise as he moves away from her. It is interesting that not only the boy is named, but the role of the mother is recognized as having great significance as well. Though the title earlier foreshadows the argument, the mother is

Mary by Marina Warner to show the history of the cult of the Virgin while questioning society’s understanding of the female body and presenting a research program not yet fully explored. Moi says that, “today, due to the demise of the cult of the Virgin, and of religion in general, we are left without a satisfactory discourse on motherhood” (The Kristeva Reader 160).
named on the second of this six-page story. She has the role of Yokasta, but she is named Nora.

The Nora in “Yokasta” has a long genealogy. The nineteenth-century Norwegian author Henrik Ibsen wrote a play in 1849 entitled *A Doll’s House*. This is the story of Nora. She is an assertive woman who seduces Torvald in exchange for his money. They have a tumultuous marriage of secrets and power struggles, and Torvald tries to rid himself of her. Nora experiences an epiphany which leads her to abandon him and the children in favor of an independent life. She comes to realize that she cannot force him to love her and can only control her own actions.

In the early twentieth century, when Sigmund Freud produced many case studies in psychoanalysis, he had one patient he named “Dora.” He labeled her as hysterical because of her attraction to her father’s mistress. Feminists have discounted this work, arguing against Freud’s methodology and claiming he projected his own feelings onto his patient without giving her the benefit of speaking for herself. In defiance of this case study, Kim Morrissey produced a human, emotional Dora in her work *Dora: A Case of Hysteria*. Departing from the single voice of Freud, she allows Dora to tell her story. Additionally, Hélène Cixous’ 1976 play *Portrait de Dora* also gives credibility to Dora over Freud while exploring issues of language. In fact, Lizbeth Goodmen says of the forerunners to these two feminist works: “Acknowledging a distance between Ibsen and Freud gave Morrissey fuel for comic commentary; Morrissey’s Freud calls Dora ‘Nora’ in repeated ‘Freudian slips’” (Goodman, no pagination). This Nora in “Yokasta,” then, is Heker’s version of allowing her protagonist to have a voice in the separation process.

The third character to be named is Graciela. Her name is the title of the 1849 novel *Graziella* by Frenchman Alphonse de Lamartine. In this story, an upper-class Frenchman goes to Italy and falls in love with a fisherman’s daughter because of her great beauty and charm. The Graciela of “Yokasta” also plays the role of seductress of a man who, by his mother’s account, is of higher stature than she. This is the role of every mother: to critique the woman loved by her son. In *Sons and Mothers*, Paul Olsen relates

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57 Freud’s study was written in 1900 and published in 1905.
58 *Graziella* was based on the author’s travel to Italy and were first published in 1849 in *Confidences* and separately in 1852 under *Graziella*. It was translated in 1876.
the account of one son who brought his fiancée home to meet his mother. He found the
two women sitting on the bed admiring childhood photographs:

My mother was saying, “Look at this one. We always knew he was
meant for the very best in life, that he was very special. Just look at that
face.”

There was a process going on there that I had the sudden need to
end or at least try to nip in the bud. I walked into the room and said hello,
and my mother didn’t at all act as if she’d been interrupted. I was feeling
that I had caught her in the act -- what act, I wasn’t sure of. But she went
right on with it. (169)

Olsen explains that mothers experience great loss and fight to preserve their role in
relation to their sons:

I believe that this drama is played out always, in lesser or greater decibels
-- but it is a conflict that all mothers must experience and through which
they must pass before they can make peace with the loss they are about to
undergo. Some of course do it well -- those mothers who are most open
to themselves and aware of themselves and understand at least on an
intellectual level that their sons are setting out to carve a life of their own,
that it is all socially right, psychologically necessary. The intelligence
here prevails over the emotional level. It is the mothers who have little of
their inner life working for them, whose needs for control and power
overwhelm all else, who are not in touch with themselves -- these mothers
will struggle, fight, claw to keep their sons for themselves, keep them
locked in the frames of their baby photographs. And they seem
completely out of touch with even the social acceptability of marriage and
independence. (170-71)

Olsen shows the mother’s astonishment that the son would choose someone over her.
Hence she views the competitor as a seductress/sorcerer who brainwashes her son. Even
after the union with someone else, the mother attempts to demand respect for her
authority from the daughter-in-law. The mother’s jealousy must evolve slowly into
accepting the new woman, and even then this acceptance only reaches certain depths with some mothers. The new woman is never quite “good enough” for her son (170-71).

Heker’s character is blatant in her criticism of this “other woman”: “Y hoy, quizá solo un segundo, antes de que yo te llevara adonde estaba Graciela y todo empezara a ser como debió, Graciela, mocosa diabólica, estuvo parada lejos de nosotros y yo la miré y pensé eso: mocosa diabólica” (114). Further on she reiterates her distrust of the sorceress who steals her son away from her:

Qué sencillo resulta todo cuando no se sabe de traiciones, no es cierto Daniel. Uno está en brazos de mamá, que es lo mejor del mundo, quiere pasarse la vida así, acurrucado, dejándose mimar; uno moriría si alguien quisiera arrancarlo de allí. Entonces aparece Graciela que tiene ojos de diablesa y saca la lengua hasta el mentón y se revuelca en el pasto, que es lo más hermoso del mundo y uno quiere pasarse toda la vida así, rodando sobre los tréboles mojados jamás nadie podrá impedir que juguemos juntos. (115)

The son’s playing with Graciela is likely evidence of his progression into a sexual being. First it is innocent as they roll around together in the pastures, but this time, the mother makes reference to the tongue in mythical proportions. *The Women’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* says about the tongue: “Latin *lingus*, (tongue) was derived from Sanskrit *lingam*, (phallus.) Showing the tongue between the lips was once a sacred gesture of representing the lingam-yoni; to this day the folds of the vulva are properly called *labiae*, (lips) (1002).59 The Hindu goddess Kali sticks out her tongue as she beguiles her male consort, Shiva. The mother recognizes this classic sexual interplay that truly exemplifies her son’s new interest. Furthermore, rolling over the shamrock is a defiant move on the part of the two playmates as the shamrock represents the trinity. The triune force in this story admits the love relationship between the mother, the son, and Graciela which must be resolved.

59 Lingam-yoni is “the supreme symbol of the vital principle, representing male and female genitalia in conjunction” (Walker 543).
In mythological terms, Oedipus battles the monster who is his mother not by brutal force. Indeed he is a matricidal failure, so she kills herself. As Olsen points out, the battle for individuation is, for the mother, part emotional and part intellectual. The mode of attack used by Oedipus was an intellectual one as he solved the riddle of the Sphinx:

SHE is the Sphinx, the threatening female monster, part woman, part animal, who confronted Oedipus. Instead of engaging the monster in mortal combat as is the task of the Hero, Oedipus engaged HER in an intellectual contest and, while winning the contest, Oedipus failed to kill HER, the sin of incest with his own mother became inevitable. For Goux, the central theme of the Oedipal myth is not patricide, which is only a side issue, but matricide failed. Freud, according to Goux, missed an essential element. (Smith and Ferstman 34-35)

In “Yokasta,” the mother’s son is Daniel, her rival is Graziella, and the fourth named character is Sebastian. This name is of Greek origin though it is most closely associated with the martyred saint who joined the Roman Army during a time of persecution. By joining the army he hoped to console captured Christians, but his secret was revealed over time. He was executed for his faith in 288 A. D. and given a Christian burial in the Catacombs of the Via Appia (Appian Way) outside the city walls of Rome. He is a popular figure in religious iconography and has been depicted in every medium for centuries. Generally, he is a young, nearly androgynous person seen tied to a tree (or column) killed by arrows. He is a type of Christ figure who died on the cross. The scene is also reminiscent of the birth of Vishnu below the trees. Thus, the symbol of nature as the womb is maintained in this story. In addition, this is a man who became a martyr for a chosen way of life.

Finally, the crowd functions as a fifth character. Both a literal and a figurative identity are bestowed upon this unnamed entity. Just as in Greek drama a chorus sang and danced while commenting on the action of the play, this chorus makes outside commentary. This narcissistic mother sees herself reflected in her son; that is why she designs a group outside of her dual self, mother-son, through whom she can project
opinions. The point of departure is that figuratively this chorus presents the logic or intellect of the mother as a third-person construction and thereby blames the comments on “society” in general. Thus, this third-term mediates the narcissistic relationship between the mother and son. This is an interesting technique in that Heker constructs a society much like society constructs us. She plays with the idea of what is real, tangible, voiced and what is imagined, unseen, unvoiced. Kristeva postulates that Freud’s ideas on primal repression of narcissism are a repression which cannot be successful and that the repressive agent is language: “Let us therefore not speak of primacy but of the instability of the symbolic function in its most significant aspect – the prohibition placed on the maternal body (as a defense against autoeroticism and incest taboo). Here, drives hold sway and constitute a strange space that I shall name, after Plato (Timeus, 48-53), a chora, a receptacle” (Powers of Horror 13-14). The chorus then supplies the narrative with the repressed erotic desire of the mother toward her son through language. However, the narrator never actually gives a direct voice to the crowd, but instead she first refers to the crowd this way:

Nos reímos los dos, el muy ladino: lo hace a propósito (así les dije hoy), esas caritas, vieron para que no le saque los ojos de encima. Y que yo hacía todo lo posible, eso también les dije, todo lo posible para que no esté todo el día pendiente de mí, pero es inútil. Ellos se reían; sabés, yo los comprendo: es gracioso verte todo el día encima mío, vigilando cada uno de mis gestos. Ni hablarles a ellos podia, te enojabas como si fueras. Shh. Querías tenerme toda para vos y a ellos les divertía, claro. Decían tu pequeño edipito. (112-13)

In The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir comments on the narcissist and her relation to others:

The comedy of narcissism is played at the expense of reality; an imaginary character solicits the admiration of an imaginary public; a woman infatuated with her ego loses all hold on the actual world, she has no concern to establish any real relation with others. …the narcissist refuses to admit that people may see her otherwise than as she presents
herself, which explains why she is a poor judge of herself, though always engaged in self-contemplation, and why she very easily becomes ridiculous. She no longer listens, she talks; and when she talks, she is speaking her part. (638-39)

Later, the protagonist’s foreshadowing of impropriety is delivered through the voice of this chorus:

¿Viste hoy?: te dejé saltar todo el tiempo en mi falda y ni me preocupó (hasta me divertía) que ellos estuvieran tan maravillados. Pero este chico, Nora, decían; no te deja ni a sol ni a sombra. Yo trataba de decir pero se dan cuenta qué cosa, y vos me tapabas los labios con los dedos; no quiero que hables, decías, mi pequeño tirano. Ellos movía la cabeza, risueños, y no decían nada. Hago todo lo posible les explicaba, les juro. (113)

Finally the chorus witnesses the mother’s despair as Daniel falls in love with Graciela and abandons his mother. In its own words, the chorus recognizes yet dismisses the impending doom of the mother: “me ría [sic] como loco de sus muecas que nadie como ella sabe hacer. Nunca conseguirán arrancarme de su lado; es inútil que mires todo el tiempo, mamá; es inútil que no puedas despegar tus ojos de mí y a duras penas logres disimular ante tus amigos aunque les sonrías cuando dicen: te traicionó, Nora” (115-16).

De Beauvoir anticipates that the narcissistic fantasy must eventually be broken, much to the despair of the delusional mother. She upholds her image of control, if not with her son nor with herself, than at least with the on-looking public:

There can be no real relation between an individual and her double because this double does not exist. The narcissist encounters a fundamental frustration. She cannot envisage herself as a totality, she is unable to keep up the illusion of being pour-soi-en-soi. Her isolation, like that of every human being, is felt as contingency and forlorn abandonment. And this is why -- unless she changes -- she is condemned to unresting flight from herself to the crowd, to talk, to others. It would be quite wrong to suppose that she escapes dependence in choosing herself as supreme end in view; on the contrary, she dooms herself to the
most complete slavery. She does not stand on her independence but
makes of herself an object that is imperiled by the world and by other
conscious beings. (640)

That is why the mother upholds the façade or appearance of continued closeness between
her and her now too-old son when talking with her friends. Daniel, for his part, is aware
of this façade and the reversal of their need for one another: “Contestás sí, todos los
hombres son iguales, y lo pronunciás con voz de estar diciendo algo muy gracioso. Pero
no los mirás siquiera: seguís esperando mis ojos, una sola mirada mía que te diga que
todo sigue igual” (116). He even becomes cruel to his mother: “Ya no me gusta más,
para que sepas; Gracielita sabe mucho más linda, Gracielita linda, nadie me va a arrancar
de tu lado aunque sea de noche y haya que acostarse” (116).

These words from Daniel reverse his earlier need to stay with his mother. She
earlier teasingly referred to him as Edipo and a traitor. Now, it is he who lives up to her
prophecies. The finale for the mother, having completed the separation for her son and
from her son, is one of melancholia because she sees herself in her terminated role as
mother: “Sólo mamá no duerme. Sólo yo no duermo” (117). Finally, we leave the
mother in denial of her own mortality, this mortality which becomes discernible because
of her fulfilled maternal role:

Que no sabe nada de la piel inmuda de su miserable mamá. Es inútil
repetirse que es la noche la que lo vuelve todo tan horrible, que mañana
va a ser distinto. Que vas a venir corriendo a despertarme y será hermoso
como todos los días. Hico caballito, saltando sobre mi vientre, hico
caballito vamos a Belén, que mañana es fiesta y pasado también. Como
todos los días. (117)
Alejandra Basualto is a Chilean-born author who is well known both in her native country and abroad; her works have been translated into various languages. Basualto’s formation includes a degree in literature, and her vocation is director of a literary workshop. Her work consists predominantly of short stories and poetry. Here the story “Yocasta” is examined in regard to its reversal of the Oedipus story into an account of mother’s grief and death. This story’s protagonist is a mother whose adolescent boy has begun to develop a life independent of her. Though the story is told from a third-person point of view, it is an omniscient narration mingled with dialogue in which the protagonist speaks directly. Nonetheless, it is the mother’s story which betrays her innermost fears of death as her son pulls away from her loving care.

The story is a mere two pages in which the mother shows a typical “day in the life” of her and her son together at home. The absent father is away on a business trip and is barely mentioned by name. During the evening, the son receives a telephone call from a girl and goes out dancing with her while the mother is left at home alone. From the phone call to the actual outing, the mother’s jealousy mounts. The next day is the mother’s birthday, and she spends the day in preparation for the evening meal alone with her son. In fact, she showers twice and prepares her own body as lovingly and thoroughly as if preparing for a romantic rendezvous. It is with this same care that she prepares the food and table. She is even able to overlook her son’s forgetting this important event and lacking an appropriate gift for her when she considers what a pleasure it will be for her to have him all to herself. The evening is interrupted when a girl comes to their house and rings the doorbell. Edipo chooses to depart with her immediately after dinner, thus leaving the mother alone and dejected on the most
important of days. His casual manner of tossing the mother aside for another female is devastating to the mother’s development and yet normal for the boy’s.

The title word, Yocasta, is a name of function more than of reality. The title suggests the role the protagonist will play based on the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus. The mother is aware of his identity though he is not aware of hers. Once the truth is revealed, she kills herself, because he is a matricidal failure. In “Yocasta” the mother is, in fact, called Gioconda, a name originating from *Jucunda*, a late Latin name, meaning “happy.” There is uncertainty throughout the story as the narrator varies the name of the protagonist, Yocasta/Gioconda, thus she vacillates between an incestuous mother and happy lover. Despite this, she is the mother of a teenage son, Edipo (Oedipus).

Basualto begins the story with a scene of a typical snack time shared by mother and son: “Cuando Edipo terminó de comer su pastel de manzanas, Yocasta, o Gioconda – (nunca me aprendí bien su nombre) - , retiró el plato con esa dedicación propia de las madres y le pasó una servilleta de papel para que se limpiara la boca” (no pagination). This scene establishes Edipo as eating the apples. \(^61\) Apples are regarded as a sign of immortality; and, based on the Biblical story of the forbidden fruit; they also symbolize a defiance of godly instruction and knowledge of carnal issues. It was, after all, Eve who served Adam the fruit. Following the eating of the fruit, the first pair, Adam and Eve, realized their nakedness and that they were ashamed. \(^62\) This shame implies that among this forbidden knowledge contained in the fruit was the knowledge of sex. In “Yocasta,” the son is eating the forbidden fruit, and this will reveal to him a carnal knowledge of the sexes which will lead him away from his mother and to another woman. Ingesting these apples also affords him immortality at the expense of his aging and therefore purposeless.

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61 In *The Women’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, Walker shows that apples among other things were used by the Romans to honor the apple-mother called “Pomona.” She symbolized all fruition. A Roman banquet always progressed *ab ovo usque mala*, from eggs to apples -- beginning with the symbol of creation and ending with the symbol of completion. It was recorded that King Herod finished every meal in the Roman style, with an apple (Walker 49).

62 According to Genesis 3, the fall of man is based on the succumbing to the temptation of wanting to eat the forbidden fruit and obtain godlike knowledge. The chapter says that Satan took the form of a serpent and tempted the woman saying: “God knows that the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (verse 5). It goes on to say that after the man and woman ate the fruit: “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings” (verse 7) (quotes from NKJV).
mother. She is left with only the remains of his snack: the plate, a metaphor for the barren womb robbed of its own fruit as a result of the physical birth.

The protagonist’s name is given immediately though it is only given in such a way as to undermine her individual identity. She is named first Yocasta, a role she will fulfill. Secondly, she is named Gioconda. Finally, an omniscient narrator says in an aside that he never really learned her name. That is to say, her personal identity is secondary and irrelevant in comparison to her role as mother/lover, which is revealed in the next lines:

Lo miró con arrobamiento hasta que una nubecilla gris, como esas neblinas que de pronto cubren los bosques costeros, le fue templando la mirada mientras oía el sonido del teléfono. Se abalanzó sobre el aparato y lo levantó con cautela. Una melosa vocecita nórdica la saludaba con desparpajo: ‘Hola, tía, ¿está Edipo?’ (Larga pausa a este lado de la línea, para dar mayor dramatismo a la acción). Yocasta estruja el enorme ovillo de celos que le retuerce las entrañas y con su voz más ponderada responde: ‘Sí, mijita; lo llamo’. (no pagination)

From the first mention of the mother, we see a woman who adores her son, serves him, and is jealous of another female’s interest in him. She looks at him with “entrancement, ecstasy, rapture” until her view fogs over like the coastal waters. This is a mother enamored with her son in an erotic fashion. However, this is tempered by her knowledge of acceptable societal norms. She must feign a polite voice and sentiment towards this interloping female, the Nordic Grete; and though it is difficult for her, she not only allows the conversation to occur, but she also serves as the intermediary for the communication to commence.

When the younger female calls, the mother informs Oedipus, and he goes to his room. The mother holds the line open until he reaches his own personal space within the house and picks up the phone. He, of course, waits for his mother to hang up before he begins conversing with this other woman. Thus, he confronts the mother as the true interloper and silently beckons her to initiate the necessary separation. This transition from one woman to another with the mother’s reluctant participation is what Adrienne
Rich describes as the mother’s willful obedience to her son’s need for a rite of passage into adulthood. She claims that the son’s separation from the mother must entail a “first birth” involving a physical birth and separation from the maternal object. As a result of the actual birthing process, Rich postulates that there is further physical separation from the son which causes anxiety for him. She asserts that:

A third person, other persons, are obviously necessary to relieve this anxiety, to dry his tears of abandonment, to reassure him that all care and love are not embodied solely in one person, his mother, and to make it possible for him to accept her separateness and his own. But more often than not, that third person has also been a woman: a grandmother, aunt, older sister, nurse. She may, in fact, give more care and cherishing than the mother has been able to give; she may become, emotionally, the mother. (199)

After the literal birth and ensuing physical separation from the mother, Rich notes that all world cultures mark the passage of a male from boyhood to manhood; and, in many cases, the mother plays an active role:

finally he must be taken over by these male figures. Tribal societies have always required a “second birth” of the young boys at puberty into the male group. … It may also be attended by an overt ritualized rejection of the mother: striking her as with the Fiji, wounding her with arrows, as with the Apache and Iroquois. (199)

In the case of “Yocasta” this boy is moving from the care of his mother to another female. Though not a caretaking figure, this third person provides a first man-woman relationship outside of the one he shares with his mother. Because of this, the rite of passage experienced by Edipo is an initiation as a sexual being. Not losing sight of the

63 Rich describes the mother’s role in rearing her son to become an adult: “But even as we challenge or refute Freud’s structure, the questions arise: How does the male child differentiate himself from his mother, and does this mean inevitably that he must ‘join the army,’ that is, internalize patriarchal values? Can the mother, in patriarchy, represent culture, and if so, what does this require of her? Above all, what does separation from the mother mean for the son? It means, in the first place, physical birth, leaving the warm, weightless dream of the amniotic sac” (198).
ingenuity of this story, one now must consider this ritual rebirth from the point of view of the mother and as it pertains to her own development psychologically.

Firstly, after Edipo goes to his room and receives this call, the mother goes to her own room as well: “Luego se dirige a su propio dormitorio, saca un pañuelo de fina seda del closet y comienza a morderlo con fruición” (no pagination). At this point, the two have undergone a spatial separation within the house. They began in one room together to end up in separate bed quarters. This metaphorically shows the condition of pregnancy – the move from the kitchen/dining room as a “feminine space” to the physical separation of birth and independent and sexual identities.

Next, the protagonist says she took a handkerchief or neckerchief of fine silk out of her closet and bit it with enjoyment. This appears to be a strange thing for a grown person to do. However, when considered in its relation to the fact that it is a decorative item worn around the neck, it is notably an ornament of the organ through which life is believed to enter and depart from the body. This procreative force or spirit, the Mayans believed, was anchored in the throat. In the moment of death the spirit left through the throat and was momentarily able to speak with the gods. Therefore, this neckerchief represents the birthing. Furthermore, her attempted consumption of this article is a private expression of her aggressive tendencies toward the son because of the oncoming separation at the “second birth.”

Once Yocasta is in her room, she watches a beautiful young blonde moving seductively with a tall, muscular young man on the television. They dance the Salsa together, but the parallel is clear: the young seductress has provoked her faithful son to sinful ways. The protagonist is no longer a central participant in his life: she is merely a spectator of this televised ensemble. Her absence is duly noted. In fact, she also, for the first time, marks the passage of time:

    Pero Yocasta sólo está atenta al lento deslizarse de los números rojos que se van sucediendo implacables en el reloj del velador. Las diez y treinta, las diez cincuenta; finalmente el clic a las once y cinco. Rápidos pasos hacia la puerta de calle le indican que la velada familiar nocturna –Edipo recostado sobre su falda, ella acariciándole la cabeza, y cine de
The usage of the verb *deslizar* to indicate the movement of the numbers on the clock reveals her perception of this passage of time compared to what the son experiences. While he lives in the eternal present, she is conscious that time passes (slides away, slips away, and glides away from her). It is a slow and gradual movement as she wills it to continue in the present. It is in this physical separation and acknowledgement of the passage of time that the mother recognizes her own mortality. Her maternal function is coming to an end. Olsen notes this acknowledgement of the mother who feels that she is no longer necessary and can die: “There is obviously some feeling within her of great confusion: How in God’s name is he able to care for himself without me? And hence I am now useless, I have no function, no meaning – I am getting old and useless and perhaps on the way down the road to death” (162). This contemplation of death is marked physically by her actions once Edipo departs from the house. After taking her diet Coca Cola and diazepam (Valium) to calm her anxiety, she returns to her room. The fact that she ingests an anti-anxiety agent with a Diet Coke seems paradoxical and yet appropriate: she requires short-term relief of anxiety (diazepam) and at the same time, it seems so very casual (Diet Coke). Once in her room, the source of this anxiety is revealed: “Enseguida se desviste y contempla en el espejo la marchita realidad; se enfunda en su camisa de dormir y entra en la cama con desgaño. Apaga la luz, y mientras va hundiéndose en el sopor, puede ver a Edipo bailando con la rubia de la televisión” (no pagination).

This mother recognizes her dismissal in the life of her child and in that she understands that death awaits her for possibly the first time. That is why she contemplates her naked appearance in the mirror and cannot find the youth of yesteryear. What she can envision is the sexual appetite of her son for another woman. This realization also calls for action. According to Olsen, this is an important stage for the mother’s development because the son’s moving out of the house or away from the mother is not only paramount in his quest for independence, but it is also a critical moment for the mother as she confronts her death. Olsen states:
it is the mother who must separate from the son – not only the son who must separate from the mother. Both must seize the opportunity to grow, but it takes a lot of doing because the gulf between them can seem so vast, so unbridgeable. Simply because of this: the son has his life ahead of him and recognizes the need to grow…

The mother, conversely, has a sense that she has already grown (however *she* defines that term), that, as most adults feel in our culture, she *has* grown up, *has* gotten somewhere, is in some sense complete because she has spun out her role, done her job, and has become firmly identified with her mission and achievement, and she thinks too much about the separation; she experiences profound pain at the contemplation of the loss of a person who has contributed in an incalculably profound way to what she has come to accept as her identity and her purpose. What she is then engaged in, as a counterpoise to her son’s movement, as an antagonistic counterpoise at that, is her position of stability, of changelessness. She wants to be settled; her son is unsettled and unsettling. (163-64)

The unsettling brought about by her son leaves Gioconda/Yocasta to take her anti-anxiety agent and wait at home while Edipo wanders through the night without her. All that remains for her is the sad realization that she is not only alone and lonely, but also that she has outlived her utility to him and in general. After retreating to her room, the mother fantasized earlier about their nightly ritual watching the television together, and then the mental imagery turns to his dancing with another woman. Both of her son’s activities are symbolic of his place in the feminine realm of night.

First, in “Yocasta,” the action began in the same room of the house and proceeded to separate bed quarters. Now, Edipo has left the maternal house or allegorical womb. As Gilbert and Gubar point out:

The womb-shaped cave is also the place of female power, the *umbilicus mundi*, one of the great antechambers of the mysteries of transformation. As herself a kind of cave, every woman might seem to have the cave’s
metaphorical power of annihilation… Yet individual women are imprisoned in, not empowered by, such caves…How, therefore, does any woman -- but especially a literary woman, who thinks in images -- reconcile the cave’s negative metaphoric potential with its positive mythic possibilities? Immobilized and half-blinded in Plato’s cave, how does such a woman distinguish what she is from what she sees, her real creative essence from the unreal cutpaper shadows the cavern-master claims as reality? (95)

The mother created Edipo and yet exists as a remnant of life once he departs from the house. She sees her reflection first in him and now in the mirror what was once a youthful procreative force, now a faded body destined for the grave. Gilbert and Gubar might point out that this woman is defined only in relation to this male’s utility of her, but in fact, that is precisely a mother’s self-definition: she is her son’s mother.

The following day, after ensuring that Edipo yet slumbers placidly in his bed, Gioconda/Yocasta spiritedly showers while planning her day. In the light of day her will has returned, and she has a plan for rejuvenating her soul, because it is “cumpleaños de la reina madre.” The omniscient narrator makes this comparison to the Virgin Mary which implies a parallel not only with royal Yocasta, a presupposed perverted mother of Oedipus, but also with Mary, the revered virgin mother of all Christians.

The protagonist carefully selects the menu and plans the event:

Habrá que escoger con cuidado el menú para la cena a la luz de las velas, ceremonia privada y estrictamente familiar. Con Layo lejos, en viaje de negocios, has pensado que es preferible celebrar este día en la más completa intimidad, a solas con su hijo unigénito, que ha prometido estar temprano en casa. (no pagination)

Clearly, this event takes the form of religious ritual based on the son’s divinity as well as the mother’s status as his earthly creator; it also takes advantage of the father’s absence. Yocasta’s husband is away on business whereas Mary’s husband died before Christ was crucified. Both women are solely dedicated to their sons without marital distraction. Yocasta’s “unigénito” or only begotten son is equivalent to the Christ or the only son of
God made flesh through Mary. A feast in her honor is a fitting recognition of her role in his life.

The Feast of the Assumption is a Catholic ritual based loosely on the scripture found in Luke 1: 28 when the Archangel Gabriel informed the Virgin Mary that she was chosen to give life to the Messiah: “And coming to her, he said, ‘Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.’” This became the basis for an oral tradition that was made dogma in 1950 by Pope Pius XII:

In explaining the grounds for the Church’s belief, Pius XII singled out the fact that Mary was the Mother of God; as the body of Christ originated from the body of Mary (caro Jesu est caro Mariæ); that her body was preserved unimpaired in virginal integrity, and therefore it was fitting that it should not be subject to destruction after death; and that since Mary so closely shared in Christ’s redemptive mission on earth, she deserved to join him also in bodily glorification. (Hardon 32)

The dogma actually reads: “Mary, the immaculate perpetually Virgin Mother of God, after the completion of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into the glory of heaven” (32). Thus, Mary’s role was complete, but her final act was to die in grand fashion. Yocasta, modeled after Mary, will do the same.

Yocasta prepares herself by first painstakingly applying her make-up in order to go out into the public realm and shop for the food items necessary for the feast. This is an external mask enabling her to function in yet another facet of her maternal role: she provides the food and must venture out into the public realm appropriately adorned for that purpose. Yocasta seeks fresh oysters and other “exquisiteces.” Then she selects “true” French Camembert cheese, baguettes, Azapa olives, small dill pickles, and two bottles of “Miguel Torres Bellaterra” wine. Several of the aforementioned items are aphrodisiacs. In particular, the oysters represent the female principle and are associated with procreative involvement in the production of pearls (which appear later in the story) while the Camembert Cheese is a soft white spread demonstrating the purity of the woman. As for the olives, a Judeo-Christian symbol of the people included in the holy lineage of Christ through Mary, they show the perfect union between the mother and her
son. The baguettes and small dills are phallic-shaped foods. Of course, no feast may be held in the absence of a fine wine, hence the bottles. Finally the meat – a masculine attribute- and a dessert - feminine - complete the meal. They will be prepared by the hands of the mother as another example of her power of creation. This feast may honor a virgin mother, but the foods therein constitute a sexual prelude.

Her day is spent in preparation for the meal. She must prepare herself anew with a “nueva ducha y cambio de atuendo” (no pagination). The shower purifies her body and the change of attire moves her from secular to liturgical vestments. In addition, she spares no detail in the preparation of the altar either. It is while setting the table that she thinks momentarily of her mother-in-law. There is a break from the omniscient narrator to an aside in first-person narration from this unidentified narrator: “La mesa puesta, las copas de cristal de las ocasiones especiales y la vajilla heredada de la suegra. (No sé por qué me acordé de la suegra en este momento tan trascendental en la vida de mi protagonista, pero continuemos el relato).” (no pagination)

This seemingly odd detail is, in actuality, a call to action. Yocasta once played the role of interloping female in relation to her mother-in-law. The articles previously used to adorn the table once set by Layo’s mother are now in her possession. She “inherited” Layo and the ceremonial garb as well. This shift in roles for Yocasta enables her to carry out the responsible act of the transference of power from her as the mother to the new, more youthful woman as her own mother-in-law was once forced to do.

Following this recollection of the mother-in-law, Edipo returns to the house, puts his bicycle in the garage, and “saludó a Yocasta con un beso distraído. De pronto, al verla tan almidonada y compuesta, recordó” (no pagination). Then the author reintroduces a dialogue between the two. In Edipo’s first line, he admits he forgot her birthday and has no gift to offer her. He excuses himself and refers to her with a pet name, “Te lo debo, viejita” (no pagination). His pet name is seemingly void of affection and respect but is in keeping with cultural protocol. Even so, it openly disregards her as an emotional being in favor of her as a functional unit in his life. He regards her as a remnant of life contained in a failing body.
Yocasta elects to excuse her heir simply because he has returned to her. At this point, the presence of her son at her side is the most precious gift she could receive. She gladly welcomes him and beckons him:

Yocasta sonríe comprensiva, ¿Qué podría importar un regalo ante la dicha de tenerlo una velada completa para ella sola?

- Hijo, dúchate y cámbiate de ropa. ¿Por qué no te pones un poquito de ese Drakkar Noir que te di para la Pascua? – dijo ella mimosa.

Edipo sonrió y obedeció con presteza.

The mother acknowledged her son at Easter, as he must acknowledge her now. Both lives have reached the point of culmination of an assignment and are being transformed into new beings. This is not only the death of “life” for each of them, but it is also an awakening process leading to a “second life” separate from one another.

Everything, including Edipo, is ready at nine that night. In the midst of opening the bottle of aperitif wine, the doorbell sounds. The first interruption of their family time was the phone’s ringing announcing the call of the “melosa vocecita nórdica” (no pagination). This time, the sound of the doorbell announces her physical arrival. These sonorous interruptions are outward sensual proclamations of the inner spiritual change.

Yocasta denies this change when she asks:

- ¿Quién podrá ser? – preguntó Yocasta contrariada, mientras Edipo salía hacia la reja. Tardó varios minutos y, cuando regresó, le brillaban los ojos. Con una sonrisa despreocupada anunció:

- Mamá, Grete pasaba por aquí, y la invité a comer porque después saldremos a una fiesta.

The new female is at last revealed so that the Nordic voice has substance and a name. Her name is Grete, a Norwegian variation of Margarita or Margaret, meaning pearl. This is the fruit of the oyster or the jewel of the feminine which was brought forth by Yocasta for her birthday meal. Margaret is an English name meaning “pearl” from the Greek margarites. Saint Margaret was martyred at Antioch in the 4th century. She is the patron saint of expectant mothers. Another famous bearer was Queen Margaret I of Denmark, who united Denmark, Sweden, and Norway in the 14th century” (Campbell no
pagination). Obviously, the role of the mother is one of martyrdom. Yocasta now reaches martyrdom just as this new female is the one who will next become a mother, and the cycle of life will continue through her. Yocasta, then, is left dumbfounded at this discovery but allows the transition to proceed.

It is Edipo who invites this transition to Grete and martyrs his own mother in the process. He chooses to go to a party with Grete rather than remain in the maternal space of the home with Yocasta. Not interfering with the free will of her son, there are no words left for Yocasta to pronounce, no protest to be made, and the story ends.

This story loosely exploits the well-known story of Oedipus whose mother knowingly entered into an incestuous relation with him and committed suicide in the end. However, as told from Jocasta’s perspective, this protagonist simply complies with her son’s wishes and represses her own libidinal desire for him. This is a loving sacrifice by her which enables him to mature and grow as a separate person from her. In the next story, the protagonist narrates a story much more closely tied to the original version.

“Yocasta confiesa” by Angelina Muñiz-Huberman (Mexico)

According to Eduardo Mateo Gambarte, Angelina Muñiz-Huberman is an author who belongs to:

La segunda generación del exilio español en México. El término generación se usa aquí en sentido sociológico más que en el literario. … Hoy parece que lo que mejor los define es el término hispano-mexicanos. …

Las características mínimas que posee esta generación son las siguientes: nacen en España y salen al exilio acompañando a sus padres cuando están todavía en una etapa de formación, viven lo español de
This generation, according to Gambarte, is one composed of young Jewish war immigrants whose literary production will be marked by its linguistic tendencies towards a peninsular-Mexican blend and the use of poetic prose with preference for the allegorical. After establishing Muñiz-Huberman as a member of this generation, Gambarte critiques her body of work. When Gambarte arrives at *Huerto cerrado, huerto sellado*, the collection from which comes the story “Yocasta confiesa,” he notes that this book is a collection of stories about characters whose lives are not, in fact, their lives but are instead their desires (81).

Daniela Schuvaks also situates Muñiz-Huberman in a “decade of writers who came after 1968” and notes that she:

- was born in Hyeres, Provence, in 1936 but spent most of her life in Mexico. Her parents left the Iberian Republic in 1942 to escape the collapse of the Republic in Spain (Muñiz-Huberman 1991, 21). This path to exile, along with her mother’s revelation of their Judaism, would mark the author’s life in a special way. Muñiz-Huberman does not ignore the fact that she lives in the margins of both Jewish and Mexican cultures. Perhaps this is why the author dedicates most of her work to showing the relationship between exile and Jewish themes. (83)

However, in her article comparing Esther Seligson and Angelina Muñiz-Huberman, Schuvaks also defines the “essence of Judaism: its origins and the universal exile in which the Jewish people have lived for centuries” (75). Schuvaks mentions the incredibly low population of Jews in Mexico (0.63%) and the desire of Jews to maintain Jewish communities and customs as opposed to assimilate into Mexican mainstream lifestyles (75). She also dedicates much time to establishing these two authors (Seligson and Muñiz-Huberman) and others in their generation as having “an obsession with the concept of returning to the past as well as an obvious attempt at evading reality by returning to lost worlds that exist in memory only” (76). While not all of Muñiz-Huberman’s stories deal directly with the Jewish issue, Schuvaks does state that “Muñiz-
Huberman’s marginalized characters try to escape a hostile environment that prohibits them from being who they want to be” (85).

This current study provides a close examination of “Yocasta confiesa,” one story in her collection entitled *Huerto cerrado, huerto sellado*. This story deals with identity and the return to a mythical world where motherhood is marginalized much as contemporary Jewish peoples and writings are in Mexico and elsewhere. This story abandons the traditional reading of the Oedipus story in favor of one with the mother as protagonist. In this way, Muñiz-Huberman subverts traditional male dominated readings of an old story in order to shed light on a female’s rationale for her role in her son’s life. Yocasta has a voice and explains herself without shame. Freud has been severely criticized for only exploring the male point of view in the Oedipus complex and its place in child development. Muñiz-Huberman allows Yocasta to occupy the central role generally conferred upon the child. This reversal of perspective promotes the importance of childrearing in relation to the psychological development of the mother rather than the traditional deference to the child.

In *This Sex Which is Not One* Irigaray says that Freud’s and subsequent work on female problems is not sufficient to allow women a voice:

> But as we have already seen, even with the help of linguistics, psychoanalysis cannot solve the problem of the articulation of the female sex in discourse. Even though Freud’s theory, through an effect of dress-rehearsal -- at least as far as the relationship between the sexes is concerned – shows clearly the function of the feminine in that scene. *What remains to be done then is to work at “destroying” the discursive mechanism.* (76)

Irigaray continues this critique by offering a solution: mimicry (76). Irigaray asserts that is the feminine role which converts the masculine discourse from a form of

64 Luce Irigaray, among other contemporary feminists, criticize Freud’s methodology. Irigary points out: “[h]is resolutely ‘masculine’ viewpoint on female sexuality” (73). Freud’s work on the Oedipus complex is an issue Melanie Klein investigated from a female’s perspective and about which Julia Kristeva further theorized.

65 Irigary’s full explanation of mimicry shows that: “There is, an initial phase, perhaps only one “path,” the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately.
subordination into an affirmation. In “Yocasta confiesa,” Muñiz-Huberman seeks to do just this: she subverts the discourse by recounting a masculine story from a woman’s point of view. In addition, she confesses the unspeakable. That is, she shows why Yocasta knowingly committed incest with her son while exploring feminine sexual pleasure and maternal martyrdom as pieces of a viable explanation.

“Yocasta confiesa” begins with a description of Oedipus walking up to the palace. The writing is devoid of dialogue; the narrator paraphrases the words of other characters without consenting to any other kind of outside intervention. This story is the narration of Yocasta. It is a suicidal woman’s justification of her actions. It is a “death bed confession” of a mother written in first person and full of emotion and sensuality. It explains how Oedipus is the embodiment of her love after a night with Laius (Layo). Yocasta recounts her son’s conception and birth allegorically through comparisons with Echo, Kali, Narcissus, and her existence as his alpha and omega. When she nearly arrives at revealing herself as his mother to the reader(s), she “Temería que hablara y que me preguntara” (22). This mental tension is followed by the first of four jumps in the text. The narrator describes her using silence as a weapon necessary to hide the truth, projects blame on Layo for any perception of impropriety, and dismisses the law and morality in favor of a union with her son though she acknowledges that this union will surely result in suffering. Yocasta simply counts herself a martyr for the sake of her son.

Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) “subject,” that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference. / To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation y discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself to – inasmuch as she is on the side of the “perceptible,” of “matter” – to “ideas,” in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make “visible,” by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible” the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means “to unveil” the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere: another case of the persistence of “matter,” but also of “sexual pleasure.” (76)

66 Nowhere in the text is the name Oedipus (Edipo in Spanish) employed. However, Yocasta speaks of her son which according to Greek mythology is Oedipus.
The opening lines demonstrate the creative force of maternal love. They reveal the pride this mother/goddess has in her creation, and they mark the moment of her decision to augment her maternal love for him through sexual initiation with him:

Cuando subía la escalinata del palacio, lento, erguido, con el tranquilo orgullo de quien se sabe vencedor, supe que era él. No lo dudé ni un momento. Sus ojos y su boca reflejaban mi amor, mi noche de amor en que él fue concebido. Y lo amé yo también: amé su cuerpo joven y ágil, el peso de sus músculos, su cabeza redonda y suave, la proporción precisa de sus miembros, como un potro en carrera libre hacia el mar. (no pagination)

Here, Muñiz-Huberman begins Yocasta’s confession with a gentle description of her son’s poise followed by her observations of his physical body before lathering the scene with lustful Lorquian symbols illuminating an overtly sexual link to her son. In this way, Muñiz-Huberman exhibits her knowledge of peninsular letters by carefully emulating Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), the famous poet and playwright of the Spanish Generation of 1927 and arguably the most sensual and even erotic modern writer from that peninsula. Consider his poem “La casada infiel.” In García Lorca’s much loved and analyzed poem are the sounds and sights of what is actually a crude sex scene in the dirt between two strangers – one of whom is committing the moral and legal sexual transgression of adultery. The distinction in Lorca’s account is that he uses symbols to convert this scene into a romantic, passionate affair between forbidden lovers who have the courage to go against societal norms to follow their convictions. He removed society’s condemnation and replaced it with a passionate explanation of the events. It is also interesting to note his words in the stanza addressing the act of intercourse itself: “Aquella noche corrí / el mejor de los caminos / montado en potra de nácar / sin bridas y sin estribos.” Lorca’s words foreshadow those of Muñiz-Huberman. She, being well aware of Spanish letters, undoubtedly knew of these classic symbols. Here Yocasta compares Oedipus to “un potro en carrera libre hacia el mar” (21). Her fine colt in an open race towards the sea is an obvious sexual allusion. Early in the twentieth century Lorca used the stallion as a symbol of sexuality and the river as one of fertility, sexuality,
and vivacity. Additionally, Muñiz-Huberman also follows Lorca’s example by converting the incestuous love affair of a son and his mother - an act condemned by society - into a selfless act of a mother with unbridled passion for her son.

In “Yocasta confiesa,” the mother, like Lorca’s unfaithful wife, is the one who knowingly enters into this affair. It is the woman who rejects societal judgment in favor of following her suppressed desire. The short story begins *in medio res: Edipo walks up the palace steps and the reader has no context except for the connection to his namesake Oedipus and a supposed similar history. Consequently, when Yocasta recognizes her son, she chooses to remain silent about the truth of her identity: “Supe que era él y sin embargo callé: la profecía era hermética” (21). She acknowledges in him desire and that is what prompts her to:

silenciar lo que debería haber anunciado. No diría quien era, a pesar de que conocía su nombre desde que puso el pie en el primer escalón para entrar al palacio por la puerta principal como le correspondía por héroe, por libertador … Entró por la gran puerta principal no por ser mi hijo, sino por haber vencido a la temible Esfinge. (21)

Yocasta’s silence at the moment of her son’s arrival evokes an allusion to the mother-goddess Kali. This Hindu goddess of creative power gave her son his name by pronouncing it aloud. Similarly the narrator notes that she knew her son’s name before anyone else “conocía su nombre” (21). This ability to name a human life elevates the mother to the ultimate creative power. The mother goddess is, for that reason, the first to know it and the first to recognize his prophesied return to her. Yocasta corresponds with proud satisfaction. Though she previously alluded to his entry into the palace through the main portico, the metaphor is of vaginal birth. For the first time the narrator directly refers to him as her son, and from there she dissects his qualities into those of coming from his father and those coming from her genetic disposition. In terms of psychological development, Simone de Beauvoir reminds us that a woman has a dual fantasy/fear about
her child that he could become either a hero or a monster.\textsuperscript{67} This pride, then, is verification of her opinion that, in fact, her son has become a hero, and she is pleased.

Next Yocasta makes references to Oedipus as the sun (representing the son/hero). This sun reflects orange and black tones on whatever water – river, sea, puddle – is available (21). Oranges are another symbol for fertility and as such are given in proposals of marriage to the bride’s family in several Asian countries (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 724). Black represents both the absence of color and the sum total of all color. In this instance the son’s reflection is again a reflection of the mother who is both the mother creator and the mother destroyer like the Hindu goddess Kali.\textsuperscript{68} Thus, the colors orange and black alone show Oedipus and Yocasta to be reflections of a hero, a mother, and their fertility all at once. The reflection is based in water as the female formlessness from which he was created. Initially, any reflection of the son is made through his mother, but as the son begins to grow, he will opt to be reflected in other women and to reflect them in him as the mother occupies a more peripheral role in his life.

While Oedipus still seeks his mother, she will not reveal the secret of their identities so as to protect her position in relation to him. Muñiz-Huberman spends the

\textsuperscript{67} De Beauvoir outlines this dual fantasy/fear of a mother saying that: In a sense the mystery of the Incarnation repeats itself in each mother; every child born is a god who is made man: he cannot find self-realization as a being with consciousness and freedom unless she first comes into the world; the mother lends herself to this mystery, but she does not control it; it is beyond her power to influence what in the end will be the true nature of this being who is developing in her womb. She gives expression to this uncertainty in two contradictory fantasies: every mother entertains the idea that her child will be a hero, thus showing her wonderment at the thought of engendering a being with consciousness and freedom; but she is also in dread of giving birth to a defective or a monster, because she is aware to what a frightening extent that welfare of the flesh is contingent upon circumstances – and this embryo dwelling within her is only flesh” (497).

\textsuperscript{68} Black is the colour of the universal substance (prakrti), of materia prima, of primordial formlessness, of Chaos at the beginning of time, of the lower waters, of the north and of death, as well as of the hermeticists’ nigredo (although it may not always be the opposite of white, but, for example in China, of red or of yellow). In this sense black indubitably has the aspect of darkness and impurity. Yet, conversely, it is a higher symbol of non-manifestation and of primordial ‘virginity’ and it is this sense which links it with the symbolism of medieval Black Madonnas, as well as with Kālī, black because she returns to the state of formlessness and of diffused shapes and colours. . . . Black is the equivalent of the Chinese yin, feminine, intuitive, earthy and maternal. As already observed, mother-goddesses such as Diana of Ephesus, the Hindu Kālī or Isis are depicted as black, while Black Madonnas have been venerated throughout Europe. (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 95-96)
first of her three pages describing from Yocasta’s point of view Oedipus’s ascension to his mother at the main door of the palace. Yocasta justifies her role upon his return to her:

tampoco dije nada, como si me vengara, no de mi debilidad, sino de la palabra hiriente de la profecía, de la voz rota de los sacerdotes, del silencio interrogante del pueblo. O tal vez, de mi propia debilidad, que de nuevo me hacía aceptar el sino, aunque engañándome, pensando que la decisión partía de mí. El peso de los dioses y el peso del hombre: ¿qué valía más en la balanza? No podría invocar a los dioses puesto que iba a ser impura, y, en cambio, el hombre, el que ascendía lentamente por la escalinata me colmaba: volvía a mí porque de mí salió, y sólo esperaba el momento en que dos dolores – dos placeres – me lo devolvieran. Pero no era impuro mi deseo: volver a amar en uno, al padre y al hijo. Los celos que hubiera podido sentir alguna vez, los acallaba así, y volvería a tener hijos, de mi propio hijo. (21-22)

Oedipus returns to her, because he came from her. She is more than a physical mother: she is Kālī; she is Isis; she is the mother earth from whom all are born and to whom all return. This is Yocasta as the alpha and omega of all humanity. Her two pains and two pleasures reproduce the physical pain of birth and the emotional pain of death. Both of these are painful and pleasurable at once.⁶⁹

Yocasta, like any mother, is joyous over this reunion with her son - particularly because of their premature separation after his birth. Yocasta did not rear her son. This fact, however, proves to be an advantage for the mother, because as long as this remains secret, he will fulfill her sexual desire for him:

Él llegaría arriba y yo le sería entregada. Su mano en la mía me conduciría a la alcoba de su origen y de su desdicha. No reconocería nada

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⁶⁹ Adrienne Rich notes the connections between the pain of childbirth and the orgasmic nature therein (183).
de mí, porque yo nada más le di a luz, aunque, a veces, cierto relámpago de odio cruzaría por sus ojos azul-mar-tierra. Temería que hablara y que me preguntara. (22)

Edipo’s physical proximity propels Yocasta’s desire to unite sexually with him. She craves a return to his place of origin in order to begin the arrested cycle anew. As she endeavors on this risky course of action she engages silence as a weapon. In fact, the text takes the first jump. This space allows the silence to permeate the text as well. It serves as an intertextual space in which the consciousness churns. Her first words reiterate her necessary resolve: “Cada día a partir de aquél en que no quise hablar, el silencio tuvo que ser más necesario. El silencio pesaba como agua olvidada. El silencio remordía como granizo indeseado. El silencio iba sembrando la duda y creaba las palabras que nunca se decían” (22). In fact, Edipo begins to question her, and Yocasta becomes paranoid that he knows (or at least suspects) the truth about their identities. As their pillow talk turns to the topic of the past, the insatiable Yocasta resists this talk and turns to physical pleasure with him. She tries to fool herself, to forget his identity, and to believe that some god will forgive her. Finally, she even resorts to blaming her dead husband for the prophecy and its realization:

Había olvidado a Layo. Sólo tenía odio para él: el odio y el miedo que él sintió cuando nació su hijo y dictó sentencia amparado indolentemente en la obediencia a los dioses. Fue Layo quien atrajo la mala suerte cuando quiso creer en las palabreias irónicas de los sacerdotes. Fue él quien inventó la profecía al ver mi mirada de amor a nuestro hijo. Ahora Layo se esconde en lugares negros y perdidos de mi memoria. (22)

Yocasta paints a picture of a husband who is jealous of his own *primogénito* or firstborn son. She convinces herself that it was Layo who attracted the bad luck and the priests who gave false prophecies which separated her from her beloved Edipo in the first place.

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70 This is a reference to the color of the virgin-mother who proceeds from the formless waters to the earth in acts of divine creation. She is the sum embodiment of all that is the sea and the land.
She is merely restoring nature’s intended plan by “volviendo su boca a mis pechos, buscando el placer que no conoció y que se desesperaba en cambiar por el que ahora conocía. Hubiera deseado, entonces, que manara de nuevo mi leche, leche que secándose y endureciendo mis senos nunca fue para él” (23). Of course, this pronouncement is followed by the second jump in the text. This is the next written space of silence which permits a moment of acceptance of the new law she makes. The proceeding short paragraph announces the elimination of morality and law. In this she claims Edipo to herself and only for herself. Necessarily, the author leaves the third space between paragraphs in the text.

Finally, Yocasta renounces society and any repercussions of her actions against the law and morality in general. She knows that she will sacrifice everything for her son:

A mí solo me quedaba la muerte, y cuando estaba a su lado no hacía sino pregustar el quebranto último.

Paso a paso – por la escalinata - , noche a noche – por mi cuerpo – rondaba el fin, sin saber en dónde parar, pero con la herida ya dispuesta y la sangre a flor de piel. (no pagination)

Another space is concluded with her words. She maintains that her relationship with Edipo marks true divine order and when the death of the mother comes, the world will once again be without form: “Después no quedarían sino el caos y las tinieblas” (23).
CONCLUSION

The undertaking of a study of numerous works by Hispanic female authors begins with an intent to examine a largely unexplored literary field. One particular story awakens the imagination and excites the reader. From there, the diverse field narrows to stories with commonalities found in the inspiring first story. That was the case with this study.

Firstly, this study unites stories in which the woman’s perspective emerges within the short story genre, because the short story is a genre which closely resembles the female semiotic in that it has fewer words and a greater reliance on symbols, as shown by Karla Paniagua. This allows the authors to figuratively place one foot in the domain of the male symbolic order, subject to the Law of the Father, while remaining fully grounded in the female semiotic. In other words, they enter this male domain with the ability and plan to subvert it and tell a female story in existing male narratives. In order for these authors to express that which is beyond words, they choose a genre equipped to perform precisely such a function.

Secondly, the fact that these female authors have chosen familiar myths, religious stories, and characters to frame their female versions is to say that the female voice emerges through the mediation of a traditional male narrative. This is extremely effective as it uses widely known and accepted male stories to convey a previously unheard female perspective on the relationships between these characters and their effect on the female character. Again, this entrance into the symbolic and subversion of it is the beauty of these stories and the genius of the writers.

Thirdly, the universal theme of motherhood as told exclusively by women, albeit women from widely varying geographic regions, is explored not solely as it relates to the
subject formation of the child; but, moreover, as it relates to its role as a stage of psychological development for the mother when the child leaves his mother first physically and later emotionally to become an independent, adult being. Motherhood in the popular imagination evokes both personal and archetypal images, but it is generally accepted that for a mother, the empty nest syndrome is a painful, yet necessary development both for her child and also for her. This perspective on the woman’s development after the physical separation at childbirth has previously been ignored outside of the mother’s affect on the development of her child. Her psychological growth does not stop at childbirth and is not left unchallenged by the conflicting selfish wants and altruistic acts she must constantly weigh. The effects of motherhood on the mother and on her relationship with her son make the theme of motherhood from the perspective so critically important. This is a theme that is both universal and universally ignored.

The most critical juncture of the mother-son relationship is the process of birth, death, and rebirth. Using René Girard’s ideas on sacrifice in myth criticism and the premise of the feminist Julia Kristeva that every child has a matricidal mandate, one can see that childbirth is merely the physical process in which the child abandons the female womb and leaves it behind as a physical tomb. Thereafter, there is an erotic love between them which culminates in a second emotional death when the son abandons the mother emotionally and no longer sees himself as a mirror image of her. When this stage transpires, the son emerges as an independent being who finds mature love in someone other than his own mother. However, the mother is left to experience an emotional abandonment and confront her own mortality now that her function in relation to childrearing is complete. The jubilation of childbirth for the mother is transformed into the devastation of abandonment when the child emotionally separates from her. This “death” for the two as mirror images of each other in effect marks a rebirth for both. This rebirth marks the son’s entrance into adulthood and the mother’s entrance into her “golden years.”

This cycle for the mother is explored in well-known maternal characters: in Chapter One, Kali, the Hindu mother goddess is seen to be a creative and destructive mother, because she creates them only to kill them. Viewed through the lenses provided
by psychoanalysts, one understands this killing as also a motherly act in that Kali only kills her devotees in order that they be reborn into a greater life. Thus, a mother severs ties with her son in order that he be reborn as an independent being from her. A female author is able to convey the love with which Kali commits this sacrifice of her son and on behalf of him.

In Chapter Two, the relationship of Echo and Narcissus is seen to be one of mirrors. Echo is far from being a mother to Narcissus, but she does perform a maternal function as an aural mirror and erotic pair with him. Theirs is an erotic love which never leads to sexual gratification as is the case with mother and son. Echo is pained by the realization that Narcissus will and must destroy himself in order to “know [himself].” Yet she watches from the forest as he destroys his image. Hers is also a benevolent love which suffers and allows him to proceed separately from her.

In Chapter Three, Jocasta, the mother of Oedipus, speaks. She reveals the mother’s perception of this incestuous love story. In two of the modern-day versions of this ancient story, Jocasta also acknowledges her own dissatisfaction with her son when he begins to find pleasure with another female. Hers is a typical mother’s love which exhibits pride in her son’s appearance and actions and a desire to be at the center of his attention. In two of the stories, Jocasta, however, willingly sacrifices her insatiable desire for him and sadly steps aside and allows him to follow a younger woman.

The connection between these maternal figures is their strong desire to be with their sons and to receive all of their attention. Additionally, they watch as their sons (or male mirrors) begin to grow apart from them or even reject them. It is then that each of these women is left to choose a course of action: if the male is incapable of separating from her, is she willing to complete the action for him? Or, if the male willingly begins to separate from her, is she willing to step aside and allow him to leave her? In each case, she must stifle her own maternal desire for him and carry out the benevolent act of death. This action results in her confronting her greatest fear: that of her own death. Now that she is no longer needed by him, she enters old age, and she becomes aware that her life is drawing to a close. Her work as a mother is done.
APPENDIX A
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CRISTINA FERNÁNDEZ CUBAS

1980 *Mi hermana Elba* (short stories)
1982 *El vendedor de sombras* (short story)
1982 “Omar, amor” in *Doce relatos de mujeres* (short story)
1983 *Los altillos de Brumal* (short stories)
1985 *El año de Gracia* (novel)
1990 *El ángulo del horror* (short stories)
1994 *Calamito* (guide)
1994 *Con Agatha en Istambul* (short stories)
1994 “La mujer de verde” in *Vidas de mujeres* (short story)
1996 *Segundo bachillerato* in *Relatos de mujeres* (short story)
1995 *El columpio* (novel)
1997 *Drácula de Bram Stoker, un centenario: vampiros – banipiroak* (essay)
1998 *Hermanas de sangre* (theater)
1998 *Altillos de Brumal en el Hemisferio* (short stories)
2001 “El ángulo del horror” in *Antología: los mejores relatos fantásticos de habla hispana* (serie roja) (short story)
2002 *Cosas que ya no existen* (Palabra En El Tiempo, 296) (novel)
APPENDIX B
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF LUISA VALENZUELA

1957 “Ciudad ajena” (short story)
1966 *Hay que sonreír* (novel)
1967 *Los Heréticos* (short stories)
1972 *El gato eficaz* (novel)
1975 *Aquí pasan cosas raras* (short stories)
1976 *Claara* (13 short stories & novel)
1977 *Como en la guerra* (novel)
1977 *Who he Searches* (novel)
1980 *Libro que no muerde* (short stories)
1982 *Cambio de armas* (short stories)
1983 *Cola de lagartija* (novel)
1983 *Donde viven las águilas* (short stories)
1987 *He Who Searches* (novel)
1988 *Open Door* (short stories)
1990 *Novela negra con argentinos* (novel)
1990 *Realidad nacional desde la cama* (novel)
1992 *Ergo: The Bumbershoot Literary Magazine* (w/Paley & Troupe)
1992 *The Censors* (short stories)
1993 *Simetrías* (short stories)
1995 *Bedside Manners* (w/Costa) (short stories)
1998 *Antología personal* (recompliation)
1999 *Cuentos completos y uno más* (137 short stories)
2001  *Peligrosas palabras*  (essays)
2001  “Los deseos oscuros y los otros” in *Letras Femeninas*  (poetry)
2002  *Los deseo oscuros y los otros: cuadernos de New York*  (memoires)
2002  *La travesía (la otra orilla)*  (novel)
2003  *El placer rebelde: antología general*  (novel)
    
    *El mañana* unedited  (novel)
APPENDIX C
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF HERMINIA PAZ

1992  *Los muertos no se resignan*  (short stories)
APPENDIX D
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CRISTINA PERI ROSSI

Uruguayan period

1963  Viviendo  (short stories)
1968  Los museos abandonados  (short stories)
1969  El libro de mis primos  (novel)
1970  Indicios pánicos  (short stories & poetry)
1971  Evohé  (poetry)

Spanish Exile Period

1975  Descripción de un naufragio  (poetry)
1976  La tarde del dinosaurio  (short stories)
1976  Diáspora  (poetry)
1979  Lingüística general  (poetry)
1980  La rebelión de los niños  (short stories)
1983  Europa después de la lluvia  (poetry)
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<td>1983</td>
<td><em>El museo de los esfuerzos inútiles</em></td>
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<td>1983</td>
<td><em>El corredor tropieza</em></td>
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<td>1984</td>
<td><em>La nave de los locos</em></td>
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<td>1984</td>
<td><em>Cristina Peri Rossi</em></td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td><em>Una pasión prohibida</em></td>
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<td><em>Europa después de la lluvia</em></td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Solitario de amor</em></td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Cosmoagonías</em></td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td><em>Babel bárbara</em></td>
<td>(short stories and poetry)</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td><em>Fantasías eróticas</em></td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td><em>Acerca de la escritura</em></td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td><em>La última noche de Dostoievski</em></td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td><em>La ciudad de Luzbel y otros relatos</em></td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Cosmos agonías</em></td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Otra vez Eros</em></td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>“Primer amor” in <em>Madres e hijas</em></td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td><em>Aquella noche</em></td>
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<td><em>Poemas de amor y desamor</em></td>
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<td><em>Las musas inquietantes</em></td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td><em>El amor es una droga dura</em></td>
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1986  Piel adentro  (short stories)
1989  Sueño recurrente  (short stories)
1991  “One Minute” in *When new flowers bloomed: short stories by women writers from Costa Rica and Panama*  (short story)
1991  “I’ll Eat the Land” in *When new flowers bloomed: short stories by women writers from Costa Rica and Panama*  (short story)
2000  Género, comunicación y sociedad  (essays)
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<td><em>Los que vieron la zarza</em></td>
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<td>“Diálogo sobre la vida y la muerte”</td>
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<td><em>Las peras del mal</em></td>
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<td><em>Los bordes de lo real</em></td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td><em>La crueldad de la vida</em></td>
<td>(short stories)</td>
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APPENDIX G
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ALEJANDRA BASUALTO

1970  *Los ecos del sol*  (poetry)
1983  *El agua que nos cerca*  (poetry)
1988  *La mujer de yeso*  (short stories)
1990  *Territorio exclusivo*  (short stories)
1993  *Las malamadas*  (poetry)
1994  *Descato al bolero*  (short stories)
1996  *Altovalsol y uno bilingüe: Guayacán and other poems*  (poetry)
1999  *Exclusive Territory and Other Stories*  (short stories)
2000  *Casa de citas*  (poetry)
2000  “Yocasta” online  (short story)
1995  “Réquiem para unas manos” online  (short story)
1995  “A requiem for hands” in *What is secret : stories by Chilean women*  (short story)
APPENDIX H
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ANGELINA MUÑIZ-HUBERMAN

1972  Morada interior  (novel)
1977  Tierra adentro  (novel)
1982  Vilano al viento: poemas de amor y del exilio  (poetry)
1984  Hacia Malinalco still unedited  (novel)
1985  Huerto cerrado, huerto sellado  (short stories)
1988  De magias y prodigios: Trasmutaciones  (short stories)
1989  La guerra del unicornio  (novel)
1989  La lengua florida: Antología sefardí  (essays)
1990  El libro de Miriam y Primicias  (poetry & short stories)
1991  Serpientes y escaleras  (short stories)
1991  De cuerpo entero  (novel)
1991  El juego de escribir  (autobiography)
1992  El ojo de la creación  (poetry)
1992  Narrativa relativa: antología personal  (recompilation of stories)
1992  Dulcinea encantada  (novel)
   El arte de la memoria unedited  (novel)
1993  Las raíces y las ramas  (essays)
1995  Castillos en la tierra: (seudomemorias)  (novel)
1995  La memoria del aire  (poetry)
1997  El mercader de Tudela  (poetry)
1997  El trazo y el vuelo  (poetry)
1997  Las confidentes  (novel)
1998  *Sal en el rostro*  (poetry)

1998  “In the Name of His Name” in *Oxford Book of Jewish Stories*  (short story)

1999  *Conato de extranjera*  (poetry)

2001  “Hija pródiga / Prodigal Daughter” in *Miriam’s Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets*  (poetry)

2001  “Manuscrito / Manuscript” in *Miriam’s Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets*  (poetry)

2001  “Obsesión / Obsession” in *Miriam’s Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets*  (poetry)

2001  “Los cabalistas / The Cabalists” in *Miriam’s Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets*  (poetry)

2001  “Santuario / Sanctuary” in *Miriam’s Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets*  (poetry)

2001  “Ablución / Ablution” in *Miriam’s Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets*  (poetry)

2001  “El circulo de golem / The Circle of Golem” in *Miriam’s Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets*  (poetry)

2001  “El ojo de la creación / The Eye of Creation” in *Miriam’s Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets*  (poetry)

2001  “La cascada de la muerte / Cascades of Death” in *Miriam’s Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets*  (poetry)

2001  “The towere of Gallipoli” in *With Signs and Wonders: an International Anthology of Jewish Fabulous Fiction*  (short story)
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Introduction


“Omar, amor” by Cristina Fernández Cubas (Spain)


“Viaje” by Luisa Valenzuela (Argentina)


“Ayer” by Herminia Paz (Spain)


“Historia de amor” by Cristina Peri Rossi (Spain by way of Uruguay)


“*Piel adentro*” by Griselda López (Panama)

*Bible.* King James Version.


“Yokasta” by Liliana Heker (Argentina)


“Yocasta” by Alejandra Basualto (Chile)


“Yocasta confiesa” by Angelina Muñiz-Huberman (Mexico)


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer Colón grew up almost entirely outside of the United States. She has traveled extensively in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, England, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, (the former) Soviet Union, Spain, Turkey, and the United States and has lived in several of these countries for extended periods.

In 1990, she came to the United States to attend college at the University of West Florida in Pensacola where she earned three Bachelor of Arts degrees with specializations in Spanish, French, Communication Arts, and Education. In 1994, she began teaching high school, and in 1995 she began studies abroad through California State University, Sacramento to earn a Master of Arts in Spanish in 1998. In the 1999/2000 school year she completed all coursework for a doctorate at The Florida State University in Tallahassee. Beginning in 2001, Jennifer participated in professional conferences each year including The Mid-America Conference on Hispanic Literatures (MCHL), The Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference (MFLIC), The Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association (RMMLA), and The South Atlantic Modern Languages Association (SAMLA). She also belongs to several professional organizations.

Jennifer Colón taught French and Spanish during her master’s and doctoral studies at both the high school and college levels. She taught as a Lecturer in Spanish at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland and as a Visiting Assistant Professor in Hispanic Studies at the College of Charleston in South Carolina while presenting her
research at professional conferences, and writing this dissertation on contemporary Hispanic short fiction by women.

Currently, she lives with her husband, Daniel, and her two American Bulldogs, Jake and Belle.