

PERIPHERAL VISIONS: SPANISH WOMEN'S POETRY
OF THE 1980S AND 1990S

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the use of vision (the sense of sight) and visuality (social seeing) in four women poets of the 1980s and 1990s in Spain: Ana Rossetti, Maria-Mercè Marçal, Aurora Luque, and Montserrat Abelló. All four combine the use of vision and visuality with questions of gender performance and identity as a challenge to normative and culturally constructed gender(ed) behavior. The very fact that the majority of the lyric voices in their poems does not have a defined gender, as many of the people that they view do not, permits them to move from subjectivation to subjectification. Through the manifestation of gender “difference,” the various lyric voices leave behind their status as marginalized members of Western gendered culture. Although not all of the lyric voices are ungendered or ambiguously gendered, sufficient questions of, and challenges to normative gendered behavior exist to warrant including these four poets in the same study, despite their ostensible differences.

The theoretical framework for this study focuses on Freudian ideas of voyeurism and exhibitionism as well as pleasurable and unpleasurable looking (scopophilia and scopophobia), Foucauldian ideas of power, and Lacanian ideas of the mirror stage and subjectivity. The major flaw with all three when applying them to the poetic texts is that they all base their ideas on the normative man/woman binary. This by extension implies the subjection of the lyric voices, and the people and objects that they view, to what Judith

Butler calls the heterosexual matrix. This idea assumes the “natural” existence of two genders, men and women, with the sexual relationships between them the only and “natural” option. This leaves out all other manifestations of gender as non-existent or deviant at the very least.

Despite the distinctions between their works, due to writing at different times, with different approaches, and also from different cultural experiences (Rossetti and Luque write in Spanish, Marçal and Abelló write in Catalan), all four demonstrate the possibility of a world, literary or otherwise, in which normative gender(ed) performance can and should be a concept of the past.

Dedicated to Lannie, MJ, Kiddo, and El Mejor Uno

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVES AND POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PROJECT

Many scholars have shown that women writers in Spain have a rich literary tradition that has existed, and continues to exist, despite the predominance of studies of male authors in all time periods. Nevertheless, a lacuna exists in studies of women's poetry when compared to the quantity of studies of their male counterparts in both Spanish and Catalan. Studies of poetry by women from the Golden Age up to and including the 1975 transition to democracy are readily available for Spanish-language writers. However, they are limited to a select group of poets: Rosalía de Castro, Carmen Conde, Gloria Fuertes, María Victoria Atencia, Clara Janés, and Ana Rossetti. The quantity is not nearly so abundant in the arena of Catalan letters. Maria-Mercè Marçal and Marta Pessarrodona are the two women poets consistently included in poetry anthologies. Some of the women poets who have been included in the Spanish canon have ties to autonomous communities, as in the case of Castro who is linked to Galicia. Her situation notwithstanding, the norm is that women poets are victims of a double-edged sword, especially if they do not write in Spanish. As Kathleen McNerney has stated, they are double minorities: they are not only women, but women from the periphery. The majority

of women poets have been relegated to secondary status in poetry regardless of their association with the Autonomous Communities. This is due to the earlier importance of “women’s themes” such as motherhood, childbirth and rearing, and domestic chores. Women suffer further separation if they are from the periphery. Vinyet Panyella has extended McNerney’s idea to that of triple minority status: by gender, nation, and through writing poetry, a marginalized genre whether written by a man or a woman (“Amb” 17). This dissertation, which includes women poets who write in Spanish and Catalan, hopes to close the gap between writers of the Peninsula who choose to write in different languages. Despite the language and cultural difference(s), these poets seem to have a shared goal: present in their poetry is the search for ungendered identity and self-knowledge effected through vision (sight). Because all see, the use of sight in their poetry allows commonalities to be forged between the two linguistic and national groups while simultaneously encouraging their differences and distinct approaches to emerge.

Using Freudian ideas about scopophilia (voyeurism and exhibitionism as pleasureable looking) and scopophobia (shame in looking or being observed), Foucauldian ideas of power, and Lacanian ideas about the gaze and the mirror phase, I will move to a discussion of identity formation and subject positions in the poems of Ana Rossetti, Maria-Mercè Marçal, Aurora Luque, and Montserrat Abelló. We live in a digital age with an abundance of visual stimuli. There is unlimited access to the visual through television and cable channels, cinema, videos, DVDs, games, magazines, the internet. Not all of these technologies existed when Rossetti, Luque, Marçal, and Abelló began to write, but seeing has always been a way to connect in a world that becomes more disconnected daily. Vision has been examined since Antiquity and continues to be of interest to many

scholars across disciplines. Vision and visuality are the means through which the lyric voices in these poets are able to come to a conclusion about their identity as women in some cases, and as non-gendered people in others.

The ideas on vision and visuality that will be presented in the dissertation are not in themselves new, but their application to Spanish women poets is. In the past two decades, there have been numerous studies on visual culture, a field that offers various and broad definitions. The common thread among most is the presence of an object that is meant to be looked at. These “objects” can be, but are not limited to, paintings, photographs, advertisements, television, and film. For an object to be seen, the presence of someone to do the looking is indispensable. Literature is often not included in the discussion of visual culture unless the works in question are ekphrastic in nature. Although literature is visual in that the reader sees the words on the page (this of course would be different for non-sighted readers), this is little considered by the majority of visual culture theorists.¹ Literature does, however, create experiences of space that are as real-seeming as actual seen events, places, people, and objects, even though these experiences are conveyed through language and not instantaneously perceived through real eyes (Mitchell, Showing 95). What I propose here is a further broadening of the definition(s) of visual culture to include the literary use of vision (sight) in the poetry of the four poets previously mentioned. What and who the lyric voices see, how they see,

¹ A recent issue of the PMLA has a number of articles that deal with the similarities in the study of the visual and the literary. See Bal “Figuration,” Caws, and Siebers.

and how explicit or implicit textual and cultural others see them, are all integral themes found in their works and lead to the speakers' conception of self.²

All of the poets are known in poetic circles, some more than others. However, they have all been anthologized. The bulk of their work has been published since the 1980s so they potentially offer a different view from that of poets who published under Franco. Although they are not the only poets who treat the topic of vision, it is important in their work, and the approach taken here is new and innovative. Based on my readings, Rosset, Luque, Marçal, and Abelló are the poets who seem most openly concerned with the visual and visual culture. However, that is not to say that others are not. This dissertation does not attempt to offer the last word on the subject of vision and visibility in women's poetry in Spain, but rather it offers a beginning that I hope will lead others to examine these and other issues more in depth and with different authors. The discussion of vision and visibility however, is merely the method applied to the texts in an attempt to answer the question of difference(s) or lack thereof in gender in these four poets. Moreover, the category "woman poet" becomes slightly problematic when their work focuses on the destruction of the established man/woman gender binary.

The inclusion of these four poets will enhance the extant body of studies about them and will shed more light on several women poets who deserve greater attention. My dissertation also attempts to close the gap between Spanish writers who choose to write in different languages. All four poets resist gendered practices of looking and in so doing, attempt to create a space for ungendered identity. By "ungendered" I refer to the choice not to self-define as a man or woman although the categories "man" and "woman" are not

² Sight is not the only sense treated in their poetry, touch and hearing are also present, but sight is a major avenue taken toward knowledge of the textual self.

necessarily excluded from the poetic texts. By opening up the field of gender in their poetry, these women are simultaneously advocating for particularity in universality. To my knowledge there is no large-scale study that combines the application of vision (sight) and visuality to late twentieth-century Spanish (the country as a political entity, not a linguistic unit) poetic texts written by women, combined with ideas of the deconstruction of gender performance and the culturally dominant idea of “woman” toward the formation of a new and often genderless identity. Although ungendered practice is not incorporated into the mainstream, this is meant as a point of departure for devising at the very least, new vocabulary(ies) and approach(es) to the question(s) of gender(s) in contemporary Western culture.

POETRY BY WOMEN IN SPAIN

Poetry written by women in Spain has a long history reaching as far back as the *jarchas* and extending to the present day. Most poets who are women were dubbed *poetisas* and placed into the group of “feminine poets” because of the “feminine” themes about which they wrote: nature, the domestic sphere, emotions. This of course, implied that they were considered inferior to their male counterparts and were excluded from the canon in most instances based on this assumed inferiority.³ Men wrote about the “worthy” topics of mind and spirit while women wrote about the not-so-lofty body (Bellver, “Hands” 31). Women had a “peripheral appearance” for the majority of the 20th century

³ “La crítica dominante no sólo peca de la omisión, sino también de desprestigiar sistemáticamente la poesía de la mujer. Tal vez la evidencia más destacada de esta actitud es el hecho de que el mejor alarde que se podía dar a un libro de una poeta era que la obra no parecía ser escrita por mujer” (Ugalde, “Subjetividad” 513).

but this began to change with the social unrest and political upheaval that would take place shortly before and after Franco's death (Bellver, "From" 206).⁴ Women poets during this time began to question the traditional roles that had been defined for them for so many years.⁵ During the *Novísimo* movement that centered on language and the dialogue between the public and private, women poets found new ground (Benegas "Estudio" 52). The private, a woman writer's traditional domain, became something of public interest and women found a renewed avenue through which to express themselves. The 1980s was the period of *la movida*, a cultural phenomenon which opened up all modes of expression that were repressed during the Franco regime. During this time, topics that were not previously part of the lyric realm were now permitted. Any and all experiences were valid and the important and distinct element here is that those experiences were named. Women poets wrote about the body in new ways as well as a non-universal and fluid subject, in an identity process that moved from object to subject.⁶ Women poets broke free from the stereotypes that defined them for so long and in which they no longer recognized themselves. Unlike their predecessors, they lived in an era in which they were permitted to do so more openly.⁷

⁴ This "peripheral existence" of which Bellver speaks refers to writers who produced in Spanish. It excludes those who wrote in other languages, but it can be assumed that they had an even more pronounced "peripheral existence" because of their double or triple minority status.

⁵ This rebellious spirit did manifest itself in many women poets much earlier than the 1960s, but it was the exception, not the norm for poets who were women. Rosalía de Castro questioned the traditional women of the 19th century, Carmen Conde began to reinterpret myths in the post war period, and Angela Figuera questioned traditional concepts of maternity (Benegas, "Estudio" 33-44). Women during the 1920s and 1930s were overshadowed by the men who wrote at the time.

⁶ For Noni Benegas, this is the most interesting characteristic of contemporary women's poetry (García 13).

⁷ Women poets of the 1990s continue this tradition of rupture established by those from the 1980s. There is also more repetition, colloquial language, fragmentation, and illogical changes (Benegas, "Estudio" 80-1).

The history of poetry by women written in Catalan is much the same as elsewhere. Before the 20th century, Catalan literary history is much more fragmented than its Spanish (language) counterpart. Catalan poetry was at its apogee in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance with Ramon Llull and Ausias March. After these authors, there is virtual silence in Catalan letters.⁸ The resurgence occurred during the *Renaixença*, a late 19th century cultural movement intended partly to recuperate the lost, but rich, Catalan literary tradition.⁹

There are very few women participants in the *Renaixença* and after. In fact, very few Catalan women poets were known before Maria-Mercè Marçal's study on Clementina Arderiu (1889-1976).¹⁰ Two other woman poets who figure into the Catalan poetic scene are Maria Antònia Salvà (1866-1958) and Rosa Leveroni (1910-1985). With the exception of these three women, women poets of the 1970s and 1980s virtually had no women writers to use as inspiration. In fact, Marçal herself cites men poets as the major influences on her poetry (Sabadell, "Allà" 15). The exclusion of women Catalan-language poets from the canon parallels that of women Spanish-language poets. Àlex Susanna, himself a well-known poet, named the five most influential poets in the Catalan language, none of whom are women: Josep Carner, J.V. Foix, Guerau de Liost, Carles Riba, and Salvador Espriu (263).

The visibility and importance of women Catalan-language poets began to change in the 1970s and 1980s much the same way that it did for their Spanish-speaking

⁸ Felipe V prohibited the use of Catalan in public speaking or in written texts with the Decreto de Neuva Planta (Goytisolo 10).

⁹ Bonaventura Carles Aribau is cited as the father of the *Renaixença* with his poem "La pàtria." Other important figures were Jacint Verdaguer, Àngel Guimerà, and Joan Maragall (Goytisolo 10).

¹⁰ See Marçal's introduction to Arderiu's *Contraclaror: Antologia poètica*.

contemporaries. The poetic movements in the 1970s and 1980s in Catalonia are very similar to those in Castile. Women also have the same problems with being considered “feminine poets” or *poetisas*. Patricia Boehne states that Catalan-language women poets write about love and a “personal viewpoint” but that they “can certainly choose and articulate the same topics as male poets” (33).¹¹ Aside from being extremely sexist, this comment does not place the personal viewpoint or the discussion of love into a larger context. It is much the same as in the case of the Spanish-language poets. These authors were and are free to express things that were not previously options for them. The private was now appropriate and love was discussed on terms of equality instead of the woman-as-object-man-as-subject rubric of the past. Although there may have been an “orfandad literària materna” for poets like Marçal and Abelló, those that come after them have many more examples of women poets from whom to seek inspiration (Marçal, “Diferencia” 178).¹²

For some, the biology and gender of the author must be maintained and known. This makes criticism of the works easier since one can utilize notions of gender to pinpoint a woman writer’s “contradictory relationship with dominant literary tradition” as well as identify “the evolution of women’s poetry” and “the quest for identity and autonomous self-definition” (Collopy-O’Donnell 6). Of course one problem with this approach is that one operates on the assumption that all women experience life the same way; it does not account for differences within gender definitions. In the poets of the

¹¹ Interestingly, when Boehne talks of male poets that include the domestic sphere and the family in their texts they are not considered to have a “personal viewpoint.” That characteristic appears to be exclusively, and pejoratively, female.

¹² Concha García calls this “angustia de autoría” (13). With virtually no precursors, until recently no one had been able to legitimize women’s writing the way that men’s had been.

1980s and 1990s there is gender fluidity in the lyric subject in poetry written by women as evidenced by the texts studied here. In reality no monolith named “women’s poetry” exists just as there is no such thing for male poets. Unfortunately the tendency is still to group all women poets together because of shared essential biology and assumed shared experience as women, but “[e]l sujeto lírico no está fijado por las hormonas” (Parreño 90). It is a dynamic creation, and as such it will change with the various cultural and social experiences that each poet has or had as a human being. The texts themselves most definitely reflect the differences in those experiences.

Women poets on the whole, whether they produced their works in Spanish or Catalan have been, and continue to be, judged by questionable “*criteris de qualitat*” (Panyella, “Amb” 15). This is one possible reason for their (un)conscious decision in many cases to write a genderless or ungendered lyric subject. The creation of female characters and personae is one characteristic that can distinguish women’s writing from men’s. However, writing that has no implicit gender is just writing and does not necessarily become a question of the author’s gender. This is what the four poets in this study undertake.

The majority of the poets included in this study have been all but ignored critically, perhaps because of their assumed inferior status as poets, although those who write in Spanish have appeared in anthologies of poetry written by women as early as 1985 (Buenaventura, *Las diosas blancas: antología de la joven poesía española escrita por mujeres*). It is important to note that despite the apparent sisterhood in anthologizing women poets, the Catalan writers in this dissertation, as well as others, have been excluded from anthologies of what is considered “Spanish women’s poetry,” and appear

rather in anthologies of poets who write in Catalan. Two recent anthologies of this sort were published in Barcelona in 1999.¹³ Although some women certainly have been included in general anthologies of Spanish poetry, their numbers are not representative of the women who write and publish poetry. This phenomenon occurs with both Spanish and Catalan-language poets.¹⁴ Feminist criticism seems to be a bit more advanced in uniting writers of the periphery and center. Lisa Vollendorf's Recovering Spain's Feminist Tradition includes three essays concerning Catalan language writers but, according to Catherine Bellver, unfortunately overlooks writers of the other linguistically distinct autonomous regions. Still, despite "its implicit preferences" it offers "a coherent and cohesive discussion" (Review, 258).

Many articles have been written on Ana Rossetti's poetry: Ferradàns, Escaja, Fajardo, Newton, Sarabia, Pasero, and Wilcox are but a few scholars who have studied her writing. The focus of the majority of them has been on eroticism in her poetry as well as erotic looking. She has been called the great voyeuse of universal poetry by Ramón Buenaventura (60), and literary critics have not overlooked this aspect of her work. Another facet of the visual in her poetry is the use of visual culture. Carmela Ferradàns has recently published an article on the use of publicity and commodity culture in her poetry through a Calvin Klein advertisement for men's underwear.

Of the remaining poets in the study, Maria-Mercè Marçal is the only one who has critical articles published about her poetry. She is considered the great Catalan-language

¹³ Contemporànies: Antologia de poetes dels països catalans edited by Vinyet Panyella and Paisatge emergent: Trenta poetes catalanes del segle XX edited by Montserrat Abelló, Neus Aguado, Lluïsa Julià, and Maria-Mercè Marçal. See bibliography for complete publication information.

¹⁴ See Panyella "Amb versos" (12-14) for an extensive list of recent general poetic anthologies and the percentage of women included in them.

feminist poet and the burgeoning field of Catalan literary studies has included her writing. She was named writer of the month by the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes in January 1995 attesting to the esteem in which her work is held in Catalonia. An article on her feminist voice is found in the aforementioned volume edited by Vollendorf.

Aurora Luque and Montserrat Abelló have been anthologized many times, but little to no critical writing on their work exists. Luque has had small articles and reviews published about her work. She has also had some critical attention in the introductions to her various books of poetry although those are by no means exhaustive nor extensive studies. Abelló was included in “Punt de lectura”, a collection of twelve contemporary authors promoted by the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes in 1998. There are also some interviews that have appeared in Serra d’or and numerous book reviews have been published in the Catalan-language journals and press.¹⁵ Virtually the only critical writing that has been done on her poetry is the introductions to her various books.

Much has been written on ways of looking and literature and the list is extensive. Most of the work on the topic focuses on Victorian visuality and seeing in French, German, and English literature. With regard to Spanish literature, the topic of vision and visuality has received little attention. What does exist spans many time periods, literary movements, and genres. Peter A. Bly published a book-length study on vision and the visual arts in Galdós in which he examines references to real or imagined art in his novels and newspaper articles (“interart”) as well as visual arts vocabulary that appears in Galdós’s writings. Jo Labanyi, also focusing on Galdós, talks of blurred vision in La de

¹⁵ See Nadal “Montserrat” and Panyella “Montserrat” for interviews. See Neus Aguado “Hoguera” and “Montserrat,” Alzamora, Anglada, Castillo, Cinta Montagut, Clos, Farrés, Julià “Tria,” Llorca, and Parcerisas for reviews.

Bringas as a reflection of the effects of lack of framing in realist literature. Joyce Tolliver looks at the power of the gaze in turning women into tradable commodities in “La mirada” a story by Emilia Pardo Bazán. A recently published book by James F. Burke (2000) on sight and hearing in La Celestina investigates man’s link to the surrounding world through the senses. In the twentieth century arena, articles about vision and the gaze in José Angel Valente, Rosa Chacel, Carmen Laforet, and Montserrat Roig have been published. The last three deal with women looking and how that looking affects characters’ relationships with others, whether they are based on looking that implies power (for example between men and women) or a reciprocal gaze (that of mother and child) and their self-identity.

Early theoretical work done on women and looking focuses mainly on women taking the “masculine position” when they look. Sight historically is gendered male: the man is the subject who views, the woman is the object to be viewed. Mary Ann Doane, E. Ann Kaplan, Laura Mulvey, and Linda Williams provided ground-breaking ideas on women and looking in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but it seems that not much has been done to dismantle the idea of gendered looking. Most critical writers continue applying ideas of role reversal and appropriation of the masculine, patriarchal position when looking or gazing women are involved.

The literature on the mechanics and history of vision and looking is vast. Freud, Foucault, and Lacan are all well-known for their discussions on voyeurism and exhibitionism, power and the panoptic gaze, and the mirror phase and the gaze. Martin Jay has written an extensive study on the importance of ocularcentrism in Western thought and culture in what he calls “scopic regimes of modernity.” Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought, Jay’s seminal work on

vision in French thought, gives a general visual history up to and including Descartes and his “perspectivalist scopic regime” (166). From there he discusses the importance not only of vision for modern philosophy, but of bypassing sight in order to privilege the discussion of the other senses. In his conclusion however, he concedes that sight can provide us insights that a god would envy (594). Jay, in collaboration with Teresa Brennan, has also edited a volume on the history of sight from the Greeks to the present. Jonathan Crary, one of the foremost visual historians, in his Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century discusses visual devices of the nineteenth century, such as the camera, that brought modernity, and consequently, post-modernity, into the visual age.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Vision and Visuality

“How do we *see*? How do we attribute meaning to what we see?” (de Lauretis, Alice 39 original emphasis). The sense of sight and how the brain interprets visual stimuli have been topics of interest for thinkers since Antiquity. From characters in the Odyssey and the Iliad to political life and citizens as actors and the observed in the theater of the polis, the importance of vision was evident in Greek letters and society (Goldhill 19). For the Greeks, the eye was the place where light was drawn in (intromission) and also emitted (extromission). Sight was the privileged sense for the Greeks and vision was seen as the inner eye of the mind (Jay, Downcast 27).

Referring to Plato’s cave allegory and human knowledge through vision, Kaja Silverman states that we are the ones who decide if the world is going to come into Being

through our sight: “We bring things into the light by looking in the strongest and most important sense of the word. We conceal them when we fail to look in this way: when we neglect to exercise the visual agency with which our subjectivity entrusts us” (World 7). If there is no look effected, then the ungendered status of the speakers and/or objects is overlooked. The same goes for the poems in which there is an ungendered speaker who may or may not look at an ungendered person/object. If this desire in the look is not discussed, then it is as if that type of looking, looking that may break barriers or cause discomfort through challenging norms, does not exist either.

Vision and the acknowledgment of its importance are evident in the Bible as well, when Adam and Eve cover themselves to escape the shame they feel at having others look upon their nakedness. During the Middle Ages, however, sight was relegated to third place on the list of most important senses: hearing and touch were numbers one and two respectively (Jay Downcast 35).¹⁶ The attitudes toward the importance of sight changed as religious thinkers came to realize that visual means were an excellent and necessary way to educate the illiterate masses in the ways of a good Christian life. As knowledge and science progressed, thinkers were able to theorize the mechanics of vision in ways that were not available to earlier philosophers, scientists, and artists. Leon Battista Alberti and his ideas on perspective in art, that there is one vantage point at the apex of an imaginary triangle or pyramid from which to get a true, natural view, changed the medieval idea of many vantage points of viewing. Both René Descartes and John Locke questioned the

¹⁶ Donald Lowe rates the importance of the senses according to time period. In the Middle Ages hearing and touch were numbers one and two; in the Renaissance sight was the most important because of the advent of perspective; in estate society sight continues because of the representation in space; bourgeois society saw the broadening of the importance of sight through technology (cameras, etc.); the early 20th century saw the “extrapolation of sight and sound” due to consumer and “electronic culture” (qtd in Walker 20).

mechanics of the eye as well as the true meaning of sight as a means of understanding the world. The connection between light and knowledge maintained sight as the privileged sense during the Enlightenment although the majority of German thinkers privileged “aural over visual experience” (Jay, Downcast 265).¹⁷ Throughout the nineteenth century, the invention of many optical tools (the camera, stereoscopes, kaleidoscopes) and the continued use of and fascination with optical devices from earlier centuries (camera obscura, microscope, telescope), reinforced sight as the noblest of senses. Sight has continued to be of utmost importance in the visual arts of the modern and contemporary periods, with artists searching for new ways to express their interpretations of the reality in which they live(d).

Although vision has been privileged throughout history, it is important to make the distinction between vision and visuality. Vision, or sight, is the “physical/physiological process in which light impacts upon the eyes” whereas visuality is defined as “vision socialized” (Walker 22).¹⁸ Those who look are not just eyes, but beings with histories and bodies. What we see, the way we see it and consequently how we understand it, fall under the rubric of visuality which according to Martin Jay, has replaced “ ‘vision’ per se as the central concern of scholars in many different disciplines” (“Scopic” 3). Vision and visuality are used then, to create and question identity through gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and other types of difference (Mirzoeff “Subject” 10). Instead of adhering to a unified way of seeing, the viewing or observing subject breaks from this supposed unity to forge a new form of viewing. Those who look, as well as those who are looked at, have a certain

¹⁷ This was true from the Reformation on. Later, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Adorno found “the quintessential art form” in music instead painting (Jay, Downcast 265).

¹⁸ See also Norman Bryson’s article “The Gaze in the Extended Field.”

“visual subjectivity”: they not only recognize that they are seen, but they see themselves being seen (Mirzoeff “Subject” 10). This affords the looker and the looked at with an insight into their identity that would not be feasible without the articulation of difference(s) from the visual norm. The question of who is seen and who is not seen must be addressed in order to fully understand the journey to identity through vision in the poets included in this study. Looking is an act of choice that establishes our place in the world surrounding us (Berger 8, 7). But the question of visibility is: “How do certain people, places, things enter into spaces of representation, which spaces do they enter, and why?” (Pollock, “Feminism” 13). What does being in an assumed natural and compulsory heterosexual space do to those that do not fit into the overall idea of the heterosexual dichotomy? Are they really in that heterosexual space or are they forging new spaces for themselves? If so, what are they? The four poets in the proposed dissertation exercise their agency, and by choosing what and whom to look at and how to interpret what they see, they are in effect challenging their place in society and culture while also resisting the ideologies with which they are faced. They are in the midst of power plays between observers and the observed. It is through this questioning of and struggle with patriarchal power that the lyric voices are able to question their identity and that of others and redefine themselves in new cultural and non-phallogocentric terms that are, many times, genderless.¹⁹

¹⁹ Teresa L. Ebert defines patriarchy as “the organization and division of all practices and signification in culture in terms of gender and the privileging of one gender over the other, giving males control over female sexuality, fertility, and labor” (19). Although the definition is workable, the one shortcoming is the assumption that there are only two genders: male and female. Not only does the patriarchy control female “sexuality, fertility, and labor” but it also controls all other aspects of the female and differently gendered that do not fit the “natural” male/female binary.

“Phallogocentrism” is a term coined by Martin Jay that combines the terms “phallocentrism” (phallus-centered) and “ocularcentrism” (eye (look)-centered). For Jay it describes the “French feminist

Sight and visibility have many components; it is not simply a question of looking at someone or something. In order to discuss the use of sight and visibility in the texts studied, it is necessary to revisit some well-known theories about how sight and the cultural constructs surrounding it are used.

1.2 Scopophilia and Scopophobia

In his essay “The Sexual Aberrations,” Sigmund Freud introduces the importance of the scopic drive, dividing it into two components: voyeurism and exhibitionism.²⁰ Operating on the masculine/feminine, active/passive binaries, Freud considers voyeurism to be an active perversion and exhibitionism to be a passive one (“Sexual” 23). From his discussion of the libido as being either active and masculine or passive and feminine, the active/passive dichotomy can be extended to cover voyeurism and exhibitionism respectively (“Transformations” 85). This basis is important to keep in mind since the libido, activity, and passivity are essential to the discussion of voyeurism, exhibitionism, and the challenge to traditional roles in viewing. Although the male/female and masculine/feminine binaries in looking are questioned in many poetic texts (it is maintained in others), the binaries must be understood in order to move beyond the male/female and masculine/feminine distinctions. Both of these ways of looking and being looked at place the observer and the observed under what Freud called, scopophilia,

defense” of the idea of “difference” used to upset the effects of male centered looking (Downcast 494). The term is a play on Derrida’s “logocentrism” (word-centered) which is consequently phonocentric (sound or speech-centered). Derrida thought that speech was too privileged in our society and that it could be displaced by “*différance*,” the deferral and indeterminacy of meaning when one reads words on a page.

²⁰ Not only does Freud base his ideas of voyeurism and exhibitionism on vision, other ideas of gender are based on the visual. When young children recognize their difference from one another, namely the boy recognizes that he has a penis and that the girl does not and vice versa, they assume their “natural” gender role through vision (Hope 44). See also Jacqueline Rose (227).

or pleasure in looking (“Sexual” 23). The voyeur derives his pleasure from looking at someone who does not know she is being watched. It is no accident that the word “voyeur” is in the masculine form, since this branch of scopophilia has long been considered masculine and active. This idea of course, is out-dated and preposterous since active and/or erotic looking is by no means the exclusive domain of men. E. Ann Kaplan concurs with Freud’s idea calling voyeurism a “male [operation]” (129). The exhibitionist then is undoubtedly a woman since women have a “traditional exhibitionist role” in their “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” (Mulvey “Pleasure” 442), although in practice neither voyeurism nor exhibitionism have exclusive claims on the gender of the observer or the observed. The (woman) exhibitionist on the other hand, enjoys being looked at. This is consistent with the idea of women as vain creatures, concerned with their looks and how others perceive them. This vanity offers women as a commodity for men: they offer themselves for his scopophilic and other pleasure(s). Given that women are such vain creatures, they are very pleased when what they offer to men (themselves) is looked at.

While ground-breaking at the time, these ideas now appear limiting as the critical discussion of sexuality(ies) and gender(s) expands. What is important to extract from Kaplan and Mulvey’s ideas, as well as those of Freud, is that someone derives pleasure in looking. The viewing subject sees another and the viewed becomes objectified by the looker for her/his pleasure. This normally causes some discomfort for the person objectified. If an ungendered person, or a differently gendered person is objectified by the gaze, it is due to their being viewed as distinct from the gendered cultural norm. This however, may erroneously assume that the viewer is part of the norm in question. The results may be quite different if the looker is also ungendered or differently gendered.

The other side of this Freudian looking is scopophobia, a term coined by Douglas Murray (46). Freud defines this concept as shame in looking or being the object of another's gaze: as soon as the voyeur realizes that he is being watched watching, he becomes ashamed ("Sexual" 23). As in Sartre's idea of the voyeur looking through a keyhole at an unsuspecting person in the room on the other side of the door, when this person is watched by another, feelings of shame overwhelm them. This voyeur does not like having become the object of someone else's gaze and consequently is mindfully ashamed of his voyeuristic activities.

The majority of the looking described in the poems here is pleasurable. The observers derive some sort of excitement, erotic or otherwise, when they look at objects, others, or themselves. What is observed may be another textual person, an advertisement, a photograph, a philosophical interiorizing look at the self, or observance of the speaker's reflection in a "real" or metaphorical mirror. The gender of the speaker is not always specific, therefore it is necessary to move away from the male/female and masculine/feminine dichotomies that Freud employed with his discussion of scopophilia. His definition demands expansion to include women as voyeuses, and the non-gendered who look without being acknowledged, as well as men who offer themselves for the visual enjoyment of women, other men, and non-gendered people found in the texts.

Pleasurable and unpleasurable looking are present in some form or other in all four poets. This is in the broad sense of the terms; sexual undertones do not play a role in the majority of Marçal's, Luque's, and Abelló's poems. However, Ana Rossetti is a strong contradiction to this. Of the four, she is the poet who best manifests these types of (un)pleasurable looking in her poetry and the discussion of scopophilia and scopophobia

will center around her texts. Unlike the other three, eroticism is a crucial element in her writing. Her work most closely approximates Freud's ideas on voyeurism and pleasurable looking and exhibitionism and unpleasurable looking. There are also instances in which the lyric voice feels some sort of embarrassment from looking or from being looked at. In many cases this has to do with social taboos and viewing the prohibited. At first glance, the shame experienced by the lyric voice seems to uphold social stereotypes of gender roles, but what needs to be examined is the fact that the speaker challenges these norms by looking in the first place. It can also be said that the rejection of the gaze of another is a manifestation of the agency of the speaker and her/his desire to challenge social, cultural, and ideological roles into which they are placed.

Examples of the lyric voice not looking at all are present, consequently broadening Freud's definition of scopophobia to include not just shame, but a type of fear or disgust in looking. Closing one's eyes or looking away is a manner in which the speaker can challenge social, cultural, and ideological roles. Not engaging in the expected activity of seeing or looking is a manifestation of the speaker's agency and individuality.

Freud's ideas are not the culmination of discussion about observing people and objects, but it is imperative to examine his theories. Although his masculine/feminine, active/passive dichotomy is outdated, it is necessary to partially use and submit to his terms so that there can be resistance to them (Fletcher 99). Consequently Freud's concepts of pleasure and shame in looking and being looked at are necessary when discussing sight and the pleasure or pain derived from it in literary texts. Consideration of their psychological effects must be addressed in order to discuss fully the effects they produce in the texts studied. Since the poems move away from gendered looking, Freud's theories

should be questioned, refuted, and broadened to include a new genderless seeing, but one that still operates on the ideas of pleasure and shame. These concepts stem from cultural constraints on the lyric voice whether or not said speaker is gendered.

1.3 The Gaze and Power

The gaze can profoundly affect a person's concept of self (Vaz 33). Whether it be cultural constructs of a political, racial, ethnic, or gendered nature, it is the power that these ideas hold that determines the concept of self of the person being gazed/looked at or observed. Those being observed are conscious of others looking at them and of their objectification by the one looking. When one is seen by another, this creates vulnerability in the one subjected to the look (Vaz 35). The gaze of the other unsettles the gazed-at because of what it does to the concept of self in this subjectivation.²¹ Because of this fear, the gaze is the means through which power and control are possible (Jenks 15).

Perhaps the best-known application of the idea of the gaze and power is Foucault's use of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. Power in this case was a means to control the body, to "train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies" (Discipline 25). The panoptic building, useful for prisons, schools, hospitals, factories, etc., had a central tower that housed guards who were able to observe inmates at any time. The inmates, however, could not see into the tower and therefore never knew whether or not they were being watched (Foucault, Discipline 200).²² This constant possible "visible and

²¹ "Subjectivation" is the process by which someone is brought into being through regulation; the individual is subjected to laws and norms. The term is opposed to "subjectification" which refers to the self's relationship to the self and how said individual turns themselves into a subject (Rose, Nikolas 147 n. 2).

²² The term "panopticon" comes from the Greek *panoptes* which means "all-seeing" (Walker 106).

unverifiable” surveillance in theory maintained order in the prison; one could not commit any egregious acts since one did not know if said acts would be observed by the guards in the tower (Foucault, Discipline 201). The gaze, and the potential for its use, not only maintained control in the Panopticon, but “was destined to spread throughout the social body” (Foucault, Discipline 207), in the way of surveillance and its consequent control of the population at large. If one thinks that someone is watching them, they will, in all likelihood, curtail illegal activity and maintain proper decorum (Foucault, Discipline 209).

What this gaze also does is establish lines that are at times clear and at others not so clear between the self and the other.²³ It pits those who possess the power of the controlling gaze against those without it. That is to say that the identity of the gazer is marked as different than that of the one gazed at (Mirzoeff, Introduction 164). This can be linked to the ideas of masculine activity and feminine passivity expressed by Freud and manifested in the scopophilic looking and observing of the (male) voyeur and (female) exhibitionist. There are, however, women who look, for gazing is not solely the domain of men. Many feminist film theorists have tackled this subject and have come to different conclusions about what happens when a woman looks. A gazing woman may be taking the place of the male looker. In other words, she is not subverting any existing power structures because she has taken the masculine position of power in the looker; when she does look, she is looking from what E. Ann Kaplan calls the “masculine position” (130).

²³ The lines are unclear when the traditional gender roles of active male observer and passive female observed are absent. They are also blurred when the person observed is female but not in the traditional sense. By this I mean that she breaks free of her culturally assigned role of homemaker, heterosexual lover, and happy mother. This is prevalent in Marçal’s poetic texts. Also, as in Luque, the lyric voice recognizes the traditional female figure as a fictitious entity, one that wears a mask in order to adhere to patriarchal idea(l)s of the female and femininity.

Women can also be the bearers of a castration threat when they look at men: if they have the power to look and be active, they also have the power to castrate the men who are under their spell (Williams, Linda, "When" 30). According to Laura Mulvey, women are in the habit of "trans-sex identification" ("Afterthoughts" 125). This means that looking women want to be outside of the passive box to which they have been relegated and therefore identify with the male hero. This identification shows a woman's ability to move from one set of gender identities to another; she has free reign to navigate between both genders to fit her identification needs.

According to Luce Irigaray, a woman feels more than she sees so she must distance herself from herself in order to see who she is ("Sex" 363).²⁴ Women spectators of film identify too closely with the image they see on the screen because of this lack of separation from the self. In other words, seeing and knowing are almost simultaneous actions for a female, as for a male they are not (Doane 137). If a woman is to identify herself from the outside as a man does, she must identify with the masculine, thus losing herself in a structure of identity that is not traditionally associated with women. So gazing women then, according to these feminist theorists, are put into the position of the male, and therefore see themselves as a man would see them: an object for male visual pleasure, and subject to and of a male gaze.

This is not necessarily the case in the poetic texts that will be discussed here. Not all women see themselves as an object for male visual pleasure nor are they always subjected to a male gaze. Women are capable of looking at themselves and/or other

²⁴ This is not emotional feeling, but rather the sense of touch. Irigaray believed that women are in constant contact with themselves because of their labia. This constant contact a woman has with herself is exclusively female and is sharply opposed to the so-called male sense of sight.

women without taking the “male position.” These earlier feminist theorists attempted to explain in new terms the power structure inherent in seeing. They were second wave feminists who created a new critical vocabulary to discuss the plight and situation of women. Women, and the differently or ungendered, see just as much as men do. Irigaray’s metaphor of a woman’s constant contact with herself was a manner to explain women in women’s terms. Due to the changing face of the world it is necessary to talk of vision in still different terms. These terms are questions of gender.

Although some poems in this study have a female lyric voice, many do not mention a specific gender of the speaker. This brings the idea of the gaze and power into new territory. There is power implied in many of the gazes present in the poems, but it is not necessarily a controlling power in the same way that it was conceived by Bentham and Foucault. The lyric voices do resist the gaze and power inherent in the societal and cultural constructs from which they come, but the speakers of these poems turn this power on its head and use it to their own advantage. The observances of the lyric voices are not casual; they serve as an attempt to redefine viewing relationships (Tolliver 621). Disrupting the power of the cultural gaze, that is to say, the identity that society and culture at large dictate to these voices, allows them to exercise the power to know themselves or the falsity of what they observe. So while some of the lyric voices do appear to exercise a type of sexual or gender-based power over those they view, perhaps in a mere appropriation of phallogocentrism, others have the power to master this phallogocentric way of seeing and find themselves through their own gaze. Without clear gender markers in many instances, these poems question the idea that the gaze is always male. Whether the lyric voice looks at another person, an object, or themselves,

challenging established ways of seeing puts conventional and patriarchal ideas about the gaze, power, and gender into question, further breaking down the masculine/feminine dichotomy that permeates cultural understanding of seeing and the self.

The ideas of Mulvey, Irigaray, Doane, and other early feminist theorists are not sufficient to discuss the type of seeing effected in Ana Rossetti, Maria-Mercè Marçal, Aurora Luque, and Montserrat Abelló. Because the seeing in their poems is either ungendered (meaning the speaker does not “have” an easily defined or specific gender) or at the very least the object of the gaze aids in redefining traditional conceptions of gender, their gender binary based readings fall short. It is imperative to broaden the parameters of what it means to be both the observer and the observed with relation to expanding ideas and definitions of gender.

1.4 The Mirror Stage and Mirrors

A discussion of Lacan’s mirror stage is important since it is the moment that the infant becomes aware of his difference from the mother and is able to see himself as a subject. Like the child who sees that she does not have a penis, or that he does, in Freudian theory, or the observer who exercises a disciplinary gaze on an object (or subject as the case may be) in order to control her/him, it is the sense of sight that leads the infant to a totalizing view of the self opposed to the fragmented one that was known before looking into the mirror (McDougal 230). When faced with the specular image of himself, the infant recognizes that the fragmented body to which he had previously had access is really a whole, entire body (Lacan, “Mirror” 47). He also realizes that he is not his mother, nor a part of her and is able to recognize the difference (Lacan, “Mirror” 48). It is

also in this stage that the infant moves from the Imaginary, where there is unity, no difference, and no language, to the Symbolic, a place of difference, language, and consciousness of the self. “Non-being” as lack of language in the Imaginary comes “to being” in language in the Symbolic: “he is because he has spoken” (Lacan, “Sign” 209). Although there is unity with the self, since the infant is now able to see his whole body instead of the fragments previously available to him, he feels separated from his ideal self as seen in the mirror. Is it here that one is a subject when one is seen as “other” by another. That is why subjectivation, and quite possibly subjectification, takes place in the mirror stage. The baby recognizes the reflection as “other” and is consequently the other’s other. By seeing the self as other, the infant goes through what Lacan calls the misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) of the specular image. He mistakes the other for himself and consequently identifies with that other, the ideal “I,” which consequently leads to the formation of the subject and his coming into being. The result of this process of becoming a subject leads to an “alienating identity” that makes possible future identification with other alienated selves (Lacan, “Mirror” 47).

It is necessary to point out the gender of the infant in Lacan’s ideas: the baby is male. According to both Kaplan’s and Mulvey’s interpretations of Lacan, women cannot fully enter the Symbolic since it is there they realize they do not possess the phallus. This physical lack translates into a psychological and linguistic lack. With this “inorganic insufficiency” (Lacan, “Mirror” 46), a girl or woman cannot fully participate in male language, and is consequently seen as an Other in patriarchal culture (Kaplan 119; Mulvey, “Visual” 438).

Despite her apparent linguistic lack, an infant girl who looks at herself in a mirror also sees herself as others see her. She strives to be that other facing her in the mirror due to the misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) of the specular image as the ideal self (Lacan, “Mirror” 48). I propose that what is reflected back at the female and genderless speakers of the poems in this study is in fact, not the ideal I, but a cultural construction and falsehood that hinders unity with an authentic self. By “authentic self” I do not mean an essential being that is shared by others. I refer to the self that was disguised and hidden by cultural masks. The self is not static or unitary; therefore, multiple selves may be revealed. The speakers recognize this and desire to go beyond the image of themselves that others, as manifested in the reflection, have of them. What happens in these cases is not a return to the Imaginary, since the speakers are still in language, but rather an attempt to return to the stage in life when cultural definitions and constraints were not imposed upon them and readily accepted and to a subject beyond cultural definitions of men and women.

Mirrors are important to this discussion not only because of their tie to Lacan’s mirror stage, but also because of their connection to women. Women more often than not have been portrayed in literature and art as vain creatures who use the mirror to primp and prime themselves for their exhibitionist tendencies. Looking in the mirror is seeing oneself as others see you, and the idea of female characters not getting attention from others, both men and women, has been a topic used by writers such as Jane Austen, Edith Wharton, Virginia Woolf, Margaret Atwood, and Emilia Pardo Bazán.²⁵ A woman identifies herself in most cases as others see her; if she is pretty it is because someone has told her she is.

²⁵ See Murray, Sweeney, Deppman, de Jong, and Tolliver for articles on women and mirrors in the authors mentioned.

She has been, and still is, the victim of a male-dominated culture with very clear notions about how a woman should look.

Mirrors have also been associated with the truth as in the talking, male mirror in the fairytale Snow White. One looks into the mirror when one wants to know the truth about how one looks, and how one is perceived by others. The reflection that comes back to us, however, is not real. If it is in fact the ideal “I” as Lacan attests, then it is an image that has no real referent; it is a simulacrum. A reflection as cultural construct does not have any “real” counterpart; it is a type of “fake real” that can be mistaken for real (Sturken 366). The female and/or genderless speakers that will be examined however, take this “fake real” image and convert it into something that does in fact have a real referent. Women often do not confront the power of the mirror and its reflection (LaBelle 60), so, challenging the image as Abelló’s lyric voices do, not only questions gender but also questions women’s mirroring and how they interpret the specular images that they view.

What the female and/or genderless speakers do is create an interior self, utilizing the falsity of the exterior self observed in the mirror as a springboard. They reject the self that others see, but not necessarily themselves per se. It is important to note that they do not reject the mirror since it is through this vehicle that they effect their journey of self-discovery. Whether the speaker is gendered or not, s/he challenges the idea that all people survey themselves in the same way. The speaker, therefore, is turning itself into an object not for someone else’s pleasure, but for one’s own, generating a type of self-objectification for the purpose of self-knowledge.

This is not casual observation or glancing at themselves, but rather examination of who they are. And although there is a power relation involved here, as mentioned above, it

is not in the conventional sense. Here we see the power of the subject/individual to undo cultural ideas about the self, to undo the image that others have of the speaker, and ultimately to decide for themselves, who and what they are. The tie-in to discussions of gender is very interesting here. Not mentioning the gender of the person looking into the mirror, or for that matter, looking at another person or object is a new kind of power in itself. The lyric voices reject the ideologies readily imposed upon them by others and are able to use their new-found power, autonomy, and agency to know themselves. The masculine/feminine, active/passive binaries do not function here. Lyric voices simply exercise their right to see and desire free from cultural restraints, ultimately receiving pleasure or discomfort from their discoveries.

1.5 Identity and Gender

The lyric voices in the poets studied attempt to answer the question: “Who am I?” in the role of both observer and observed. Whether the speaker is a woman looking at a man, a woman looking at another woman, a non-gendered individual looking at an other, or someone looking at her/his reflection in a mirror, each undertakes the pronouncement of their identity in some way, shape, or form. The manner in which they do this is through vision (sight) and visuality; what or who they see through learning how to look in ways different from the cultural norm and how these visions are interpreted all lead to the speakers’ conception of self and others.

In order to understand questions of identity it is necessary to discuss ideas of Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler. For Louis Althusser, ideology, or the way reality is constituted (Smith, Paul 14), is everywhere and certain individuals are

interpellated or hailed by certain ideologies, the parts that make up the whole. When one accepts a certain interpellation, s/he is already a subject in ideology. For example, if one accepts a gendered or national identity, that individual is interpellated by and subjected to the ideology inherent in gendered or national discourse. In Foucault, this interpellation is done by institutions: schools, hospitals, prisons, the government. In these disciplinary institutions, one is made a subject by them and subjectivated to the power inherent in those institutions. There is also the idea of discourse and here, a subject takes part in the certain way of speaking and conveying meaning particular to a certain area: like law or medicine. Those areas of expertise require that an individual know and understand the language that is characteristic of them.

For Butler, identity is based on gender and the falsity of the heterosexual matrix that is taken to be the norm and acts as a normative and normalizing factor in subject positions. An individual can exercise the agency to not participate in the matrix, but the problem with that is that no recognized place for the expression of this agency exists. Because there is no adequate discourse to discuss them, those whose process of becoming a subject, or subjectification, are not recognized. They continue to be subjectivated, or subjected to, the cultural forces that deny them their own specific discourse. Breaking out of normative practice, whether it deals with gender, nation, race, religion, etc. is a process of “disidentification” (Butler, Bodies 4). Identification then, in Butlerian terms, is a falsehood and can never be. It is a falsehood because it is based on the unnatural and normative idea that there are only heterosexual men and women. If you fit outside of that supposedly natural heterosexual structure, you do not count (Bodies 105).

I propose that there is identity outside of the heterosexual matrix and normative heterosexuality. However, the downside of this identity is that current discourses do not account for its existence except in terms of the heterosexual matrix. Humans are defined as men or women, and masculine or feminine. Until society's ideas about sex and gender are on a par with the realities portrayed in the poetic texts analyzed here, realities located outside the walls of normative heterosexuality, it will be an uphill battle for recognition and a continual fight to express an agency that is not readily, if at all, recognized. Identity is constructed through opposition to the cultural norm, in this case gender and the male/female binary. This non-heterosexual matrix identity though is able to come into being because of its very rejection of the matrix in the first place (Butler, Bodies 115). But in refiguring abject identities it is important not to repeat exclusionary practices that the new identities struggled against in the first place (Butler, Bodies 118).²⁶

When discussing this process of identity, it is of utmost importance to keep in mind the power relations previously mentioned. Not only are the bodies of the observers and the observed subjected to and affected by power, but the mind is as well. One who is “subjected to a field of visibility” and recognizes that fact, “makes” power “play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes himself in the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault Discipline 202-3). The various manifestations of the self in these poems are charged with casting aside this subjectivation to power while attempting subjectification.

²⁶ “The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject”(Butler, Bodies 3). An example of how refigured abject identities can exclude instead of include is second wave feminism that tended to focus on Anglo women, leaving other races out of the discourse. Also gay liberation focused mainly on gay men's liberation, overlooking other non-heterosexual people.

They attempt to become subjects by exercising their agency in self-definition (McLaren 64). The lyric voices are not only subjected to how others see and define them, but also the recognition that they are subjected to this power. Since the dissertation proposes to treat sight and visibility, power inherent in the gaze plays an important role, but it is not as simple as mere appropriation of the male gaze by female or non-gendered speakers. This reworking of the power relations in the gaze is what the lyric voices initiate.

Subjectivation to a stifling power is what the speakers of the poems strive to dismantle and consequently redefine on their own terms.

“Identity is always constituted out of difference” but it is not always necessarily out of difference from normative practice (Grossberg 93). Some essentialism exists at the beginning of the identity process. Those that are different from the norm seek essential similarities in others in order to form a common bond. Gender identity is a textbook example; women unite because of their shared subjectivation to the patriarchy. Once a large group identity forms it is possible to break off and identify because of differences from those in your group. There may be differences based on racial, socio-economic, ethnic, and sexuality lines, but the identity stems from a group that is already marginalized from the norm. Perhaps it is a question of semantics between “difference” and “differences,” but those that construct their identity out of a previously marginalized group do so on distinct terms than they did originally.

Evident in these poems are poetic voices who articulate differences from established cultural and societal norms through vision. Their active sight helps to constitute the self as erotic, philosophical, or self-sufficient, reclaiming the self concealed by cultural expectations. Modernity tended to a historically narrow preference for

perspective and this has now shifted to a broader scopic regime of postmodernity in which exploration of a more fragmented, extensive sight is permitted and encouraged. If the late stages of modernism represent the status quo and “official culture,” postmodernism “challenges its assumptions” and shakes it (modernism) up (de Lauretis, Technologies 73-4). Perspective became the dominant “visual mode of modernity” because it was believed to most closely resemble natural human sight (Jay, “Scopic” 4). It viewed spaces “filled with natural objects that could only be observed from without by the dispassionate eye of the neutral” observer (Jay, “Scopic” 9). The lyric voices in the poems studied are not “dispassionate,” “neutral” observers. They are very much invested in viewing themselves and others from within as well as from many different approaches, not just the God-like view at the apex of the perspectivalist pyramid.

The lyric voices view themselves and others under defining and confining notions of gender. Of Judith Butler’s many definitions of gender there is one that is quite extensive and worth quoting at length. For her, gender

can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent. And yet, one is compelled to live in a world in which genders constitute univocal signifiers, in which gender is stabilized, polarized, rendered discrete and intractable. In effect, gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control. Performing one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all. That this reassurance is so easily displaced by anxiety, that culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that on some level there is social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and in no sense ontologically necessitated. (“Performative” 399)

Performance is repetition and reiteration (Butler, Bodies 108). Normative gender(ed) behavior comes about through the performance of gender norms. However, one act does not constitute a performance. There must be a citation of a previously established law or regulation; a reiteration of past performances. The lyric voices and objects viewed break free from the reiteration of cultural gender normativity, which falls under the rubric of the heterosexual matrix. They are subjected to the gaze of others and cultural definitions and constraints placed on gender(ed) identity. Because of this subjectivation to gender norms, the speakers desire to manifest their subjectification and become subjects not disciplined by heterosexist and male/female discourse(s).

People are too easily classified according to their biological sex and perceived gender roles for their particular biology. The cultural and performative gender construct tells us that there are men and women, and that women are the subordinate of the two. Logically then, genders that do not fit the man/woman mold are subordinate to this normative binary. Genders that are extrabinary are not above the relationship and exclusionary practices of the binary. They are the abject and as such are considered by those with power (especially men) to have the status of being inferior to the binary; they are not held as superior to the binary by those who comprise it. Many “different” people are overlooked and because of this exclusion are not considered. Articulating the self by deconstructing the “phallogentric order” and heterosexual matrix that subordinates both women and others allows for individual agency and a subject position outside of culturally restrictive parameters (Linker 393). The norm, as in the heterosexual matrix, exists because someone is always excluded from it (Butler, Bodies 11). At times, critique and analysis of difference from the norm must be pushed aside to survive (hooks 97-8). It is

often easier to imagine that the normative gender binary and heterosexuality provide a discourse that ungendered, or differently gendered people can use. What happens in these situations is that the dominant discourse is employed by those that do not form a part of it, under the false pretense that it is a discourse that speaks to them. This can be a painful process since there is often no space for difference(s) from the norm. What difference(s) do(es) exist is(are) camouflaged by a false sense of belonging and self that unfortunately leads to subjectivation and false subjectification. But if no norm exists, there is no exclusion from it and vice versa.

The way in which one is seen by others can determine who one is. Rossetti, Marçal, Luque, and Abelló use the way in which the poetic personae are seen “from the outside” as a springboard to another new and different identity(ies). They choose not to identify with the way the rest of the world sees them and consequently reject certain interpellations, discourses, and performances. This is true of both the gendered and ungendered observers and observed. They cast off a stifling identity in order to find a new one. The false identity from the outside and their rejection of it directs them to their new perception of self and others. The unsatisfactory exterior discourses enable them to articulate resistance to power from within: the power in the gaze and the power in gender norms.

In an ideal setting a world would exist in which gestures, clothing, enactments “*express nothing*” (Butler, “Performative” 400, original emphasis). Unfortunately, this is not the case and the various lyric voices struggle to define themselves in a system that attributes too much meaning to such gender markers. Expanding the range of vision, whether “real” or theoretical, is effected in the deconstruction of the gender binary which

ultimately develops to the exclusion of gender altogether. New gender identity(ies) is(are) in opposition to the norm and reject that very norm (Butler, Bodies 115). The lack of a gendered speaker in many cases allows for a wider and freer concept of self that enables the lyric voice to explore aspects that are not afforded a gendered speaker. Without cultural impositions, the genderless self may explore its identity in ways not permitted a self by the gender dichotomy and narrowly circumscribed phallogocentricism. Cultural constraints of the gendered self are disguised as natural truth. The lyric voices examined in the dissertation delve deeply to disclose the fraudulence.

To be a viable member of society one must identify as a man or woman (Moore, Henrietta 88). These poets do not necessarily see this need and often simply avoid gender(ed) identification altogether. Although the postmodern and sometimes genderless identity seen in the poets studied primarily focuses on the self, it is not a narcissistic or solipsistic view of that self. Self-love is evident in the poems, but not in an erotic sense; it is the presence of a love of self and others manifested in the desire to know who one is and one's place in the world. It is knowing that one can exist and have an identity despite the oppression prevalent in a culture that privileges a gendered binary. The self, gendered or otherwise, is significant but always in relation to others. Whether it be gazing at another, examining oneself in a past manifestation such as a photograph, or using one's reflection, the knowledge of self comes from the presence of others and the ideas that they impose knowingly or unwittingly on the self in question. Without outside others in opposition to the lyric voice, there would be no acknowledgment of self. The challenge is to ensure that this new-found self does not become farsical in the eyes of those it confronts (Butler, "Variations" 156).

The examination of gender is not the only area that needs to be addressed in order for conclusions about identity to be reached. As stated in previous sections, ideally the poets included in the dissertation would be studied as women writers with a shared, common experience. Nevertheless, the reality is that their lives as women are in all likelihood different. The problem with talking about difference is that it perpetuates the norm. If, on the other hand, we talk about differences in the plural, I feel that the focus of the discussion is removed from the ‘normal’ and the ‘different’ and is redirected to expressions and manifestations of the self in a distinct forum. We may be different from each other, but we all share the label of different from the norm. Although I also do not believe that one can talk of pure essentialism in questions of identity, I do feel that some sense of belonging to a group that shares some sort of commonality is necessary. There may be some lone wolves out there who are different from everyone and eschew “membership” in any group based on shared experience, but in general, those who are labeled different than the norm find each other. When unity among those marginalized and who are society’s abject is firm, then discussion of differences among that group can and should take place. So whereas the idea of difference is oppositional, it seems a necessary evil in order to arrive at the place where differences within the different are applauded and praised.

The fact that there is no language or term to speak of a certain ‘reality’ does not make that ‘reality’ any less real. The same holds true for gender. The fact that right now we do not have a term (or terms) to adequately portray the abolishment of gender, or to speak of people who do not adhere to the binary by doing their gender correctly, does not mean that there are not those outside of the normalizing heterosexual matrix that live this

‘reality’ every day. Theorists like Judith Butler, Monique Wittig, and Annamarie Jagose and scientists like Anne Fausto-Sterling have begun the discussion.²⁷ The challenge now lies in the attempt to give their ideas space and to give those that are differently gendered, or ungendered, the power to continue to resist certain social discourses. They should not be co-opted by the system, but rather change the system to one that will readily accept differences from the perceived norm.

In talking about ungendered people, or people with a gender that fits outside the binary norm of “man” and “woman,” those very terms become problematic. I do not advocate abolishing the terms, but there should, and needs to be room for talking about people who are not “men” and “women” as defined by cultural norms.²⁸ This is a shortcoming of the analysis, that there is not adequate vocabulary to talk about these new ideas in new ways. There has been some work in this area. Anne Fausto-Sterling coined the terms “ferm,” “herm,” and “merm” to refer to biological sex, but not to gender (21). The poets here allow for differences in the articulation of established gender norms as well as for the articulation of completely new genders altogether. They themselves did not invent new terms for these new manifestations perhaps because it is a difficult task or they were not conscious of what they were doing with regard to gender. I do think that the

²⁷ See Butler: Gender Trouble, Bodies That Matter, and Undoing Gender; Wittig: The Straight Mind and Other Essays; Jagose: Queer Theory: An Introduction; Fausto Sterling: “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough.”

²⁸ In Undoing Gender, Judith Butler states that she has “no qualms about using such terms” (polemical terms or those whose meaning is in flux) (179). She also states that using polemical terms could be a “revitalization of them” (178). Much in the same vein as Monique Wittig’s declaration “Lesbians are not women” (32), Butler appears to suggest here that new ways of conceiving of old ideas are essential to the undoing of gender as we currently perceive it.

invention of new terms for conceiving of gender is necessary in order to have a cultural practice that better reflects the differences that exist between human beings. That is a task left to future scholars.

The use of “s/he” throughout this dissertation not only denotes the possibility that the person in question may be female or male (as defined by biological sex and gender roles) but also leaves room for the possibility of a/any combination of the two genders. Without a viable term for a third, fourth, fifth, etc. gender, I have decided to maintain “s/he,” “her/his,” “her/himself” throughout this study. Since I focus more on cultural constructions of gender and resistance to them rather than biological sex, although both are cultural constructs, I have opted not to use Anne Fausto-Sterling’s terms. The speakers and observed others in the individual poems have to choose between identifying as an understood gender or not being recognized in the male/female dyad-based system. When these individuals do not fit neatly into either group uneasiness may ensue. Although the identification process(es) may be painful at times, resistance to normative practices paves the way for future non-gendered identifications.

THE POETS AND THEIR TEXTS

The approaches of the four poets are quite different. Of the four, Ana Rossetti has the broadest array of gendered poetic personae. Men, women, and the differently and ungendered are all present in her texts. When her texts deal with men and/or women Rossetti reverses the power structure inherent in gender(ed) relations. The men become sexual objects and the women become sexual subjects. They make room for those who are left on the “fringes” or in the “basements” (Ferguson 7).

In her texts with an ungendered observer or observed, she examines who is active and passive in a looking relationship. If there is no gender to the person looking, the masculine/feminine Freudian binary cannot stand. As such, normative gender performance is challenged by both the lyric voices and the objects viewed. The roles of the voyeur and exhibitionist are often revised as are the reactions to those types of looking. In these texts Rossetti defies established gender norms but does not appear to offer solutions beyond the initial challenge to the norms. Gender here appears to be a performative game, but Rossetti opens up possibilities for seeing gender differently and therefore including its issues in contemporary cultural discourse.

Maria-Mercè Marçal has female gendered lyric voices, but they deal with women's cultural and stereotypical images and roles in a different way than Rossetti. The lyric voices reject normative images and question the power of the (male) gaze in the perception of women and why women may or may not look. Marçal also offers poems in which the gender of the speaker and others is more ambiguous. In these poems, the poetic personae challenge patriarchal and normative ideas about who can and cannot love. However, they do not always prevail over normative sexual behavior. Maternity is an important theme to Marçal's work and she questions the notion of motherhood as the quintessential characteristic of femininity and femaleness. The archetypal mother figure is rejected and by extension her established and normative female role. Although Marçal's texts deal more explicitly with women than some of the other authors, her contestation of normative gender(ed) roles extends in an all-encompassing sense. Those who may not be able to experience some of the "female" affairs in her texts can possibly identify with the experience of marginalization and subjectivation presented.

Aurora Luque writes an ungendered lyric voice that uses visual and pop culture to question established manners of visuality. Since visuality often supposes a masculine point of view, the ungendered speakers challenge this view by rejecting visuality as defined by dominant and normative (patriarchal and heterosexist) culture. This rejection can be seen through stereotypical images of women in ads and on television. Sexual experience is also ungendered in her poetry which simultaneously individualizes and universalizes the experience. Her texts are similar to Marçal's in that the experience is one that can be shared by all regardless of real or performed gender. Luque does not conclude much about the viewed images in her poetry, but like Rossetti and Marçal, the challenge to stereotypical femininity, femaleness, and gender in general is begun.

Abelló is the most introspective of the four poets because her lyric voices utilize the mirror to get to the self. When the lyric voice views her/himself in the mirror, there are two reactions: uneasiness and satisfaction at what is seen. The lyric voices are uncomfortable with her/his reflection in some cases because s/he does not recognize the self there. In those texts in which the lyric voice derives satisfaction from the mirror, it is due to the fact that the reflection is understood as false and consequently rejected. However, the mirror is not always a tool to identity. Many texts show the mirror as a confining space and in much the same way as the uneasiness felt at viewing the reflection, these mirrors prohibit identification outside the mirror.

All of Abelló's speakers are ungendered which, like Luque, broadens the interpretive possibilities. These poems offer the ultimate challenge to gender(ed) norms by

omitting their mention altogether. Of the four poets, it is Abelló's texts that provide the most sophisticated and comprehensive challenge to notions of normative gender and gender(ed) identity.

Identity is both constituted and determined. Who does the constituting and determining is very important. Gender as restricted by the male/female binary is an example of determined identity since it is cultural norms that define what gender a person "is" or "has." A way to make gendered identity constitutive is for someone to have the agency to decide that they are going to do their gender differently by stepping out of the culturally determined boundaries that are set for compulsory heterosexuality and the gender binary.

A person who goes against the status quo asserts a certain type of identity even if it is based on a fallacy. S/he expresses not only a certain way of thinking, but also a certain way to look at oneself, taking the risk to oppose the system that s/he finds oppressive for any number of reasons. This person attempts to recapture some of the power held over her/him in the status quo relationship in and of which they do not have a voiced and active role. Alignment with a genderless identity, whether conscious or not questions all of the foundations of modern Western society that many hold dear. So, although the four poets are very different, they appear to have begun their identity searches on common ground. The unifying thread is the questioning of gender roles in the various gender performances seen in their texts through vision (sight).

What these poets do is construct a social and cultural identity for the various poetic voices. Rejecting the normative heterosexuality of the gender binary is a manner in which the lyric voices can choose who they are. They perform a gender to belong to a falsely

constructed way of being in the world. But the very fact that they attempt to recognize themselves on different terms means that they aspire to change the norm and forge a new avenue for the recognition of the self. Consequently the self ends up constructed on new terms.

SUMMARY

Sight and the lyric voices are in fact the uniting factor in the poetry of Ana Rossetti, Maria-Mercè Marçal, Aurora Luque, and Montserrat Abelló. Although the individual works of the poets I have chosen for the dissertation are ostensibly different, connections prevail through their use of vision to question and break down existing and traditional gender norms. The act of observation has been considered in the masculine domain in the past. Jay shows this with his neologism “phallogocentrism” and Irigaray also demonstrates this notion by stating that women are in constant contact with themselves and therefore privilege touch over sight (363). It is important to establish various women writers’ appropriation and transformation of this “masculine” activity. Through sometimes female, sometimes ungendered visuality, a female or ungendered lyric voice can, and does, achieve an autonomous identity. It is also crucial not to continue to leave to the side those who choose to break down the gender dichotomy that has existed for milenia. Observation is not just the domain of men or women. It is not a gendered activity in the sense that one does not have to possess or be a mainstream and normative gender in order to take part in and talk about the act of looking. In fact, it is the challenge to the normative gender binary that enables the speakers of the poems studied to effect a search that identifies an authentic, “real,” untainted view of the self and others. Despite

the differences in the treatment of the gender question and the differences in ways of looking, the poets' individual characteristics must be highlighted without relegating each poet to a universal idea of "woman poet" or "feminine writing."

My proposed study is meant to be inclusive, despite these differences. I have included Spanish-language and Catalan-language women poets to begin bridging the gap that exists in the study of writers of the periphery.²⁹ Not only are Catalan women overlooked because their male counterparts attract greater interest, but as a general rule, they are not included in anthologies of Spanish poetry by women. This is not to say that Spanish and Catalan women poets are the same or that they approach and solve the identity issue in the same way. Catalan poets are generally relegated to secondary status and their inclusion here is not an insinuation that they should be Castilianized, but rather that writers of the periphery should be included in discussions of poetry, and literature in general, in (the political unit) Spain because of and despite possible differences.³⁰ Being a linguistic minority is very similar to minority status based on sex and gender. It is "una situació de desventatge (Marçal, "Més" 156).³¹ I would like to show that the women poets

²⁹ Identities are "dividing practices" and oppose the non-normative and the normative (McLaren 64). Such is the case with Castilian or Spanish and Catalan identities. The Castilian is the norm, the Catalan and other peripheries are outside the norm and consequently marginalized.

³⁰ Marçal believed that Spanish speakers in Spain have imagined rights and assume the obvious inferiority of Catalan speakers because of those "rights." This attitude, unfortunately, has persisted after the Catalan linguistic normalization of 1983. For her, the Catalan language needs to remain "un fet normal per al conjunt de la població del nostre país" ("Necessari" 217, 220). "Nostre país" refers to Catalonia, Andorra, Valencia, and the Balearic Islands.

³¹ Marçal was outspoken about her minority status on many fronts; the linguistic and gendered being the most important. Despite this, she did concede that commonalities can exist across linguistic barriers: "Estic convençuda que la llengua és un d'aquests factors essencials de diferenciació, màximament si parlem de literatura. Sóc partidària de l'estricta classificació lingüística de les literatures: Orlanda Marilis, posem per cas, de Cap Verd, per a mi pertany a la literatura portuguesa. Ara bé, qui gosaria negar-li un parentiu estret amb altres escriptors i escriptores africans que s'expressen, per exemple, en llengües indígenes, o bé en anglès? De la mateixa manera hi ha unes experiències comunes que

included here share a common goal despite linguistic and cultural differences: that of self-discovery and identity consciousness through vision (sight) and visuality. After all, there is not one way for women to write poetry in either Spanish or Catalan, as evidenced by the many distinct poetic styles and themes anthologized in volumes in both languages.

These four poets have surpassed the idea of phallogocentrism, transforming it into a way of seeing that ultimately has few, if any, inherent gender markers. While the plurality of their voices and approaches to this question is essential to maintain, all the authors included have the same underlying goal of revising the use of sight. This specific goal is reached no matter what the gender, of lack thereof, and nationality of the speaker. The reader of this poetry is offered a practice of looking that is primarily personal in a postmodern world that is increasingly becoming more digitized and impersonal as time progresses. These writers attempt to sift through this culture to arrive at conclusions about an independent and fluid self (selves). They are writers who use the sight of the lyric voice to try to cut through the inadequacies of the culture(s) in which they live.

The Catalan-language poets in this study have lived a marginalized experience in a manner that Rossetti and Luque have not. I believe that because of this, Marçal and Abelló are especially sensitive to other types of marginalization and oppression. They had to fight to write their national language in order to manifest their cultural identity, so their struggle for identity has deep roots. That is not to say that the Spanish-language writers do not have deep roots in their search for identity, but the roots are from a different tree. I also believe this struggle is why both Marçal and Abelló more readily align themselves with

travessen les barreres de les llengües i que posen en relació les vivències de dones d'àmbits culturals diferents, fins i tot d'èpoques diferents i que en canvi, deferencien homes y dones d'una mateixa llengua. Segurament això cal que tingui una traducció en les anàlisis i en la història literàries." ("Més" 158).

feminism and label themselves as feminists. When one is a member of an oppressed sector of society, it is “easier” to see oppression on other fronts. Rossetti and Luque write in the default language of Spain and, as part of the majority, may not feel the necessity to side with a group that fights gendered marginalization, albeit, gendered marginalization based on a fallacious binary.

That is not to say that Rossetti and Luque cannot write an ungendered subject, which in many cases they do. Rossetti’s texts are quite playful and many were meant as inside jokes for friends (Ugalde, Conversaciones 156), but both she and Aurora Luque in many cases write an ungendered subject to avoid “writing like women.”³² This brings up another question of semantics. Labeling these poets “women poets” can prove dangerous. Too many preconceived notions exist about how “women poets” write poetry regardless of how many are published. There is no monolith called “women’s poetry” just like there is not one called “men’s poetry.”³³ That is why they wish to simply be called poets, especially in the case of Rossetti and Luque. Not feminist poets, not feminine poets, just people who write poetry. One type of visibility does not exist, but culturally assigned and/or accepted gender undoubtedly colors the way in which one views and interprets one’s surroundings. Whether purposefully overlooking the gender of the lyric voice (as in Rossetti, Luque, and Abelló) or mentioning women as a force oppositional to patriarchal

³² Sharon Keefe Ugalde believes that women writers do not assign a sex (gender) to their first person lyric voices because it is an “acto subconsciente de sumisión” to the patriarchy (“Subjetividad” 519). I feel it is more a deliberate and perhaps subconscious act of rebellion against the patriarchy as well as normative heterosexuality and gendered practices. Although many women poets may have subjected themselves to the patriarchy in their texts, the four studied here do not subconsciously submit themselves to the patriarchy and patriarchal norms, they consciously challenge them.

³³ In the case of men, it is simply “poetry.” Poets who are women are opposed to that assumed universal masculine group.

ideas of how one should look (meaning both physical appearance and the act of looking itself in the case of Rossetti and Marçal), all of the authors in this dissertation search for a new way of viewing and being viewed.

This visual search by women poets who produce in Spanish and Catalan is a study that will greatly contribute to the further dissemination of not only poetry by women, but also poetry by Catalan women.³⁴ The overarching effect of their writing leads in the direction of undercutting and undoing the established and accepted male/female binary. Neither Rossetti nor Luque define themselves as feminist, while Marçal and Abelló do. Nevertheless, in some way, shape, or form, all four question cultural ideas about feminine or female gender roles as well as the notion of gender and its performance(s). Choosing to question and not mention gender in their poetic texts then, is a manner in which these authors can quietly protest current practices and discourses on gender issues of all stripes while deeply affecting those who read their works with a keen attention to detail. This is one of the most revolutionary, innovative, and lasting aspects of their poetry.

³⁴ Some may view this study view as narrow due to the exclusion of Basque and Galician language poets. Works in those languages are not inferior to those by Castilian and Catalan language poets, but due to space and time constraints, their analysis is left for future endeavors. There is however, an obvious discontinuity in the study of women poets, and those from the periphery, which needs to be addressed.

CHAPTER 2

ANA ROSSETTI: (UN)PLEASURABLE LOOKING

Ana Rossetti was born in 1950 in San Fernando, Cádiz. She spent her youth there and her experiences in Catholic schools and in her grandmother's garden color her poetic texts.³⁵ She moved to Madrid to study when she was eighteen years old and, in much the same way that her youthful experiences influenced her writing, her life in the neighborhood of Malasaña (or Maravillas) did the same. During this time she worked at the cabaret Pasapoga as well as in the theater as a seamstress.

Her published works of poetry are: Indicios vehementes. Poesía 1979-1984 (1985), Devocionario (1986), Yesterday (1988), Apuntes de ciudades (1990), Virgo potens (1994), Punto umbrío (1995), and La nota del blues (1996).³⁶ She has also written drama, and adult and children's narrative. Her book Devocionario won the Premio Rey Juan Carlos de Poesía in 1985. Certain texts from Devocionario were even the inspiration for a ballet which debuted in June of 1989 (Bundy 136). Rossetti's poetic discourse is "fundamentalmente visual" (Ferradán, "De seducción" 103) and the optical aspect

³⁵ Rossetti's religious-themed texts are heavily influenced by Golden Age poetry. See Escaja "Ana," "Liturgia," "Muerte," "Transgresión;" Fajardo, Ferradán "(Re)velación," and "De seducción."

³⁶ Rossetti's poetry has been anthologized many times in editions dedicated solely to her work as well as those dedicated to Spanish women's poetry and Spanish poetry in general.

changes continually: her lyric voices observe men, women, and the self, as well as objects such as photographs, both personal and publicity-oriented.

Ana Rossetti's poetic texts manifest a combination of voyeurism and exhibitionism, scopophilia and scopophobia, and desire for men, women, and non-specified genders. Her poetry privileges the look and as Ramón Buenaventura has stated:

No conozco ninguna [sic] otra poeta, en ninguna lengua, que posea su capacidad de acecho visual del sexo, su capacidad para encandilarnos con lo que ve. Le pueden ganar en arrebató y pasión, en revolcón y cuenta nueva, hasta en caricia y roce; pero no en cómo nos transmite las delicadas sutilezas de penetración por la mirada. (60)

The lyric voices observe people and things that, in most cases, sexually stimulate or excite the observer, but there are examples in which the poetic voice or one of the poetic personae derives little or no pleasure from looking or being observed. Although she does write sexually charged poetry in many cases, Rossetti herself writes for her and her readers' enjoyment:

Yo no tengo propósito de escandalizar ni nada. A mí lo único que me importa es que la gente que va a leer mi poesía, disfrute, se sienta bien, porque cuando yo escribo poesía me siento magníficamente y yo creo que es con lo que más disfruto en la vida. . . . Yo solamente pido que piensen [los lectores] que la poesía es una cosa divertida y ya está. (Coco 65)

Because of her birth date and certain thematic similarities with the *Novísimos*, such as the textual incorporation of popular culture, Rossetti feels more aligned with that poetic generation (Ferradáns, "La seducción" 24). However, because her early poetry did not appear until the 1980s, she is usually grouped with poets of this decade, called the *postnovísimos* among other names (Escaja, "Ana" 27). Despite her self-identification with the *Novísimos*, Rossetti is not comfortable when others classify her. She feels that critics are too quick to place her into a category, whatever that may be:

“ ‘Siempre es o literatura escrita por mujeres, o literatura erótica o nueva poesía andaluza, pero siempre se atiende más al apellido que al nombre y más que a la escritura, a sus otros añadidos.’” (Téllez Rubio 83).³⁷ Not only is she resistant to the aforementioned categories, she also questions whether or not she is judged as a writer or as a woman (Ugalde, Conversaciones 150).³⁸

According to Sigmund Freud, people want to look at someone to attempt to uncover her/his “hidden parts,” referring to the genitals, which are concealed from our view (“Sexual” 22). It is quite normal, then, for people “to linger to some extent over the intermediate sexual aim of a looking that has a sexual tinge to it ...” as long as one does not look for too long a period of time (“Sexual” 22-3). In sexual acts, Freud has established male activity and female passivity: the sperm males ejaculate are the “vehicles” and the female organism into which the sperm are inserted is the “harbour” (“Femininity” 2). This male activity and female passivity translate to voyeurism (scopophilia) and exhibitionism (scopophobia) as explained in the introduction.³⁹

His discussion centers on the normative gender binary man/woman, although in practice neither voyeurism nor exhibitionism have exclusive claims on the gender of the observer or the observed. “Seeing” is “bound up with knowing” and Rossetti writes texts in which a certain new knowledge of the self is obtained through looking (Pollock,

³⁷ In this interview, Rossetti does not offer a solution as to how she would like to be classified, if in fact a suitable classification exists.

³⁸ In the same interview with Ugalde, Rossetti does concede that there is a feminine aesthetic but only because women have different experiences in different situations [different from men and other women?]. This aesthetic exists because of society, not because one is a woman. For Rossetti, feminine literature is as much a social phenomenon as the picaresque novel was (Conversaciones 157).

³⁹ See pages 17-21 in the Introduction.

“Modernity” 81). Her poetry both follows the rubric of gender binary scopophilia and scopophobia and breaks out of the mold to destroy ideas of the male/active/observer and female/passive/observed relationship. This permits the expression of extra-binary gender identities and sexual desires. These new manifestations of gender do not have a name in Rossetti’s texts, but they are nevertheless present; their existence and desire to end their subjectivation to the normative heterosexual matrix and begin the process of subjectification is textually explicit (Butler, Gender 9). This may be seen in the speaker, an observer who is not the speaker, or in the observed object (subject) itself.

Rossetti’s examples showcase a non-gendered speaker, or “ungendered” as Margaret Persin states (Getting 171), which makes it impossible to apply Freud’s broad and sexist mold to every text. The non-gendered speaker in Rossetti undermines the heterosexual matrix that permeates Western culture. Focusing on people of ambiguous gender divests the male/female binary of its stronghold on traditional cultural values when concerned with seeing and/or sexual relationships. The recognition of the male/female binary as subjectivating, coupled with the performance of expected manifestations of gender norms or their rejection, leads to ungendered subjectification.

SCOPOPHILIA: GIRLS WHO LOOK

“Cuando mi hermana y yo, solteras, queríamos ser virtuosas y santas” (Indicios vehementes 50), portrays two sisters who look at an unsuspecting and innocent seminarian.⁴⁰ The masculine figure in the poem is “portrayed as victim of his sexual arousal” prompted by the gaze that the girls try to hide from him (Pasero 78). Sharon

⁴⁰ See Miller, Pasero, Ugalde “Erotismo” and “Feminization,” and Wilcox Women.

Keefe Ugalde states that the poor seminarian has fallen victim to a female don Juan: the girls seduce him instead of the other way around (“Erotismo” 25). Through their eyes, where their seductive power is held, the girls control the situation with the young man (Ugalde, “Erotismo” 26).⁴¹

The scene of the poem is an Edenic garden, so it is not a far leap to consider the girls as modern day Eves. However, their seductive power is so “exaggerated” that they are no longer seen as the evil temptress(es) who caused the downfall of man (Ugalde, “Feminization” 171). They are in fact, trying to protect the seminarian from their seductive powers, although they are unable to do so. In this garden there are apple trees that symbolize the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, heliotropes, a pool, serpents, and Madonna lilies. The girls and the seminarian avoid the apple trees and the heliotropes make them blush; they know the symbolic power of the fruit and the seminarian is not permitted to know about love:

Y cuando al jardín, contigo, descendíamos,
evitábamos en lo posible los manzanos.
Incluso ante el olor del heliotropo enrojecíamos
sabido es que esa flor amor eterno explica.
Tu frente entonces no era menos encendida
que tu encendida beca [sic], sobre ella reclinada,
con el rojo reflejo competía.
Y extasiadas, mudas, te espiábamos
antes de que mojáramos los labios en la alberca,
furtivo y virginal, te santiguabas
y de infinita gracia te vestías.
Te dábamos estampas con los bordes calados
iguales al platito de pasas
que, con el té, se ofrece a las visitas,

⁴¹ This poem is based on a seminarian that Rossetti knew while growing up. Her grandmother paid for his studies and he would visit in the summers. Rossetti says that he was the most beautiful adolescent “que te puedes imaginar” (Núñez 12). It is not known if a similar real-life situation transpired between the youthful Rossetti and the seminarian, but there is no doubt that his existence influenced the composition of this poem.

detentes y reliquias en los que oro cosíamos
y ante ti nos sentábamos con infantil modestia.
Mi tan amado y puro seminarista hermoso,
¡cuántas serpientes enroscadas en los macizos de azucenas,
qué sintieron las rosas en tus manos que así se deshojaban! (ll. 1-19)

The flora of the garden serves as cover for their surveillance of the seminarian: “Y extasiadas, mudas, te espiábamos” (l. 8). They are little voyeuses in the garden, their ecstasy heightened when they spy on him. It is when they look at the sexualized body of a man that the speaker feels this way. But this body is prohibited on many fronts. First: because he is older than they are, as evidenced by his seemingly mature status and activities as a seminarian and the girls’ puerile activities and trinkets that they bring him to represent Catholic rites. Second: the very fact that he is a seminarian in theory should prohibit them from looking in the sexual manner that they do. The seminarian wears a loose robe that hides all vestiges of civilian clothing (“tu pantalón incógnito” l. 24), unlike other masculine figures in Rossettian texts.⁴² Nevertheless, the girls have no reservations about spying on him, sexualizing him, and in the end letting their imaginations run wild with the thought of his ejaculation.

In order to keep their seductive gazes from him, the girls take part in simulated Catholic rites in the garden. They treat the fountain pool as if it were holy water (l. 9), they give the seminarian “estampas,” a plate with raisins/the Eucharist, and tea that is like the blood of Christ (ll. 12-14) (Miller, “Fall” 264). They also provide him with “detentes” to further protect him from their mighty gaze, so powerful in fact that they could divert

⁴² See “La Anunciación del Ángel” and “Del prestigio del Demonio” pages 56-65 in this chapter.

him from his religious path if they do not do everything they can to protect him from it.⁴³ This point is compelling because the girls possess a rather ambiguous knowledge of sexuality. They realize that they are very powerful seductresses (“Con la mirada baja protegerte queríamos / de nuestra femenina seducción.” [ll. 20-1]) and yet they seem quite unblemished at the same time. The heliotrope embarrasses them for what it knows about love, they represent mass with child-like innocence, and they sit before him with infantile modesty. None of this behavior coincides with the apparently mature adult attitudes they have about the power they hold as women over this young man. They stay away from the potential trouble of the symbolic apple trees, and they are cognizant of the fact that their eyes are the center of their seductive capabilities. The poetic voice even imagines the future orgasms that the seminarian will have even though neither she nor her sister will be there to witness them.

The girls walk with their eyes lowered so their feminine seduction does not tempt the pure man. But the speaker knows that this is in vain. She knows that he will fall into onanistic temptation because of their omnipotent gaze. The seminarian will one day get an erection (“una turgente púrpura” [l. 23]), his hidden pants will stretch, and he, as Adam, will spill his provision of milk (Pasero 78). There is nothing that can stop the flow (“tan riguroso surtidor” l. 26).⁴⁴ The seminarian will never bite the girls’ apple (the fruit of

⁴³ “Detentes” were emblems representing the sacred heart of Jesus with the phrase “Detente bala” that were worn by Carlist soldiers to protect them from bullets. In the case of the seminarian, he needs to be protected from the figurative bullets of the girls’ eyes.

⁴⁴ “Púrpura” means “purple” in most cases, but it can also refer to blood. This would be consistent with the idea of the erection that the seminarian will one day have. This imagery also ties in with the “macizos de azucenas” (l. 18) in the garden. Flower imagery often refers to the phallus in Rossetian texts. In this case, the symbolism is two-fold: the stem of the flower is stiff and hard (like an erection) in order to support the weight of the Madonna lily, a flower associated with the Church.

temptation) and they never visually witness his orgasm(s). This verse deals with not seeing as well as seeing. What they did see in the lines prior to this part of the poem leads the imagination of the speaker to the future orgasm(s) of the young man, rendering religion and self-control powerless when faced with the temptation embodied in the girls' eyes.

The girls are excited in their pseudo role of Eve, even though the youth never takes the bait. This is partly due to the fact that the bait is never actually offered to him as the girls, conscious of the power of their gaze, hide their eyes. The girls take absolute delight in their role as voyeuses of the imagined exhibitionism of the seminarian. In this pleasure, they have a dual role: they are both passive and active. When they are sexualizing the seminarian, they are active, looking at him, spying on him without his knowledge. When they are playing mass, they are sexually passive. They are the acolytes who bring the necessary accoutrements to the priest. They are also both his protectresses and his ruin.⁴⁵ The items that they give him are given so that he is shielded from the girls, but at the same time, they fantasize about his future masturbatory activities, corrupting him, at least in their imaginations.

The girls are apparently discontent with their traditional gender role and perform a female gender that is not typical when they become the active pursuers and voyeuses of the seminarian. As stated above, the girls do act passively at certain stages of the poem, mainly when they play mass. This point is interesting to note because they are apparently

⁴⁵ See Miller, "Fall." She states that the girls are saving him from "a fall into hell (which would be ordination)" (264). This interpretation is viable if it is considered from the speaker's point of view. It is possible that the seminarian does not want to be rescued from ordination. He does not request that the girls save him, they take it upon themselves to do so.

comfortable in accepting (or playing) the passive female role when it comes to reverence of Catholic rites, but they are not respectful enough of the young seminarian to allow him to remain in his performance as a celibate priest in training.

These two girls pick and choose which power structures they wish to maintain and which they choose to dismantle. Perhaps they demonstrate true passivity as the stereotypically feminine girls they are during “mass.” The masturbation of the seminarian is imagined after all, and the only overt challenge to the girls’ traditional gender role is when they hide to look at the young man. The opposite is true of their image of the seminarian: it is only in the girls’ imagination that he steps out of his prescribed performance, textually the sexualized version never really appears.

This poem seems to be a first step in Rossetti’s challenge of gender norms with regard to who looks at whom and who rebels against established normative gender performativity. The girls constitute themselves as erotic beings, capable of assuming a gender role possibly not readily accepted by Western cultural gender norms. They break out of confining notions of gender in order to manifest an active sexuality for themselves. They also ascribe a general sexuality, albeit an imagined one, to a man that should be asexual because of his chosen profession.

In “La Anunciación del Ángel” and “Del prestigio del Demonio” (Devocionario 35, 37 respectively), instead of a biological man as seen in the seminarian, angelic and demonic masculine figures are the objects of the speakers’ viewing and sexual desires. Rossetti uses as inspiration the influences of her Catholic upbringing: a religious procession of the Virgen de la Pastora and memories of etchings from prayer books used

in her school days (Escaja, “Transgresión” 87; Wilcox, Women 291).⁴⁶ The poetic voices discover their budding sexuality through fantasies triggered by thoughts and images of an angel and the devil. The lyric “I” provides the reader with a hypermasculinized vision of the archangel Gabriel and Lucifer in “La Anunciación del Ángel” and “Del prestigio del Demonio” respectively, while offering a chorus of epicene angels in the latter that does not evoke any sense of the erotic in the speaker. In fact, the reaction toward the effeminate angels is the polar opposite of the scopophilic pleasure derived from the sight of both Gabriel and Lucifer. This “repulsion” caused by the angels and consequent ridicule and rejection of them demonstrates how the definition and expectations of the masculine in these two poems do not permit deviation from the established male/female gender binary.

Despite upholding stereotypical ideas of masculinity, Rossetti does question traditional roles of men and women as observers and the observed. In an interview with Sharon Keefe Ugalde, Rossetti asks why women always have the “estigma de puta” and men the “aureola de conquistador” and wonders why men cannot be sexual objects as well (Conversaciones 157). Her female speakers are many times active gazers who sexually objectify men as men have done to women. According to Noni Benegas, women “tienen que romper la idea de Eva y María y todo lo demás creado por el hombre en cuanto a la imagen de la mujer” (Estudio 60). Although Rossetti moves away from traditional ideas of woman as held by men and patriarchal society, she does not reject men themselves, nor

⁴⁶ Devocionario and Indicios vehementes will be abbreviated Dev and IV respectively. For studies on the “Anunciación del ángel” see Escaja “Transgresión,” Fajardo “Gay saber,” and Sarabia. For studies on “Del prestigio del demonio” see Escaja “Ana” and “Transgresión,” Wilcox Women, and Williamson.

the idea of men as erotic objects. This revelry, unfortunately, is to the detriment of those who do not fit the culturally accepted performance of masculinity, at least as seen in these two examples.

In “La Anunciación del Ángel,” the reader is introduced to the figure of Gabriel who has appeared to announce the sexual awakening of the poetic voice. In the first verse the intent of the poem is clear: to portray the archangel as a muscle-bound being capable of sexually taking the person who views him. In fact, the speaker says she would die if the events presented in the text were to happen:

Muriérame yo, gladiador, arcángel, verte avanzar
abierta la camisa, tenue vello irisado
por tu pecho de cobre.
Brazos, venas,
latido, curva, élitros de insectos
bajo el músculo o velas de navío.
Muriérame yo en ellos, cautiva la cintura,
amenazante dardo presentido,
pálido acónito,
igual que una fragancia, preciso, me traspase.
Muriérame yo en tu ancho hombro
doblada mi cabeza. Empapado y oscuro
indeciso resbala por tu frente el acanto
y mi mejilla roza, y cubre y acaricia.
Muriérame, sí, pero no antes
de saber qué me anuncia este desasosiego,
rosa gladiolo o en mi vientre ascua.
No antes que, febriles, mis dedos por tus ropas
desordenándolas las desabotenen,
se introduzcan y lleguen
y puedan contemplar, averiguarte,
con su novicio tacto.

This pillar of strength is undeniably masculine. He is described as a bronze-chested gladiator with manly chest hair visible through his open shirt (ll. 2-3). The Petrarchan

cataloging of his body continues: she names his arms, veins, and heartbeat as elytra protect the muscle beneath, and the poetic voice rests her head on the angel's broad shoulder.

Not only is the archangel's body described as masculine, but the poem is replete with phallic symbols. There is foreboding of a threatening dart or lance and a pallid aconite that pierces the speaker (ll. 8-9). The acanthus and a gladiolus contribute to the array of spear-like objects which all indicate the inevitable erection that Gabriel will have when he comes into sexual contact with the speaker.

These phallic symbols and the alluded to power and threatening nature of the Annunciation are reminiscent of the biblical passage.⁴⁷ But in Rossetti's recreation of the annunciation, the speaker, apparently a virgin, or at least someone with little sexual experience, does anything but turn away from Gabriel as did Mary. In fact, she welcomes the revelation brought by the archangel. Before she dies from this imagined experience, she wants to know exactly what the message is and consequently burns with passion and anxiety: her abdomen is hot embers. Despite Gabriel's threatening presence, it is the lyric voice who takes charge of her sexual awakening and it is her fingers, inexperienced as they may be, that unbutton the angel's shirt, inserting themselves to touch him, familiarizing themselves with his body. This text is subversive on multiple fronts as observed by Tina Escaja:

⁴⁷ In the Gospel according to St. Luke, 1:29, Mary is troubled by both the message that she receives from, and the sight of, the archangel. This moment has been represented numerous times in the visual arts. One example is a 1333 altar painting by Simone Martini. Here the Virgin is turning away from a threatening archangel. Not only is his gesture threatening, but the words emanating from his mouth and the flowers in his hand and in the background are reminiscent of the phallic symbols seen in the poem. Along these lines, Mary Makris in "Pop Music and Poetry: Ana Rossetti's Yesterday" notes that in paintings, Gabriel holds a lily to represent Mary's purity (283). The presence of the flower can be interpreted as both a symbol of purity and as a threatening phallic symbol as explained above.

En primer lugar, se subvierten los roles tradicionales de actividad masculina y pasividad femenina. Al mismo tiempo, se ironiza sobre el privilegio del hombre de iniciar sexualmente a la mujer, al ser la virgen quien en el poema de Rossetti ‘introduce’ y ‘explora.’ Finalmente, se transgrede la secuencia bíblica hasta la total inversión por la sexualización de un episodio que en el texto bíblico desposee totalmente de sexualidad y de voz propia a María. (“Transgresión” 89)⁴⁸

“Del prestigio del demonio” also shows a hyper-masculinized figure in line with that of Gabriel although it is virtually his polar opposite: Lucifer. The very title of the poem privileges the demon, therefore the reader knows he will be afforded a central place. What shocks is not the prestige of the demon but his opposition to the epicene and effeminate angels who do not arouse any desires in the girls who look at them other than to turn the page of their prayer books.

Here the poetic voice describes how she and her classmates felt when they looked at an engraving of the devil in their prayer book, which, similar to the poem about Gabriel, awakens in the girls nascent sexual longings through vision. The reader is first presented with a chaste, celestial harem of epicene angels with princess-like gestures (ll. 1-2). They have abundant curls on their heads and their isosceles wings are pure (l. 7). The girls are quite bored with these angels and the poetic voice goes so far as to say that if one of the angels were Achilles, Odysseus would have to come up with new tricks for him because they would certainly prefer the sound of gold bracelets to the sword (ll. 16-18):

En los castos harenes celestiales
ángeles epicenos con gestos de princesas,
de abigarradas túnicas, negligentes,

⁴⁸ Although there are no explicit gender markers attributed to the speaker, it is interpreted as a woman due to the intertextuality with the biblical text. Escaja “Transgresión”, Fajardo “Gay saber”, Sarabia, and Wilcox Women, all assume the female gender of the speaker. I do not necessarily agree that the lyric voice has to be a woman. Interpretation of the poem with a non-gendered speaker makes the “subversiveness” of this text that much more pointed.

las ropas arrastraban.
 Abundantes los bucles sobresaliendo jónicos
 de graciosos tocados e iridiscentes
 las isóceles alas, biseladas y puras
 como piedras preciosas.
 Palacio familiar, tal consonancia
 con las asiduas aulas femeninas
 --etéreo gineceo del convento—
 que ni el más alto arcángel nos despertó jamás
 envidia o sobresalto.
 Pacientes nuestros lápices, con lujo iluminaban
 el vaporoso mundo de la gloria.
 ¡Encantadores niños! Si alguno de vosotros
 fuese Aquiles, otros trucos tendría
 que idear Odiseo. (ll. 1-18)⁴⁹

The epicene angels are an example of not fitting the gender norm and of not performing masculine gender correctly. Interestingly, this particular manifestation of performance outside of the heterosexual matrix, implying that the angels are gay, is rejected by the speaker and her classmates. Although the poem challenges male and female gender roles, it maintains the idea of a natural sexuality between men and women. So while subversive on the one hand in that the women are the lookers and have sexual desires, the text is also conventional by continuing to subjectivate the angels, keeping them in their abject position.

All of this boredom and indifference changes as the girls turn the page of their prayer books and they see “EL” (l. 21). Not only is the devil physically different from the angels, he is so distinct that he requires placement on the following page. The hyper-masculine image of the devil could not possibly share the girls’ gaze with effeminate

⁴⁹ Achilles was sent away dressed as a maiden by his mother in order to avoid his fate of fighting in the Trojan War. Odysseus had heard that Achilles was hiding in King Lycomedes’s court and, disguised as a merchant, went to convince him to join him in battle. He took “female ornaments” along with weapons. Achilles gave himself away as he was enthralled by the weapons while the king’s daughters were busy with the wares Odysseus had brought to sell them (Bulfinch 197-8).

angels who are not worthy of their sexual interest and furthermore do not provide any shock value. They have to turn the page to be able to devote all of their attention to the image of Lucifer that they see.

Instead of the expected reaction of fear of the devil and hell, he awakens sexual fantasy and desire through the image that the girls see on the page in front of them. Similar to the male figure in the previous poem, the devil possesses a virile firmness and through his thin clothing the girls can make out a hard, perfect body; his beauty commanding the respect of “la ambigüedad sexual de la niñez” (Escaja, “Ana” 33):

A la vuelta de la página EL se erguía,
su capa henchida—del águila era vuelo—
la firmeza viril de su torso arrogante
circundaba. Membrana endeble y tensa
auguraban sus ropas la dura vecidad [sic]
de su cuerpo perfecto, y, turbador, el pie
--peligrosa hendidura—insistentes acosos
prometía. (ll. 21-28)⁵⁰

He is, in other words, the embodiment of stereotypical Western masculinity. He is also a figure in Christianity that should not command any respect and certainly not any type of desire. This drawing is the one link to the forbidden masculine world that the members of the “etéreo gineceo del convento” (l. 11) have and textually, it is far better to desire a masculine demon than an effeminate angel.

The devil does instill a type of fear in the girls, but it is a fear that attracts them to the (possible) future experiences that they will have with men. After their initial reaction,

⁵⁰ I do not agree with Escaja that the “sexual ambiguity of childhood” is displayed. The girls in the poem are fully aware of their awakening sexual yearnings due to the image that they view. It is also made apparent in the text that they have a clear desire for a stereotypically masculine figure; consequently no ambiguity exists for them.

the girls reverently put down their pencils burning with the painful tension of unbearable anxiety in much the same way as the speaker did for Gabriel in “La Anunciación” (ll. 32-4). The girls gaze at this image of the devil and are instantaneously filled with feelings attributed to his evil works: lust, desire, sexual yearnings: “Y reverentemente los lápices guardábamos. / La carne estremecida: crispación dolorosa / de insorportable ansia en la cintura ardiéndonos” (ll. 32-35). It is no accident that Rossetti chose the devil to awaken the girls’ interest in sex; for it would be impossible that a group of enchanting, effeminate boys could have the same effect as the greatest sinner of all, who also just happens to be a man.

Devils were, according to Rossetti, “hombres con unas ropas tan ajustadas que era igual que si estuviesen desnudos” (Ugalde, Conversaciones 158).⁵¹ Perhaps Rossetti’s fascination with the devil stems from the fact that she considers paradise boring and something that “da angustia” because one has everything there (Ugalde, Conversaciones 163). She prefers the hell of Dante or Milton because there are thousands of ways to “pasártelo mal” (Ugalde, Conversaciones 163), and the speakers in these two poems desire to have a good time doing “bad” things.

In both examples, the speakers humanize and objectify the archangel and Lucifer, redefining them as fits their needs; the men lack passion while it is glorified in the speakers and the poetic personae (Sarabia 344). The images of the sculpted bodies of Gabriel and the devil do not have the same connotations as the chorus of epicene angels. While Gabriel and Lucifer occupy opposite ends of the spectrum of good and evil, their

⁵¹ In the same interview, Rossetti comments that angels were like fairies for her (158).

body types as described in the poems are relatively threatening figures to young, sexually inexperienced people.⁵² Their physical appearance is the antithesis to the peaceful and safe bodies of the effeminate angels and the speakers ascribe their own set of definitions to all of the figures. They see the archangel and the demon through the eyes of desiring subjects, albeit very young subjects, not through the eyes of frightened school children. This desire removes them from the traditional performance of the sexually inexperienced, especially in the case of the girls. The image of the princess-like angels repulses them and those of Gabriel and Lucifer produce sexual fantasy and desire. There is no place for good and pure little angels in their sexual fantasies. Because they do not incite passion, they are easily forgotten by a simple turn of the page.

In Rossetti's poetry, the speakers' qualities as observer are underscored by three points expressed by Carmela Ferradans: the poetic voice cannot be looked at by the photo, there is pleasure in the looking, and the bodies looked at are reified ("La seduccion" 28). The figures in these two poems almost jump out at the reader in what John Wilcox calls "intense and dramatic" images that "create a three dimensional vision of the...corporal and sexual beauty" of both of the male representations (Women 291).

So, while Rossetti may be subversive for the time in giving a voice to female eroticism by questioning and mocking church doctrine, she in fact maintains the gender dichotomy. The manifestation of sexual difference by the asexual, young angels is too different from the masculine figures and lyric voices in these poems. They do not figure into the desires expressed by the poetic voice and as such, are left by the wayside.

⁵² See note 47. Mary is often shown turning away from Gabriel, with a look of either fear or distrust on her face. Gabriel leans forward almost appearing to "attack" Mary with his words which are often depicted as a sword-like stream coming from his mouth.

Angels are traditionally thought of in two ways: asexual or masculine. They are not human, but the archangels, Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel all have men's names and they, along with Lucifer, are often depicted as men. In fact, in the King James version of the Bible, all are referred to as "he."⁵³ If we are to assume that angels are asexual, or that they have ambiguous gender, it is even more interesting that Rossetti changes this notion, making a point of transforming the archangel Gabriel and the devil into super men. She accentuates the masculine in them while concurrently emphasizing the effeminate, or non-masculine, in the chorus of pure angels.

Rossetti does alter the traditional Christian hierarchy in these poems: angels stand on higher moral ground than the devil (Escaja, "Transgresión" 86). But by exaggerating the masculine in both the archangel Gabriel and the demon Lucifer, and disregarding the asexual character of the other angels, she cements the notion that supposed natural sexuality and manifestations of gender operate on the male/female dichotomy: if you are a woman, you must desire a man; if you are not a man you are not a player. Rossetti's poetry, and especially Devocionario, centers on pleasure and desire of the human body. In order to make this clear in these two poems, there must be some humanization and separation between those desired and those not. Unfortunately in these two examples, this humanization, embellished though it may be, excludes those who may not fall into neat categories and expected performances of gender.

The masculine or male figures that are viewed in Rossetti's poetry are not limited to real men or images on a page; they may also be a figment of the speaker's imagination.

⁵³ For references to Gabriel see Daniel 8:16-17, 9:21-22, Luke 1:12, 1:29; for Michael see Revelation 12:7; for Raphael see Tobit 6:7-8; for Satan see II Kings 2:12. These examples are not exhaustive but will illustrate references to the archangels and Satan as men.

The poem “Where is my man?” (Yesterday 52), presents a lyric voice who continually searches for a man, presumably the speaker’s actual or desired lover.⁵⁴ This man is searched for everywhere and is simultaneously omnipresent and absent in everything that the lyric voice observes.

The female speaker (“consiento estar enamorada” l. 3) possesses the elusive man of the title more when she looks for him, but she knows that she will never be able to find him. Consequently she only allows herself to be in love when she comes to that realization (ll. 1-3). It is at this point, with the awareness that she will never encounter nor completely view him, that she loses herself in different aspects of the city and pursues everything that resembles the ephemeral man that she mentally possesses:

Sólo entonces me pierdo en la esmaltada jungla
de coches o tiovivos, cafés abarrotados,
lunas de escaparates, laberintos de parques
o de espejos, pues corro tras todo
lo que se te parece. (ll. 4-8)⁵⁵

Although this appears contradictory, she has him in, and only in, his absence; he is most present when he is nowhere to be found. Continuing her journey through the streets, the lyric voice is fascinated by the colors that she sees in the sky, on T-shirts, or the green malachite that reminds her of an undressing episode she had with her man (“o el verde malaquita / que por tu pecho yo desabrochaba.” [ll. 13-4]).

If she thinks she sees him, she feels “[d]eliciosa congoja” that “me hace desfallecer” (ll. 15, 16). This anguish, contrasted to the happiness she experiences while she is looking for him, is most likely due to the fact that she will lose him if he

⁵⁴ I use the third edition of Yesterday. See bibliography for complete publication information.

⁵⁵ The title of the poem invokes the song “Where Is My Man?” by Eartha Kitt. See also Makris “Pop” for other poems linked to popular music.

materializes. When she does get this feeling, the focus shifts explicitly to her eyes. Her anxious skin depends on the alertness of her eyes (l. 17) and her pupils investigate her surroundings to see if she can discern a man that she thought she had glimpsed earlier. This probing eye overturns every clue that appears to lead her to her man, although in reality, she does not want to find him. What she desires is for his image to insert itself into her surroundings; looking for him in everything allows him to exist in her mind, in that place of never-able-to-find-you of the first two lines of the poem. In fact, his invisibility, not his visibility, leads to his existence for the speaker. “[I]n a gaze-oriented culture, visibility guarantees existence” (Murray 44), but here it is the speaker’s inability to see the man that brings him into being. Rossetti subverts common conceptions of the relationship between seeing and existing with this text.

In a situation similar to that of the previous three poems analyzed, the speaker here gets pleasure from what she sees, what she does not see, and what she imagines she sees. The text incorporates what is not seen, the absent man, and simultaneously a plethora of objects viewed as she ambles through the city streets. The search that she procures confirms his absence which makes her happy and keeps her in her element: loving someone who is not present.

The woman is a type of *flâneuse*, wandering around the city, looking at and observing everything without really engaging herself with the objects she views.⁵⁶ The purpose these objects serve is to trigger memories of her man, making him mentally

⁵⁶ The *flâneuse* is the feminine form of *flâneur*. The female form came about in the 19th century with the advent of department stores. Since women did not walk the streets alone as their male counterparts did, the *flâneuse* “window shopped” at department stores. This particular *flâneuse* though, is not a window shopper, but one who walks the streets alone as the *flâneurs* did.

present for her in his physical absence. In this way, the lyric voice is able to control her affairs of the heart through her eyes. She knows she will not find her man, making it safe to search for him everywhere. This search maintains her happiness and status of being in love and maintains the image of the man (as memory?) where he seems to reside in perpetuity.

The female speaker in this poem subverts her traditional gender role in looking in that she actively searches for this absent man. She is not the object of his gaze, but rather desires to subject him to hers. Although this man never physically materializes, he is subjected to her desires, not she to his as in traditional male/female viewing relationships. One could say that she is subjected to his desire not to be found, but the focus of the text is her looking at objects that remind her of him as well as imagining him in those objects. Although the desire in this poem is based more on the act of looking itself rather than on the sexual desire(s) that arise(s) when a certain person or image is viewed, the traditional role of woman as observed exhibitionist is challenged.

SCOPOPHILIA: UNGENDERED LOOKING

A poem in which there is obvious scopophilic, active, and voyeuristic looking is “A un traje de pana verde que por ahí anda perturbando a los muchachos” (IV 43). This poem is different from the others previously analyzed because the speaker is ungendered and the object of the voyeuristic gaze is, in this case, supposedly female:

Deslumbrados los ojos, adornados de ti,
despertados de súbito, ¡oh visión turbadora!
sujeta la mirada cual broche a tu vestido,
la cabeza inmantada al giro de tus pies,
adivino el temblor con que, torpes, mis manos

tus ropajes, rasgándolos de ti, separarían
de los hermosos hombros miembros entrevistos apenas.
Mis ojos, a un banquete tan inesperado acudirían.
Nutriéndose de ti se inundarían de oro.
Mas la tela, al cubrirte, es igual a la cáscara
del fruto que no debo probar.
Y así tal semejanza te convierte
en un irresistible y acuciante deseo.⁵⁷

Aside from the title, no words in the actual text indicate that that speaker/observer is a man. In fact, the title mentions “muchachos,” while the speaker is singular. There has been discussion of the use of the words “traje” (from the title) and “vestido” (l. 3). Candelas Newton concedes the androgyny associated with the term “traje” but states that “vestido” is used solely for women’s clothing (“Retales” 618). The use of “vestido” as a female gendered term is inconclusive. A “vestido” is a “[p]renda o conjunto de prendas exteriores con que se cubre el cuerpo.” (“Vestido” def. 1); it is only in the second definition that it is labeled an article of women’s clothing.⁵⁸ Newton describes the figure in the green suit as a kind of “sirena seductora” or a serpent, which indicates incitement to sin (“Retales” 618). The fact that she uses “sirena” and “serpent” to describe the viewed object solidifies her idea that the object of the voyeuristic gaze of the speaker is a woman. For Sarabia, a homoerotic gaze exists in the poem which she does not explain in detail. She states that Rossetti uses fabric that has many cultural and social connotations and that in this poem, “el hábito sí hace el monje” (347). What type of “monje” (or “monja”) she does not say, only that the speaker/observer and the observed are of the same sex. She suggests no answer to the question of which sex this might be. Two options are left under

⁵⁷ See Newton, Sarabia, Servodidio, and Wilcox, Women for discussion of this poem.

⁵⁸ “Traje enterizo de la mujer.” (“Vestido” def. 2)

this idea then: there is either a female speaker looking at a female object, or a male speaker looking at a male object.⁵⁹ “[V]isual feasting” abounds in this poem (Servodidio 321), but there is no conclusive evidence as to the gender of either the observer or the observed.

Despite the ambiguity in Sarabia’s analysis of the homoeroticism in this poem, I do agree with her that homoerotic desire is expressed. Line eleven is the key: the speaker alludes to the corduroy suit as the skin or peel that covers the fruit that s/he should not taste. It is permissible to look at the person/forbidden fruit, but it is prohibited to “taste” her/him. The explicit statement of the prohibition to look at and/or savor the person in question too much is indicative of an underlying, extra-textual issue. Due to the gender ambiguity of the speaker and the person in the green corduroy suit, this proscription points to a social taboo that is very likely that of gender differences and/or homosexuality. If the gender of the observer is a woman and the observed is a man, the taboo that is broken is that of role reversal: the woman is the active looker, receiving ocular pleasure from what she views, and the man is the passive, observed exhibitionist, offering his body in general for the visual pleasure of the woman.

Giving credence to homoeroticism in “A un traje de pana verde” further fragments the taboo. If the lyric voice is a woman who looks at another woman, not only has she broken her societal role as the passive observed to become the active observer, but she is also seeing and desiring a member of her biological sex or culturally defined gender. Perhaps the magnitude of this challenge to cultural norms of viewing and sexual desire

⁵⁹ Wilcox states that the speaker “describes with great pleasure the skill and cunning *she* is capable of displaying to incite a young *man* to desire *her*” (Women 287; emphasis added). Clearly, the use of the term “vestido” directs most interpretations to consider the viewed object as a woman.

was too great for the time. The gender ambiguity in this text is so subtle, it is easy to see why so many assume that the speaker is a man and the viewed object is a woman. Not only is the text ambiguous, but there is no consensus as to its meaning for gender. This may have been the very thing that Rossetti intended when she wrote the poem and others like it.⁶⁰

Whatever the gender, the person exhibiting her/himself in “A un traje de pana verde” is a “visión turbadora” (l. 2), the gaze is fastened on her/him like the brooch of the suit/dress (l. 3), the head of the observer is “inmantada” to the object’s steps (l. 4), and the object is an unhoped-for banquet that the speaker’s eyes attend (l. 8). All of this makes the object an “irresistible y acuciante deseo” (l. 14). But much the same way as in other poems with traditional male and female roles of activity and passivity reversed, this voyeuristic pleasure must remain such; it is hidden and never acted upon. All of the alluded to physical contact happens in the imagination of the lyric voice.⁶¹

In “A un joven con abanico” (IV 49), we see an objective speaker, whose gender is not marked, taking pleasure in her/his voyeuristic activities of looking at a youth, presumably a young man from the “joven” of the title, and his voyeuristic/exhibitionistic tendencies with a fan.

⁶⁰ It is important to remember that *Indicios vehementes* was published in 1985. The book is a compilation of poems written between 1979 and 1984, the period just after the death of Francisco Franco, during the transition to democracy, and the *movida*. “A un traje de pana verde” is part of the first section of *Indicios*, “Los devaneos de Erato.” It was never meant to be published and is filled with texts with “guiños” meant for Rossetti’s friends (Ugalde, *Conversaciones* 156). Perhaps in Rossetti’s circle, the gender ambiguity would have been understood right away.

⁶¹ This is apparent in the verb tenses used in this poem. When the lyric voice speaks of taking off the clothing of her/his object of desire, the conditional is used which indicates that the alluded to situation is in fact hypothetical.

Kreuger-Robbins has an interesting interpretation of the poem as that of a woman deflowering a young man, but it is questionable because she assumes the speaker is a woman (173-4). Wilcox also assumes female gender for the speaker, and views the poem as homoerotic on the part of the young man (Women 285). This assumption seems problematic as well, given that no textual markers indicate the gender of the speaker. Both Kreuger-Robbins and Wilcox concede that the person holding the fan is in fact a young man, most likely from the extra-textual clue in the title of the poem. It would be quite feasible that a young woman would have trouble maneuvering a fan if this were one of her first experiences with the object, but the title mentions “un joven” not “una joven.”⁶²

The speaker is delighted by the inexperience of this youth (“Y qué encantadora es tu inexperiencia” [l. 1]) and describes the clumsiness and uncertainty with which this young man maneuvers his fan: he has a “mano torpe” (l. 2), “gracia que adivinas” (l.3), and a “vaivén penoso” (l. 4) in his extra effort to display proper fanning technique. The whole scene gives the speaker of the poem the impression that this is a “larvado gesto” (l. 9), something that is on the brink of maturation but not quite accomplished.

The boy’s gestures with the fan are remnants of his mother, implying that he learned his rudimentary display of the art of fanning from her; she was a “paciente / e inolvidable ejemplo” (ll. 12-13) for him. The patience of the mother is rather ambiguous: it is unclear if she was patient because he was a young man using a fan, placing him outside the parameters of his traditionally established gender role, or because he was really not very good at working it. Fans have long been an instrument with which women flirted and transmitted messages. In the 18th century, the fan was a

⁶² See also Williamson.

pieza indispensable, en una palabra, para estimular las relaciones iniciales con el cortejo o aspirante a tal. La forma de abrir y cerrar el abanico, de susurrar a su sombra, de dejarlo caer para que alguien lo recogiera, eran partes de un complejo ceremonial de ‘nonandas’ y trivialidades que también alcanzaban a otros gestos y movimientos de la moda. (Martín Gaité, Usos 48-9)

As the youth remembers his mother and holds his fan, he squints possibly to better discern a person or object at which he looks or to further hide his gaze from those who might look at him.

The youth is between “desdén y seducción” (l. 8), as he works the fan both “adorable / y peligrosamente” (ll. 13-14) and in this in-between space he turns away (“te desvías” l. 15). Conclusions about from what exactly he turns away are left to the reader to decide. One interpretation is that he is deviating from the cultural norm and “normal” behavior for a young man. Not only does he distance himself from the patient example that his mother provided him in her expert, feminine, fan work, but he is a male taking part in a stereotypically female activity. A young man with a fan displaces all cultural expectations of male gender roles by questioning the very foundation on which his mother’s example is based. According to Judith Butler, “we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (Gender 178), and for those who feel defined gender boundaries exist for men and women, the vision is threatening. The danger lies in that the presumably solid foundation for gender roles is challenged by this youth. The fact that this topic is one possible theme of this poem indicates that not everyone finds this dangerous or worthy of punishment.

The speaker’s voyeurism has already been addressed, but in the youth we find a combination of both voyeurism and exhibitionism. The fan fosters the hiding of the

voyeur's gaze, he is able to spy on others and observe them intently with disdain (l. 8) without their necessarily being aware of his gaze. This youth also wants to be seen by others, such as the speaker of the poem. This is a type of semi-exhibitionism: he wants to be seen with the fan, but the fan conveniently covers parts of him (the face) that he does not want viewed in its totality. So the fan serves the dual purpose of facilitating both voyeurism and exhibitionism. The role of sight in this text is threefold: the seduction the youth hopes to convey with the fan as people look at him, the disdain with which he looks at others over the fan, and the voyeuristic pleasure with which the speaker looks at him.

The fact that there is gender ambiguity or a lack of its mention altogether attests to Rossetti's attempts to continually question established gender roles and the performance of those roles. If the speaker of the poem is a woman, she breaks from her prescribed role as exhibitionist as discussed in other poems. If the speaker is a heterosexual man, there is no norm subverted by the speaker, and he would be performing his gender correctly: actively looking and being amused at an apparently effeminate man. Although this interpretation is possible, it does not seem probable given that Rossetti is clear about the gender of her lyric voices when she wants to be. If the speaker is a homosexual man, there is a possible homoerotic subtext that questions and challenges notions of normative heterosexuality. The important issue with this poem and "A un traje de pana verde" is that the gender ambiguity of the speaker as observer and/or the observed questions normative gender(ed) behavior. Who can look at whom and how one may perform their gender create opportunities for redefining gender norms. In Rossetti's texts, anyone can look at anyone else, and rarely do criticisms of "incorrect" gender performance come to the fore.

Continuing the gender ambiguity and transgression of prescribed gender norms are “Chico Wrangler” (IV 99) and “Calvin Klein, underdrawers” (Yesterday 54). These are possibly the best-known and most-analyzed poems by Rossetti, erotic or otherwise.⁶³ The general consensus about these two texts is that the speakers are women looking at men in jean and underwear ads respectively. Margaret Persin, Rosa Sarabia, and Carmela Ferradans are the only three that suggest that the speaker has no specific gender, other critics all refer to the speaker as female. Despite the discrepancies, all focus on the sexualization and eroticization of the undisputedly male object of desire portrayed in publicity photographs. When gender does enter their discussions, it is to talk of the subversion of the male/female, subject/object, observer/observed dichotomies.

The voyeuristic pleasure experienced by the lyric voices of both texts is indisputable.⁶⁴ In “Chico Wrangler” s/he is “de subito asaltado” (l. 1) and the lyric voice adores the vision more than is permissible (l. 2). What is unclear is why the gaze lingers more than it should. (Because the speaker is viewing an ad? Because this text possibly displays homoerotic desire?) The object observed is also undeniably masculine: his chest is an “escudo durısimo” (l. 6), he has a “vigoroso brazo” (l. 7), and the “perfectas piernas” (l. 8) separate in an exhibitionist offering of the genitals that are behind the “mas cenido pantalon” (l. 9).

⁶³ For studies including “Chico Wrangler” see Debicki “Intertextuality” and Spanish; Ferradans “La seduccion,” Makris “Mass Media,” Newton, Sarabia, Servodidio, and Ugalde “Erotismo” and “Subversion”. For studies including “Calvin Klein, underdrawers” see Ferradans “(Re)velacion,” “De seduccion,” “La seduccion,” Makris “Mass,” Persin Getting, Rosas “Ana” and “Apropiacion,” Sarabia, and Wilcox Women.

⁶⁴ In an interview with Jesus Fernandez Palacios, Rossetti commented on her inspiration: “hoy por hoy, mi principal estımulo consiste en unos publivas de cierta marca de vaqueros que hacen que meterse en un metro sea una gloria” (11). Further in the interview, she mentions the Wrangler brand by name (11).

In “Calvin Klein, underdrawers”, the reader is confronted with a text similar to “Chico Wrangler.” A non-gendered speaker looks at another ad, this time one for men’s underwear:

Fuera yo como nevada arena
alrededor de un lirio,
hoja de acanto, de tu vientre horma,
o flor de algodono que en su nube ocultara
el más severo mármol travertino.
Suave estuche de tela, moldura de caricias
fuera yo, y en tu joven turgencia
me tensara.
Fuera yo tu cintura,
fuera el abismo oscuro de tus ingles,
redondos capiteles para tus muslos fuera,
fuera yo, Calvin Klein.⁶⁵

Unlike “Chico Wrangler,” this man is scantily clad, leaving little to the imagination: “[t]he pole vaulter was captured from below the apex of the bulging briefs, the corona of his penis clearly discernible through the soft cotton material. The crisp, clean white of the briefs, matching the pure white of the stucco behind him, stood out in brilliant relief against his tanned skin” (Gaines 297). This poem is also laden with phallic symbols, so it is no mystery that the focus of the observer’s gaze, who is also the speaker, is the penis: “lirio” (l. 2), “algodono” (l. 4), “el más severo mármol travertino” (l. 5), “joven turgencia” (l. 7), “redondos capiteles” (l. 11).⁶⁶ This element is similar to that in “Chico Wrangler,” but again, unlike “Chico,” the focus on the man’s penis is highlighted from the

⁶⁵ The ad that inspired this poem is a Calvin Klein ad from 1983. The photographer was Bruce Weber, the model, Tom Hintnaus, a Brazilian Olympic pole vaulter. The ad was placed in Times Square and targeted the general public, making men’s underwear sexy and privileging the male body as object. See “Tom Hintnaus, Olympic Pole Vaulter.” See also Gaines.

⁶⁶ See “La Anunciaci3n del 1ngel” (*Dev* 35) and “El galdiolo blanco de mi primera comuni3n se vuelve p3rpura” (*IV* 25).

onset rather than at the end of the poem, drawing the focus of the observer (and reader) to the phallus as if it were the only thing visible in the photograph.

The fact that Rossetti uses visual and popular culture to construct these two poems is relatively novel. They were used by the *Novísimos*, a generation of which Rossetti feels a part (Ferradáns, “La seducción” 24; Ugalde, Conversaciones 161). An important element that the ads contribute is their connotations. Wrangler jeans connote a certain kind of man as do Calvin Klein underwear. What they evoke is similar to the connection between Marlboro cigarettes and the Marlboro man. When one thinks of Wrangler, one imagines a man roping bulls or herding wild mustangs; when one thinks of Calvin Klein underwear, one imagines muscle-bound men or waif female supermodels. Far from acting as democratizing agents that break down barriers of “clase y estatus social” (Sarabia 351), Wrangler jeans and Calvin Klein underwear are worn by different sectors of the male population. While both “specimens” in the poems are chiseled and god-like (similar to the images of Gabriel and Lucifer), the Wrangler brand connotes ruggedness and brute strength whereas Calvin Klein underwear connotes finesse and sophistication. Despite these differences, the men in the ads were chosen to draw attention to the product as well as their physiques. Ana Rossetti herself states that she does not believe “el modelo de los calzoncillos Calvin Klein lo hayan elegido por su coeficiente intelectual” (Ugalde, Conversaciones 157).

If these observed and eroticized men are gazed at by a woman, consequently converting the man into the object and the woman into the viewing subject, the gender binary is still maintained; despite the upside-down nature of the practice of looking and objectifying, the players remain a man and a woman. If the speaker is considered

ungendered however, it opens the door for many more possibilities and subverts the norm which undoes the heterosexual matrix. It is possible that the speaker is female, but without any textual clues as to her/his gender, one must consider the possibility that these are homoerotic poems. If that is the case, it sheds new light on the purpose of the ads and the purpose of writing the poems. The Calvin Klein ad was intended for the mainstream public, not specifically the gay community, but it paved the way for the male form to be accepted as a tool in advertising and subsequently as an object to be viewed by both men and women, gay or otherwise (“Tom Hintnaus” 2).⁶⁷

The voyeuristic activities of an ungendered speaker/observer who views an ungendered object is seen in “Strangers in the night”(Yesterday 59).⁶⁸ The speaker is a voyeur or voyeuse who derives pleasure in watching someone get undressed through her/his window while her/his gaze also penetrates the window of the viewed object. The lyric voice hides her/his voyeuristic gaze as if it were “somewhat prohibited” (Makris, “Pop” 289) and the unwitting exhibitionist is none the wiser:

Cuando en la noche surge tu ventana,
el oro, taladrando los visillos,
introduce en mi alcoba tu presencia.
Me levanto e intento sorprenderte,
asistir al momento en que tu torso cruce
los cristales y la tibia camisa
sea a la silla lanzada.
Mi pupila se engarza en el encaje
y mis pies ya no atienden, de las losas, el frío.

⁶⁷ The model/athlete’s name is spelled differently in three separate sources: Hinthaus, Hintnaus, and Hintinaus. A web search for his last name reveals hits for all three spellings.

⁶⁸ See Makris “Pop” for discussion of the influence of 1960s and 1970s pop music on these poems and others.

As with many other Rossetian texts, the gender of the speaker and the object is ambiguous although some interpretations appear to narrow down options for non-normative gender manifestations or performances but are ambiguous and inconclusive at best. Makris assumes that the lyric voice is a woman and that she looks at a man in “Strangers” (“Pop” 287). Makris discusses this poem along with “Feeling” and for her the “female speakers abandon their ‘customary’ passivity and become active participants capable of fulfilling their desires in unconventional ways” (“Pop” 291).⁶⁹ In the same article she later comments that “she [Rossetti] eliminates explicit references to gender, thereby creating an aura of ambiguity” (291). This is rather contradictory given that she previously discussed the female and male genders of the observer and the observed respectively.

Even though explicit gender markers are absent in this poem, Rosa Sarabia believes Rossetti brings back “la ventanera” in “Strangers” (344). Carmen Martín Gaité attests that “cuando una mujer se asomaba a la ventana, no podía ser más que por mero reclamo erótico, por afán de exhibir la propia imagen para encandilar a un hombre” (Desde 50). But unlike the traditional “ventanera,” these (possibly) women speakers/observers do not want to be seen. Martín Gaité does state that looking out of the window conditions another type of looking: looking without being viewed (Desde 51). It

⁶⁹ See “Feeling” Yesterday 60.

would also be in line with Rossettian poetics to subvert the idea of the “ventanera” by blurring or even erasing the frame of gender categories, making it quite conceivable that a man is looking out the window or balcony.⁷⁰

In “Strangers,” the speaker views a “torso” cross her/his window and a “camisa” thrown on a chair (ll. 5-6). Both terms seem to point to a masculine object that has “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” (Makris, “Pop” 287). The idea of “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” was first expressed by Laura Mulvey in her defining article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (442).⁷¹ She considers women to have a traditional exhibitionist role, and as such, in film they are inherently meant to be looked at for the scopophilic pleasure not only of voyeuristic male actors in the film and viewers of the picture in the theater, but also women as actors and spectators. A female film-goer identifies with the male protagonist, according to Mulvey, and consequently sees the females on screen as males see them: they are the erotic object, “icon,” and “spectacle” (443). Considering the viewed object in “Strangers” as masculine is problematic under this idea because “torso” and “camisa” are not terms reserved exclusively for reference to the male body and male-oriented clothing. A “camisa” is a “[p]renda de vestir, *por lo común de hombre*, con cuello, mangas, y abotonada por delante, que cubre el torso.” (“Camisa,” def. 1; emphasis added). While this definition privileges the use of “camisas” by men, it does not exclude their use by women and contributes to the general gender ambiguity in the poem. Neither

⁷⁰ In Sharon Keefe Ugalde’s interview, Rossetti states that she rarely lets herself go because she is fundamentally a spectator: “Todo lo miro desde el palco” (*Conversaciones* 155).

⁷¹ This article was originally published in 1975.

does the use of the word “camisa” preclude that a woman wear it. This would further blur gender lines in this poem and open the possibility for a woman to perform gender, through her clothing, in a non-traditional way.

Regardless of the gender of the speaker and object viewed, the voyeuristic gaze of the speaker is a safe one, much like that effected in “Chico Wrangler” and “Calvin Klein, underdrawers.” There is no risk involved in the look and the poetic voice is able to ensure her/his anonymity and consequently continue her/his scopophilic and voyeuristic activities. These activities can be pursued every night and prove no threat to the lyric voice. The gender of both personae is not essential to derive some meaning from the text. However, the fact that there is no explicit gender here leaves interpretive possibilities open regarding normative versus non-normative gender behavior as it does in so many Rossettian poems.

SCOPOPHOBIA: INTIMIDATING LOOKING

Although the majority of Ana Rossetti’s poems treat sight and vision as scopophilic, some combine pleasurable and unpleasurable looking in the same text. This is seen either as movement by the speaker/object(s) from scopophilic to scopophobic viewing or the sole presence of scopophobia.⁷² Texts in which the lyric voice expresses some sort of embarrassment from looking or being looked at consist in many cases of social taboos and viewing the prohibited. At first glance, the shame experienced by the

⁷² Other texts not analyzed in this study that consider a combination of scopophilia and scopophobia are “Con motivo de un cojín de *petit point*” (IV 21), “Uno” (IV 68), “Santa Inés en agonía” (Dev 24). For scopophobic texts see also “Isolda”(IV 60), “Los ojos de la noche” (Dev 21), “Estéban” (Dev 26), “Defiéndeme”(Dev 63), and “Llámame” (Dev 64).

lyric voice seems to uphold social stereotypes about gender roles, but what begs examination is the fact that the speaker challenges these norms by looking in the first place. It can also be said that the rejection of the gaze of another is a manifestation of the speaker's agency and her/his desire to challenge social, cultural, and ideological roles into which s/he is placed.

Examples of the speaker's refusal to look are present in several poems, which present situations that broaden Freud's definition of scopophobia to include not just shame, but a type of fear or disgust in looking. Closing one's eyes or looking away is a manner in which the speaker can challenge established norms. Not engaging in the expected activity of seeing or looking is a manifestation of the speaker's agency and individuality.

"Homenaje a Lindsay Kemp y a su tocado de plumas amarillas" (IV 47) offers many complex looking relationships. The poem is based loosely on the biblical story of Salome and was inspired by Kemp's theatrical production Salome [A Spectacle for Oscar Wilde] (Miller, "Fall" 270).⁷³ The viewing relationships are complex because there is gender performance in the form of drag.⁷⁴ Kemp, a "mime artist, renegade, and magnetic stage performer" first danced Salome in the dormitory of his "boarding school, naked except for layers of toilet paper, heavily rouged with the red paint" he had "rubbed off the wall." ("Kemp, Lindsay;" Smith, Rupert).⁷⁵ His dance troupe's 1976 performance of Salome was an all-male show and Kemp, as Salome, "performed a seven-veil dance that

⁷³ For biblical references to Salome, see Matthew 14:3-11 and Mark 6:17-28.

⁷⁴ When referring to Salome, or Kemp as Salome, the pronouns "she" and "her" will be used.

⁷⁵ The young Kemp was punished "not for the decadence" of the dance, but for wasting "school resources" (Smith, Rupert).

resembled an ecstatic whirling dervish” (“Kemp, Lindsay”). In this poem drag is not “used in the service of...hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms” but rather as a vehicle to question those very norms (Butler, Bodies 125).

The gazes in this poem revolve around Salome’s/Kemp’s dance. The ungendered objective poetic voice reconstructs the production by offering her/his gaze as an assumed audience member of the staged event. The gaze of the other audience members as well as that of the actors on stage is also reproduced. Salome/Kemp is gazed at by all of the people in the theater and they almost unanimously have a lustful reaction with “miradas rapaces” (l. 18) to which Salome is subjected. Everyone, that is, except Johanatán. In the text the biblical characters that appear are Herod as the “incestuoso padre” who gazes at his niece in a lascivious manner (l. 20), John the Baptist, here called Johanatán, who refuses to look at Salome in life (l. 19), and the decapitated head of John the Baptist/Johanatán that is forced to “look” in death at the genitals of Salome that he refused to view while alive (ll. 29-32).

The biblical John the Baptist does not actually watch Salome’s dance due to his imprisonment, and Wilde’s Jokanaan represents “the patriarchal voice” (Greger 42). In the poem, the theatrical John the Baptist/Johanatán is present at the dance but does not look at Salome partly because he is a holy man, and partly because of Salome’s gender bending performance. As Salome does her seven-veil dance on stage, she is slowly exposing her body:

Y memorables velos cayeron de sus hombros
y la luna escarlata
era una inmensa lentejuela.
Mostró al fin el último reducto,
araña tejedora entre las blancas ingles,

cruelísima venganza que abultaba
tras la postrera seda.
Y al final, su secreto delta fue ofrecido
a rapaces miradas. (ll.10-18)

Salome appears to be a woman, and “secreto delta” (l. 17) is normally an image used to describe female genitalia. However, the actor playing Salome is a biological man. It is probable then that “cruelísima venganza que abultaba / tras la postrera seda” refers to the penis and testicles of Salome/Kemp. The entire poem questions ideas of gender and dress and subsequently who looks at whom. When Salome obliges John the Baptist/Johanatán to “look” at her genitals she in effect says “look at me, take in my difference.” In all her exhibitionist glory, Salome wants to be recognized as something that fits outside of the culturally bound definitions of male and female. Three factors play a part here: “biological sex, gender identity, and gender performance” (Butler, Gender 175). A biological man playing the part of a woman who actively solicits the gaze of others defies Freud’s ideas and definitions about the passivity and activity of men and women, which further challenges norms of the role of the looker, the looked at, and gender performance. Both Salome and Rossetti upset the status quo of the male/female gender binaries as well as Freud’s ideas about the activity and passivity of the voyeur or exhibitionist by playing with gender categories and cultural ideas about what gender(s) “should” look like. As Judith Butler states:

The presuppositions that we make about sexed bodies, about them being one or the other, about the meanings that are said to inhere in them or to follow from being sexed in such a way are suddenly and significantly upset by those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize that field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural convention. (Gender 140)

At the end of the poem, Salome holds John the Baptist/Johanatán's head by the hair soaking her legs with his blood. "[H]air is associated with sexual power" and Salome forcefully holding onto John/Johanatán's head by his hair takes away what little power he may have had and gives it to Salome (Berger 55). She is still in her exhibitionist role and he has become an obliged "viewer" of her gender difference as a culturally defined woman and a biologically defined man. While it does appear that Salome upholds the traditional exhibitionist tendencies of women, she is by no means passive.

John/Johanatán's scopophobic rejection of Salome's exhibitionism, quite the opposite reaction from that of the audience, Herod, and the other actors, textually brings about his downfall and the subsequent scopophilic pleasure of Salome in finally being looked at by him. She gains pleasure from forcing Johantán to "see" in death what he refused to in life.

This version of Salome requires that everyone, audience members as well as other actors, see her as she is: a drag performer. Johanatán's character is the only one who refuses to acknowledge through looking that Salome is not a typical woman. Not only does she do a lascivious dance, which in some ways removes her from her traditional and passive female role, she is not a woman as defined by the heterosexual matrix and normative gender practice(s). Salome wants Johanatán to view her to satisfy her exhibitionist tendencies, which is a traditional female role. She also wants Johanatán, the patriarchal voice, to look at her in order for her non-normative gender performance (drag) to be recognized. With this recognition she can move from a subjectivated and marginal status to subjectification. Not only does she gain pleasure from forcing someone ashamed to view her to do so, she is also pleased by the acknowledgment of her difference from the norm as defined by the patriarchy.

The lyric voice in “Seis” (IV 73) experiences scopophobia due to her brother’s unsolicited scopophilic voyeurism. This poem is one in a series of ten that deal with the siblings “Anna” and “Louis.” The speaker is an unwitting exhibitionist as she is subjected to her brother’s viewing. There is an air of innocence and puerility to the poem as the first person speaker endeavors to escape her brother’s apparent omnipresence by swinging and kicking the leaves of an orange tree with her feet. Her game with the tree and the very fact that she is swinging (she also plays with dolls [l. 8]) is indicative of the fact that she is a little girl made to take part in a very adult game: that of being spied on for the sexual pleasure of her brother:

En su acecho ícubo de mi sombra,
se atalaya en mis huellas,
se asienta en mis vestigios.
No hay lugar sin ser por él sitiado
donde yo me cobije.
Ni poseo secreto que mi hermano no asalte.
Saquea mis tesoros, pinta raras heridas
a mis pobres muñecas, y mis faltas divulga.
¡Oh, así es él, sí, eso hace!
y cuando me columpio
mientras la vaporosa y tenue lencería
descubre sus cenefas
y mis pies acometen el verdor del naranjo,
sé muy bien que detrás de la agobiada pérgola
el brillante crisol de su atenta pupila
se endurece.

Her brother’s stalking is unrelenting. He is an incubus in both senses of the word: he is an evil demon that descends upon, and has sex with women (or at least thinks of it) and he is also a nightmare for his sister. The first half of the poem concludes when the speaker cries: “¡Oh, así es él, sí, eso hace!” (l. 9), desperate to rid herself of the nuisance so she can play in peace.

The focus changes somewhat in line ten when the speaker describes her swinging, but the overall tone turns away from childhood play to one fraught with sexual tension. As the girl swings, the edge of her undergarments becomes visible (l. 11). She knows that her incubus brother is hiding behind the pergola, spying on her in this activity as he does in every other (ll.14-16).

The brother hides because he knows he should not spy on his sister and also because of the nature of this particular episode. He is looking at forbidden things on his sister: her underwear or stockings, it is not clear which since the generic term “lencería” is used. Whichever type of undergarment it is, it leads to and/or covers her genitalia and is a metonym for both biological sex and the sex act. Seeing the edge of her undergarments only piques his curiosity. He knows he should not look at his sister in such a salacious manner, so the little incubus hides behind the pergola to spy on her.

The text does not explicitly say whether or not this spying is an innocent activity, but given that the brother is referred to as an incubus, it would seem not. As the speaker swings, she knows that he is by the pergola watching her, and she knows that his pupil is hardening (ll. 15-16). One can imagine someone hiding, staring at another, the pupils contracting because of concentration on the image before the observer. The fact that the verb “endurecerse” is in a line by itself draws attention to the word and to its multiple meanings in the text. It suffices to say that if this is a poem about budding sexual curiosity in a young boy, the pupil in all likelihood is not the only biological part that “hardens.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ According to Linda Williams, “the gaze is an erection of the eye” (“Corporealized” 14).

In all probability, both are too young to fully comprehend what is happening. However, he knows he is curious about what is under his sister's skirt and she knows she is uncomfortable with his gaze.

This begs the question if she knows he is there and she does not like his voyeuristic tendencies nor her coerced exhibitionism, why does she continue to swing? Does the speaker merely accept the fact that there is no escaping her brother, his antics, and her apparent normative role as a sexually enticing (young) woman? Is she an accomplice to his looking at her undergarments? There is no clear answer, but it would seem from the tone of the beginning of the poem, and the disgruntledness that the speaker suffers at the eyes of her brother, she is not pleased with his spying and desire to see her underwear. If we assume that both are too young to realize the ramifications of their voyeurism/exhibitionism, it is logical that the lyric voice would focus on the hardening of her brother's pupil.⁷⁷ Whatever their sexual knowledge, both poetic personae fit the traditional voyeur/exhibitionist roles, the sole exception being the scopophobia experienced by the young girl.

Another poem of particular interest to the discussion of scopophobia is "Siete" (IV 74). In a reversal of traditional voyeuristic and exhibitionist roles, the boy character, Louis, offers himself as exhibitionist to his sister's voyeuristic gaze. Her observation begins as scopophilic as she delights in the similarities between her brother and herself,

⁷⁷ See also "Uno" (IV 68). In this poem Anna watches her brother masturbate and ejaculate on their father's chair in the dining room. She becomes embarrassed and goes to her room unsettled. The term used to refer to the ejaculate is "esperma" which also refers to candle wax. (Louis removes a candle from the candelabra, lights it, and runs around the table with it.) Rossetti herself states that the "esperma" refers to spilled wax from the candle (Núñez 12), however, Miller, Sarabia, and Wilcox Women, all interpret the text as one depicting the onanistic activities of the brother.

but this quickly transforms to scopophobia when she realizes that she does not have a penis like him. She is saddened by this “lack” and draws one to complete herself:

El frasco de colonia, la esponja vegetal,
el oloroso talco de suavísima nube
bajan de la repisa, y estrepitosamente
se colma la bañera, y las blancas toallas
desdoblado vainicas, muestran las abultadas
iniciales.

En el alicatado
Anna al hermano mira, en el perfil fraterno
se comprueba: idénticas alturas,
los idénticos rizos sus cabezas definen.
Mas Louis, del albornoz mullido desprendiéndose,
riendo se introduce en la oblonga bañera.
Al instante sus hombros, de crepidante espuma,
son nevados. La felpa de la niña
cae al suelo. Y antes de que el vaho de lágrimas
la cubra, trazando entre sus piernas
un torpe bastoncillo, se completa.

Sharon Keefe Ugalde sees this poem as the negative definition of woman as lacking the phallus (“Erotismo” 26), but while this at first glance appears to be a classic penis envy poem, Anna is more saddened at not being the same as Louis. She does not feel “shame” at her supposed Freudian “genital deficiency” and “sexual inferiority” (Freud, “Femininity” 32).

The sadness in viewing stems from the realization that the speaker and her brother are not identical.⁷⁸ Far from being a poem of the “sexual awakening” of the young body of the female lyric voice (Wilcox, *Women* 287, 316n.30), it is a poem of innocence and a

⁷⁸ The title of the section in which “Seis” and “Siete” are found is “Dióscuros” which alludes to Castor and Pollux, the twins born to Leda and Zeus. In life “they were united by the warmest affection and inseparable in all their enterprises.” After the death of Castor, Pollux was so distraught that Zeus took pity on the twins and reunited them in perpetuity as the constellation Gemini (Bulfinch 148). This mythological relationship is mirrored here in that of Anna and Louis.

severed fraternal bond.⁷⁹ The *mise en scène* of the poem is bath time preparations and the text is replete with images of white objects: talcum powder and the powder puff (l. 2), white towels (l. 4), and fluffy bathrobes (l. 10). Not only does the color of the objects suggest purity and innocence, but it also lends itself to an idyllic bathroom scene.

Before Anna realizes the two are biologically different, she looks at Louis's reflection in the bath tiles and sees herself in him. They are the same height and they have the same curls on the tops of their heads (ll. 6-9). This observance pleases the lyric voice and closes the idyllic first half of the poem. When Louis removes his bathrobe and Anna realizes they are in fact not the same, she is saddened and consequently moves from the scopophilic pleasure in looking at her brother/self in the tiles to discontented scopophobia. When Louis gets into the bathtub, he is covered by snowy foam (ll. 12-13) which extends the theme of innocence that permeates the poem from the white imagery that surrounds them in the bathroom. The innocence will resume when Anna enters the tub. They are the same, despite their differences, when they are in the water and covered with opaque, pure, white bubbles just as they are when they are both wearing their fluffy white robes.

Like "Homenaje a Lindsay Kemp" this poem has an objective voice whose purpose is to recount the events as they occurred. What distinguishes this poem from many others is the presence of gendered "characters": it is clear that Anna is a girl and that Louis is a boy. Other than wanting to be identical to her brother, there is no overtly subversive gender activity here if the imagery of innocence is taken into account. What we do have is the reversal of normative roles of viewing: the female is the voyeuse, the male the exhibitionist. It is not the direct looking that causes Anna pain, it is the fact that she is

⁷⁹ Wilcox appears to mean the awakenings of sexual desire.

not the same as her brother. Her gender role reversal can only go so far, at some point she will be relegated to her proper and normative place as a female. It is perhaps because of this realization that Anna cries when she sees that she does not have a penis.

Of note is the fact that the objective speaker chose to focus on this discovery on the part of the girl and not the boy. No textual explanation is offered for this; Louis does laugh as he takes off his bathrobe and gets into the tub (ll. 10-11) but that could be for a number of reasons. He may be laughing because he already knows that he is different (and “superior” in Freudian terms?) to his sister, or it could be innocent laughter of a child getting into a tub full of bubbles. Regardless of the reason, Anna moves from enjoyment in looking at herself in her brother to feeling incomplete and unnerved.

“Purificame” (Dev 56) shows the poetic voice looking at photographed images of herself when she was younger, the adult addressing a younger version of the self. Viewing the photographs triggers memories of how the young girl used to be and how her performed and simulated personality has colored the identity of the adult woman.

The poem begins with the speaker attempting to separate herself from herself; she denies a “you” who, at this point, is indeterminate (ll. 1-5). The adult takes photos off of the shelves on which they are placed and removes them from their frames effectively freeing the younger version of the self from the barriers that she had constructed. This young girl, who wanted to be a saint (l. 15), constructs “ingenuos simulacros” (l. 28) so that no hint of her real self can be seen: “Voluntad educada para ser guardadora, / para que de tu rostro no saliera / ni un atisbo de ti” (ll. 18-20).⁸⁰

⁸⁰ When Rossetti was young, she enjoyed playing at being a Christian martyr. Her brother and sister did not like to play this game which Rossetti thought was impious of them. When her aunts and uncles would hit her

The simulacra that this young girl constructed appear to be real since “simulation threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false,’ between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’” (Baudrillard 383). Masking what lies underneath the simulacra is now problematic for the adult because the girl never considered that it would affect her later in life (“y no me adivinabas heredera y alumna” [l. 29]). The adult desires to break free from the constraints self-imposed on her youthful self and she is faced with conflicting emotions: “dulce e impetuoso / doloroso quizás, quizás desesperado” (ll. 37-8). Through this trial and tribulation, the speaker realizes while contemplating herself in photographic version, that she is who she is because of the little girl.

She “perceives her past experiences as a girl...in negative terms” (Wilcox, Women 293), but it is the photo that aids her in her realization of the impact the young girl had, and still has, on her. The photo(s) denote a happy girl, but the lived experience, or “cognitive connotation” that the adult brings to the photo(s) (Barthes, “Photographic” 29), allows her to recognize the simulacra and ultimately accept them as part of her heritage. Because of this connotative meaning of the photo(s), the speaker experiences scopophobia. That is to say that she derives no pleasure viewing the photo(s) despite an active, voyeuristic gaze similar to that in poems like “Del prestigio del demonio” and “Calvin Klein, underdrawers.” This poem has no sexual undertones, so the seeing is not that of sexual desire, but one of desire for self-knowledge. The speaker utilizes the photograph(s) as a way to distance herself uncomfortably from herself and “condense

with a switch as punishment for mischievous acts, she liked to see how much pain she could handle (Núñez 12). See also Ugalde Conversaciones for the importance and influence of religion in Rossetti’s life.

meanings around a single image” (Cvetkovich 498). Ultimately though, she is content in her contemplation, she enjoys looking at her self, simulacra, and masks, accepting herself and her manifestations for who she is.

SUMMARY

The majority of Rossetti’s scopophilic poems have a female speaker looking at a male figure or an ambiguously gendered speaker observing either a man or a woman. In sex, Rossetti sees “ninguna relación de vasallaje” and she always conceives of it “en pie de igualdad” (Núñez 1). This could possibly be the driving force behind her revision and subversion of the male/active/voyeur and female/passive/exhibitionist binary. In the texts where there is a female defined speaker, she is the active gazer and the male observed is the passive object. The effect that this inversion had on the world of Spanish poetry was the disturbance of the status quo (Gamman 17). Although the status quo is turned upside-down, these texts still maintain the male/female binary, albeit in reverse order. A woman looking at a man simply perpetuates the “dominant system of aligning sexual difference with a subject/object dichotomy. And an essential attribute of that dominant system is the matching of male subjectivity with the agency of the look” (Doane 134). Rossetti does not attempt to erase the “subject/object dichotomy” but what she does do is question traditional gender roles in her versions of voyeurism and exhibitionism in poems such as “Chico Wrangler” and “Calvin Klein, underdrawers.” Reversing gender roles in looking, and subsequently including ungendered speakers in her poems, allows for “multiple versions of spectatorship” that empower many types of looking by many different people/genders (Fraser 94). The women speakers and poetic personae who possess a

scopophilic gaze effect a look that is many times “aggressive, seductive, cupidinous, transgressive and able to control another object” (Jordan 91).

Much has been written about Rossetti transcending gender and reversing the male/female binary, but this discussion centers on that very binary. She does not transcend gender per se with this reversal, but she does transcend traditional gender roles in observing sexual and eroticized people and things subjected to the look of another. Far from having a poetic voice with a “carácter andrógino” (Williamson 73), although there are instances of androgynous language, the poetic voice offers an ambiguously gendered character. Although the poems with genderless or ambiguously gendered speakers, viewers, or gazed upon objects uphold the subject/object dichotomy, the fact that they are given agency to see and be seen dismantles the normative male/female binary. “A un traje de pana verde que por allí anda perturbando a los muchachos” and “Homenaje a Lindsay Kemp y a su tocado de plumas amarillas” are two such examples. Rossetti appears to be well aware of the fact that assuming “that everyone has a ‘true’ gender identity as man or woman and no one can be fundamentally gender ambiguous, gender transient, or differently gendered” is problematic (Calhoun 73). There is no need to limit someone to “normative heterosexuality” and the “heterosexual matrix,” maintaining gender by enforcing and policing it (Butler, *Gender* x; 9). The fact that she questions these cultural tenets indicates that she may well have been aware of the outdatedness of such normative categories and gender performances. Ana Rossetti writes sexually charged poetry that utilizes voyeurism and exhibitionism in order to turn normative practices on their heads: men, women, and ungendered people fill both roles. Vision is a means through which

subjectivating definitions of men, women, and other genders and their prescribed roles are destroyed and given new possibilities of subjectification through looking in the process.

CHAPTER 3

MARIA-MARCÈ MARÇAL: THE GAZE AND POWER

Maria-Mercè Marçal (1952-1998) was born in Barcelona but spent the first ten years of her life in Ivars d'Urgell. She attended high school in Lleida (Lérida) and studied Classical Philology in Barcelona in the late 1960s. In 1972 she married the poet Ramon Pinyol Balasch and together, with other authors, founded the publishing house Llibres de Mall, dedicated to publishing poetry. Among one of Marçal's chief activities was her involvement in women's issues. She was a champion of the female and fought for general women's social and political issues as well as working tirelessly to advance the status of women writers in Catalonia. She began writing during the last years of Francoism when political activity against the regime was becoming more visible, including in the periphery. She was influenced by many writers, both men and women, who write in Catalan and other languages. Two of her greatest inspirations at the leading edge of women's issues were Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich. Plath gave her the ability to take risks, and Rich helped her develop a "visió política" (Sabadell, "Allà" 16). Not only does she look to women writers and a woman's situation for her motivation, but she also draws

on the Catalanian popular tradition.⁸¹ Saint George is the patron of Catalonia and she likens the status of the dragon slain by him with that of women:

I assumeixo les connotacions especials que pren en un país on cada any, puntualment, un Sant Jordi ritual s'encarrega de fer emmudir la seva boca àvida de donzelles esporuguides—addictes per sempre més, des d'aleshores, i sometesa a l'imperi protector, a l'ombra de la llança. Drac mut, llengua estroncada que se sap supervivent, encara, mentre la ferida adolli. Donzella esmorteïda, colonitzada, i sense llengua. Dues cares de la moneda on es congria el meu—el nostre passat. (“Sota” 7)

Marçal's writing spans many genres, and although she is best-known for her poetry and her passion for it (Ibarz 78), she also published children's narrative, essays, translations, and a novel. Her published books of poetry are: Cau de llunes (1977), Bruixa de dol (1979), Sal oberta (1982), Terra de mai (1982), La germana, l'estrangera (1985), Llengua abolida (1973-1988) (1989), Desglaç (1997), Raó del cos (2000).⁸² Some of her texts have been turned into songs by some popular Catalanian artists. She won numerous prizes for her writing, including the Premi Carles Ribes de poesia for Cau de llunes and the Premi Carlemany de novel·la for La passió segons Renée Vivien.

Marçal is celebrated as the quintessential feminist poet in the Catalan language and possibly in the Iberian Peninsula, and is considered “una de les grans veus poètiques del segle XX” (Sala-Valldaura, “Sobre” 110).⁸³ Her now famous motto extolling the virtues

⁸¹ A dragon terrorized an entire kingdom by killing anything that got too close. In order to save the people, the dragon was given sheep, but when the sheep supply dwindled, a lottery was devised to determine those who would be sacrificed. The king's daughter drew the unlucky number and was tied outside of the dragon's lair. George came to rescue her and pierced the dragon, bringing him to the princess as a tame animal. George promised to slay the dragon if the king, in turn, would pledge to convert his kingdom to Christianity. He agreed and George slew the beast (Farmer 202).

⁸² Llengua abolida (1973-1988) includes all of her individually published books with the exception of Raó del cos which was published posthumously.

⁸³ See also Sabadell “Maria,” Ibarz “M.M.M.” and “Marçaliana,” Moix, Viladot, and McNerney. The last three are included in Homenatge a Maria-Mercè Marçal edited by Montserrat Abelló. See bibliography for complete information.

of being a working class woman from a place with a strong national identity has become a much used slogan for women who find themselves under the “double minority” label.⁸⁴ She writes from her body and feels that one cannot separate oneself from one’s body; if you are in the text, then it is logical that your body is as well (Sabadell, “Allà” 15). In her poetry, Marçal is a woman conscious of her status as such, she writes about women in certain situations and the surrounding world (such as child birth, lesbian relationships, and woman’s political consciousness), and she has thought much about both aspects (Sabadell, “Allà” 15-16). She contends that she does not have a tragic view of the world, although some critics have a different opinion (Sabadell, “Allà” 18).⁸⁵ In the view of some, her poetic texts attempt to order the chaos of the world, making sense of it for the poetic persona and the author herself (Contijoch 86), although the majority of her texts seem to be about fracture and fragmentation.⁸⁶ Marçal intellectually belongs to the group of Catalan poets from the 1970s, although the majority of her poetic texts were published in the 1980s and posthumously.

Although Marçal does talk freely of her allegiance to feminine and feminist issues, she does not always express them in ways that might be considered feminine or feminist. Much the same way that Ana Rossetti exercised the sense of vision to subvert or invert the

⁸⁴ “A l’atzar agraeixo tres dons: haver nascut dona, / de classe baixa i nació oprimida. / I el tèrbol atzur de ser tres voltes rebel.” From *Cau de llunes*. Marçal herself commented that that three-line poem was used “hasta el exceso” (qtd. in Sánchez Robanya, “Prólogo” 9). This short poem took its inspiration from a Jewish prayer (Marçal, “Llengua Poesia” 193).

⁸⁵ See Valentí Puig’s article in which he states that her poetry has a “dimensión de intensidad trágica” (28).

⁸⁶ It is worth quoting Marçal’s own thoughts about the place poetry occupies in her life:
Durant molts anys he escrit només, o fonamentalment, poesia, i la poesia ha estat el meu esquelet intern, la meva manera de dir-me a mi mateixa, d’ordenar provisionalment amb la paraula el caos que l’imprevist desencadena...Com el mirall on es reconeix, unificada i dotada de sentit, per un instant, la vivència fragmentària i sense forma. També, potser, com una segona memòria. (“Qui” 21)

masculine/active/observer and female/passive/observed binaries, Marçal often uses vision in her poetry in a similar fashion. While she does turn the phallogocentric use of vision on its head, thereby privileging the female over the male, she does not have the abundance of ambiguously gendered poetic personae as Rossetti. She does, however, use vision in a gynocentric manner. Who actually does the seeing, and the objects that the lyric voice observes, are many times women characters in her poems, concerned with women's issues. This shifts the focus away from the traditional dichotomies of the male/eroticizing/observer and female/eroticized/observed and their inverse.

Because Marçal uses maternity and lesbian relationships as themes for many of the poetic texts analyzed here, it is easy to label her texts as feminist and conclude that she approaches her poetry in the same way as Rossetti. Maternity and lesbianism limit the gender of the person who can participate in those activities in the traditional sense; a man cannot physically be a mother for example. Looking through the maternal or lesbian lens dismantles not only the patriarchal gaze that defines how a mother or a lesbian may perceive themselves, but it also challenges the way that others see them. Furthermore, Marçal does not offer her readers the stereotypical view of motherhood or lesbian romantic relationships. In fact, Marçal prefers that her readers find new elements and interpretations to her texts that acquire new meaning(s) for readers looking for answers to their world:

...el fet que [les paraules] siguin llegides com a noves en nous contextos i així prenguin nous significats, siguin nou aliment, nova sang per a un públic lector. Nova sang per a aquest conjunt de vampirs que és, segons M. Tournier, el públic lector. Nova sang per a un públic que sempre es va renovant i que demana àvidament paraules que donin sentit a les coses, a l'experiència, al món. (Pròleg Memòria 9)

In what appear to be texts with an ungendered lyric voice, observer and observed are often revealed as female through the incorporation of Marçalian female symbols: the moon, shadows, blood, salt, and witches. However, despite the numerous examples in which the speaker and the object viewed are recognizably female, there are many others in which this distinction is not so readily made. The chaos that the texts set out to manage permeates the individual poems, often making the act of looking one that produces pain and/or anguish. That pain, however, is the vehicle through which the patriarchal gaze and the power inherent in it is challenged and overridden. This type of viscosity is displayed in poems associated with relationships centered on women's political action as well as positive aspects of romantic relationships.

Marçal has a self-awareness of her condition as a woman that shows itself in her texts and therefore it is quite difficult to avoid the autobiographical dimension of her writing. Women look at other women individually, or as a collective, as a reflection of the self. The textual observance of other women embodies the personal as well as the political, and it summons them to political and gender consciousness while it simultaneously rejects the discourse of masculine power in the gaze and the look.

She believes it important to say that one is a woman as opposed to a man. If there is no difference, why are gender categories necessary? For Marçal, her life as a woman is of utmost importance because it colors who she is. Her life and her experiences would be much different if she were not a woman, and her writing would also be different were her womanhood not considered (Sabadell, "Allà" 15). That is why she is happy to align herself with women's issues. On the other hand, while Rossetti's writing is also colored by her experiences as a woman, especially her religious-themed poems, she does not

consider that a distinguishing factor in her poetic texts (Ugalde, Conversaciones 150). The self-awareness expressed in Marçal's poetry frequently places her poetic personae in a female collective, a group with many shared experiences in one way or another. Despite this commonality in many of her texts, she does not always talk of " 'transversal' struggles" since her Catalan identity plays such an essential defining role for her (Foucault, "Subject" 419).

FIGHTING THE POWERS THAT BE: DISMANTLING CULTURAL IMAGES OF WOMEN THROUGH VISUALITY

"Pasquins per a la revolta vegetal" (Llengua abolida 277-9) is a two-part poem in which the lyric voice entreats women to join her in the fight for their liberty.⁸⁷ Marçal embraces the traditionally feminine connection to the natural flora and fauna in this poem which serves as the catalyst for the textual movement toward the various "woman situation[s]" that the speaker sees on her journey (Rivero 24-5).⁸⁸ Both poems were originally written for and distributed at the Antinuclear March of the summer of 1980. Marçal stated that because of the date of their composition, they should be included in

⁸⁷ All references to poems included in Llengua abolida will be by page and/or verse number.

⁸⁸ The second part of this poem has as its central focus "the tree of liberty" ("l'arbre / de l'alliberament.") (Llengua abolida 280). It is left out of this study due to its lack of mention of vision but is worth reading due to the connections between women and the natural as a source of strength for forging their own journey, history, and autonomy.

either Terra de mai or Sal oberta (Llengua 276). The first poem “*Baixeu, veniu a la dansa futura*” was actually printed and passed out at the march as a flyer, the second, was sung at the same march. (Marçal, Llengua 276)⁸⁹

The first line of the poem focuses on looking as a plural group of people. At this point it is unknown who comprises the group: “Mireu quina hora ens enreixa el paisatge!” (l. 1). The sense of collective established with the use of the object pronoun “us” (“ens”) is continued in the next line when the group is told to come look at the air that cuts them down. The plural group is also directed to open their eyes and minds to the end of their defeat (ll. 3-4). Nature has an adverse reaction to the nuclear bombs: fish leave their places of origin, clouds are errant, and birds have no memory. The lyric voice incites those that listen to stop complaining and start fighting the rain of lead by putting up a front of a thousand faces, making the battle ubiquitous. The disorder of the world, masked and presented as order, leads the speaker to a common field in which she looks for her own face (ll. 21-4).

At this point her search for women begins. She descends into a well and looks at the moon (a feminine symbol in Marçal’s texts), she climbs up repaired walls of the well and looks at the earth, placing herself everywhere and everywhere she sees colonized women. She sees women in the plaza, women enclosed behind walls, women at their balconies watching over life, or possibly watching it pass them by. She sees a woman with

⁸⁹ This statement is a bit confusing. In *Llengua abolida*, the poems appear in the reverse order: the first one is “*Mireu quina hora ens enreixa el paisatge!*” which is referred to as the second poem in Marçal’s statement; the second in Llengua is “*Dones, baixeu, veniu / a la dansa de l’herba*”, which is referred to as the first in her statement. There is no poem in *Escarcers* titled “*Baixeu, veniu a la dansa futura*”. According to the index of Llengua, which is her complete works up to 1988, there is no poem with the title previously mentioned. There is, however, a stanza in the first poem of “*Pasquins*” that begins with the line “*Baixeu, veniu a la dansa futura.*”

aprons full of words that no one ever gets to hear because they are confined to mystery
and the women she sees doing housework sweat and their dreams are torn to pieces:

La veig amb davantals plens de paraules
menudes, confinades al misteri...
en l'olor dels lilàs; en la bugada
contradictòria

de suor muda i somnis engrunats
al fons de les butxaques. Vella obrera
de l'amor i del goig al taller obscur
de cada casa. (278)

She also sees women who are scarred and exiled from their own bodies.⁹⁰

Although they are exiled from their bodies, they are also subjected to them and their usurpation by others in the form of motherhood transforming them into a “fosca deessa / sense reialme!” (ll. 47-8). Lastly, she sees lonely women and women alone who knead bread with a mix of the “wheat of happiness” and the bitterness of powerlessness. It is at this point that she looks at her own image in the mirror and realizes that she has these multiple images of women in her, that she is they and they are she, and she is but one wave in a long line of women: “La veig. Em veig en el mirall que em dreça / la meva imatge múltiple, que sóc / ona del llarg seguici de les dones,” (ll. 52-5).⁹¹

Here, the poem returns to the connection with the flora and fauna. The women, now a collective instead of the individuals and separate groups the speaker sees in her omnipresent search (ll. 27-8), feel the grass grow, and they tear down the fences that limit the grass and them. They come down from their balconies to dance and plant the tree of

⁹⁰ The author felt that the body was everything and without it, we were nothing: “que el cos hi és en tot, que en definitiva no som res més” (Sabadell, “Allà” 15). She also wrote from her body because she thought with her body, a woman’s body inseparable from the literary word (Salvador 76). See Hélène Cixous’s “The Laugh of the Medusa” for ideas on women writing their bodies.

⁹¹ It is at this point in the poem that the speaker is revealed as a woman.

liberty, dressing themselves in ivy.⁹² Planting this tree will begin their history and they will be drowned in leaves of tenderness. They will wear party earrings and will be proud to call themselves women.⁹³ Through the observance of the poetic speaker, these women, now a collective force to be reckoned with, will not only protest the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but they will also buck a system that has either forgotten them or relegated them to the status of the unnecessary and unimportant by recuperating what was taken from them: their pride in being women.

The class of looking in this poem is quite different from that in the majority of Rossetti's poems because it does not produce any sexual pleasure for the speaker. In fact, the observing of women in their different categories, traditional situations, and historical moments initially causes the lyric voice some discomfort and agitation. She sees colonized women, women enclosed by four walls, women at the balcony, women doing menial chores, scarred women, women who are servants to maternity, and women who are alone. "[A]ll subjects, male or female, rely for their identity upon the repertoire of culturally available images" so the speaker as a woman feels that she is at once all of them in herself ("la imatge múltiple" [l. 54]) (Silverman, "Fassbinder" 295). This connection is what brings the poetic voice to action, to call all women to join together, write their own history (l. 65), effectively erasing the history that was written for them in order to start anew. They are ready to define themselves, and join forces so that no woman will have to be alone.

⁹² Ivy ("l'heura") is a symbol of life, pregnancy, and maternity that appears in *Sal oberta* (1982). It is opposed to rue ("ruda") an abortive herb (Cònsul 104). Heura is also the name of Marçal's daughter.

⁹³ Earrings are another symbol of the female that Marçal utilizes in many of her poems. See the photo that accompanies "Festival de poesia catalana" (*Raó del cos* 78) for another example of the importance of earrings.

Marçal utilizes a poetic voice that “reveals a subject who makes being a woman ... her central focus by continuously questioning all pre-established categories (Sabadell, “Maria” 360). The disturbing cultural images that she sees are not paralyzing however, and the poetic voice uses this uneasiness due to what she views as the impetus to call her sisters to action. Instead of repelling the speaker, these images incite her to action, the visuality a positive force to vindicate women and the various plights in which they find themselves. The speaker resists the power of the gaze, the patriarchal force that defines women by their domestic chores, among other things. These poetic personae are not trapped in this gaze and find a way to remove themselves from it (Bartky, “Agency” 184), thus showing that femininity, as defined culturally, is “a part-time occupation for full-time humans” (Glover 9).

Marçal thought it of utmost importance to distinguish the difference that exists between men and women instead of attempting to erase the differences: “si ets igual, ets supèrflua, prescindible, tant se val que hi siguis com que no. Si ets igual, és indiferent que hi hagi homes o dones” (Sabadell, “Allà” 15). She went on to say that the fact that one is a man or a woman adds certain connotations and colors to the fact that one is a person. It is not seen by Marçal as a restriction, but rather as an addition (Sabadell, “Allà” 15). This attitude makes her writing about women more directly feminist than Ana Rossetti’s and Aurora Luque’s texts that concern women. Rossetti believes that gender is not an issue, that it makes no difference if one is a man or a woman, so her attempt to erase those differences by having female, or assumed female, speakers ogle at eroticized male bodies is a way of manifesting her views that women can do what men do. Luque’s poems studied here may have lyric voices that look at women, but they generally are ungendered.

This questions gender categories from the outset. Marçal, on the other hand, is more directly politically engaged in demonstrating that women are in fact different than men, and she offers myriad reasons why, as evidenced in this text.

Despite this difference among these poets, it is imperative to point out that they all employ vision as a means to their individual poetic ends. Rossetti utilizes vision as a way to execute certain activities and attitudes that were, and still are, considered “masculine” or “male” and phallogentric. Luque is the poet who most erases the importance of gender for the poetic voice even though the object observed is often a woman or her representation, whereas Marçal utilizes it, at least in “Pasquins,” as a tool for women to be brought to political action from a gynocentric viewpoint which frees them from phallogentrism. The women that the lyric voice observes in this text are those that “per condició o situació ja han estat marginades per la societat” (Julià, “Memòria” 96).

“Avui les fades i les bruixes s’estimen” (137) is from a book originally published in 1979 which makes it fundamental to note as a thematic precursor to “Pasquins.”⁹⁴ It not only demonstrates the political view of the author regarding women’s collective action, but it also shows an early importance given to social seeing as a way to connect with and become a member of the female collective. Friendship between women had been “‘restringit’ per convencionalismes i misogínies de molts tipus” and the friendship between fairies and witches begins to break down the conventions (Sistac, *Líriques* 73). Not only do they break down conventional ideas about female friendship, the bond between the

⁹⁴ *Bruixa de dol*. Barcelona: Llibres de Mall, 1979.

witches and fairies is a way in which to subdue the “ ‘objectifying male gaze’ ” by focusing on the women’s activity instead of their sexuality (Cooper 283).⁹⁵

The poetic personae are witches and fairies, two traditionally female, albeit fantastical, groups, who put aside their differences and exchange emblems of their respective witch and fairyhood: brooms and magic wands. They meet where the shadows play, talk with the earth, and release dragonflies, convening in the plaza, the meeting place of the people and the center of town, spiraling like the serpent coiled around the apple tree in a frenetic dance:

Avui, sabeu? Les fades i les bruixes s’estimen.
Han canviat entre elles escombres i varetes.
I amb cucurull de nit i tarot de poetes
endevinen l’enllà, on les ombres s’animen.

És que han begut de l’aigua de la Font de Lilàs
i han parlat amb la terra, baixet, arran d’orella.
Han ofert al no-res foc de cera d’abella
i han aviat libèl·lules per desxifrar-ne el traç.

Davallen a la plaça en revessa processó,
con la serp cargolada entorn de la pomera,
i encenten una dansa, de punta i de taló.

Jo, que aguaito de lluny la roda fetillera,
esbalaïda veig que vénen cap a mi
i em criden perquè hi entri. Ullpresa, els dic que sí.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ See also Gamman 19. The discussion in this article is about the female detectives Cagney and Lacey. Showing women’s activity is a way to demonstrate that women have value as more than mere sexual(ized) people. I do not feel that this is meant to exclude manifestations of female sexuality, but rather to uncover other manifestations of femaleness.

⁹⁶ Marçal appropriates the negative associations of the serpent in the Garden of Eden and Eve’s subsequent sin and uses them in a manner to show women’s power in this text. See Pasero and Ugalde, “Feminization” for discussion of the use of Eve and sin in works by women poets of the 80s written in Spanish. See also “Eva” (406).

The female speaker of the poem spies on the witches' and fairies' dance and is enchanted by what she sees. She is surprised when they come toward her, perhaps out of fear, perhaps because they have noticed this far-away, lone spy. They shout at her to come join them, which she does.

The looking effected by the lyric voice in this poem is reminiscent of that seen in "Pasquins." The speaker derives pleasure from seeing these two diametrically opposed groups of "women" set aside their ostensible differences to dance with each other in harmony. The gratification comes from various connotations derived from the lyric voice's observations: seeing different groups of "women" come together, seeing active women rejoicing in their womanhood, and seeing a diverse group whose members want her to join them in their revelry. In fact, Marçal commented that with this poem she had broken the witch/woman/irrational tradition by having fairies and witches love each other (Nadal, "Maria" 77). Again similar to "Pasquins" this poem destabilizes deep-seated patriarchal ideas about women by accepting them with a look. The speaker's eyes are captivated and she agrees to join them because she likes what she observes. This text offers the reader insight into Marçal's perceived place in the world: a mix of "el conflicte humà entre món interior, món natural i món social" (Sala-Valldaura 109).⁹⁷

The female revelers in this poem are subjected to the gaze of the lyric voice. Women traditionally offer themselves to be looked at, in most cases, by men, and therefore, possess an innate "*to-be-looked-at-ness*."⁹⁸ The witches and fairies are in a

⁹⁷ According to Sala-Valldaura, Marçal is the only Catalan language poet to combine these three issues. Not only had no one combined them prior to Marçal, but no one has done it since and in this sense, Marçal remains truly unique among Catalan poets (109).

⁹⁸ See pages 18 and 80.

public place, the plaza, which implies that they can be seen by anyone at any time, and in fact they are observed by the speaker who hides to spy on them.

But what makes this visual offering distinct from traditional ideas of the gaze is the very fact that the witches and fairies see themselves as equals of the woman who spies on them and vice versa. They do not effect, as John Berger states, a gaze that is based on the male surveyor found in women (47). They turn themselves into objects, but not objects for a masculine observer, but rather a female viewer who happens to be their equal. This relationship of equality and collectivity is what negates the power relationship that is implied by the patriarchal gaze and its traditional associations. The revelers are neither threatened nor embarrassed by the fact that their nocturnal celebration has a captive audience.

This exposure entices the witches and fairies to include the woman spying on them. They actively accept her into their group since she is defined by them as friend and not foe. When they interpellate her to join them, the speaker exercises her agency by accepting the call from her subject position as “woman.” Equal looking by equals, who in this case happen to be women, demonstrates a kind of gynocentric looking: they show themselves as women for women (or a woman in this text) independent and in defiance of the masculine/feminine, active/passive, observer/observed binaries. In this gynocentric looking, both the witches and fairies group and the female lyric voice play the dual role of observer and observed, thus making their shared status as women that much more unifying.

All of the players are well aware of the power structure that they defy. As in “*Aquest llençol*,” the fairies’ and witches’ activities are nocturnal. They know that they

are not welcome in the daylight.⁹⁹ The lyric voice also senses the same since she is out at night spying on their activities. Essentially they are hiding because they are conscious of the fact that the patriarchal structure of the gaze would not allow their celebration.

Gynocentric looking is also present in “Pasquins.” The female speaker views other women in various states of subjugation to a social order that the lyric voice does not feel does them justice. Although she observes them in these various states with the advantage of someone who has been able to break free from them, her call to action is one of the collective. From lines 57-76 there are ten examples of commands in the first person plural.¹⁰⁰ She clearly sees herself as a member of their community and they of hers. What she initially views causes her great trepidation, but she converts that uneasiness into an active gynocentric group. This group does not desire the phallus and they are not filled with penis envy. They want to be proud to call themselves women by means of waging a take-back-our-history-and-name campaign.

“La dona de Lot” (Raó del cos 27-8) is another two-part poem with sight as the focus. The first section illustrates the omniscient and omnipresent vision of the Almighty; the second, the sight and subsequent removal of said sense in the punishment meted out by God to Lot’s wife. The story of Lot’s wife is one that has been used many times by women poets of the 1980s (Ugalde, “Feminization” 165).¹⁰¹ One of the few biblical characters that does not have a name, Lot’s wife is a “silent, nameless icon” that “moves center stage and is held up to protest woman’s ‘nothingness’ as inscribed in masculine

⁹⁹ See pages 119-120 of this chapter for the poem “*Aquest llençol*.”

¹⁰⁰ “Dem” (l. 57), “Enderroquem” (l. 59), “Esventrem” (l. 60), “Plantem” (l. 63), “Iniciem”, Acabem” (l. 65), “Inundem-nos” (l. 67), “Bastim” (l. 69), “Salvem” (l. 70), and “Recuperem” (l. 73) (279).

¹⁰¹ Ugalde’s study includes women poets that write in Spanish; there are no so-called peripheral or national language poets considered.

discourse” (Ugalde, “Feminization” 172).¹⁰² This holds true for Marçal’s version of the nameless woman. Lot’s wife disobeys not only the hegemonic patriarchal law by asserting herself in looking back at Sodom, but she defies the ultimate patriarch: God. This boldness, of course, is punished with her death and transformation into a pillar of salt. The fate of Lot’s wife is barely touched on in the Bible itself, although it is important enough for Jesus Christ to mention to his disciples as an example of what not to do when His own death comes.¹⁰³

Given that Lot’s wife is turned into salt because she looked back at the destruction of Sodom, it is only fitting that the first part of the poem be dedicated to sight as well. Here it is the eye of God referred to as “[L]’ull terrible” and “[I]’ull sinistre” (ll. 1 and 9 respectively). Similarly to Lot’s wife, the Almighty is called the “Sense Nom” (l. 1), a giant who spits fire and brimstone at the damned city. His messengers, the two angels that came to warn Lot of the future destruction of Sodom, carried the family out of the city “damunt l’espatlla de l’Altissim” (l. 14), so close that His cornea and Lot’s eyes together see the new city in the mountains that Lot and his family will inhabit. Lot’s eyes and God’s all-seeing eye are almost on a par here: they see the same thing and Lot is on His shoulder, almost making him of the same corporeal stature as the Almighty himself. The shared seeing by the men seals their pact in the heavenly law handed down to Lot (l. 17).

¹⁰² See also Mieke Bal’s Lethal Love for discussion of female biblical characters, subjectivity, and the meaning of proper names.

¹⁰³ For the complete story of Lot’s family’s escape from Sodom, see Genesis 19. Of the thirty eight verses that comprise the story, only one, 26, deals with Lot’s wife’s conversion to salt. For Lot’s wife’s disobedience used as an example in Christ’s teachings to his disciples, see Luke 17: 28-33.

This camaraderie is not shared with the women, even less with one as rebellious as Lot's wife. This is demonstrated in the second part of the poem, the other side of the story if you will, through her (unjust) punishment.

Sight is the focus of the second poem as well. The sense of fellowship of the first poem carries through to this one. However, it is gynocentric instead of androcentric in nature. Women are able to come together in their shared subjection to patriarchal law precisely because of the fate of Lot's wife. The first line of the poem sets the stage for the connection between the female and woman (women) with the earth and nature. A voice emanates from the inside of the earth, blind like the seed, that takes root deep in Lot's wife and women in general, telling her/them that it is not too late, she/they can still look: "*No és massa tard, encara. Encara pots mirar.*" (l. 4). Whereas the first poem was set up as a relationship between the ruler and the ruled, where Lot the ruled had no choice but to heed the demands of God the ruler, the second poem is presented as an announcement to women as a collective reminding them of the fate of Lot's wife. Therefore, not only is the sight that was taken away from Lot's wife central to this poem, so is the conversation and message that this happening lends to women. The lyric voice is not specifically gendered although it might be assumed to be female due to its focus on the fate of Lot's wife.

The lyric voice tells the women to look back, to look at the Voice (God) that does not know her name (l. 5). This stanza is ambiguous and was most likely purposefully written that way. The "you" that the lyric voice addresses doubles as both Lot's wife and the collective persona of women who listen to the voice from the ground. Not only did God not know Lot's wife's name, but it is suggested that He does not know the names of any women. This relates back to "Pasquins" and the situation of forgottenness or

nothingness in which the lyric voice finds many women. Here both Lot's wife and other women are subjected to wandering in the law of strangeness; they are shadows that are only permitted to live where they have lived previously (ll. 7-9). Lot's wife is condemned to live in Sodom and the collective "woman" is subjected to the traditional patriarchal gaze: relegated to her traditional sphere of domesticity, enclosure, and viewing life from afar.

The voice from the earth appears indignant as it states that "*Un esguard! I alevats per un dolor mortal / els seus ulls ja no poden, de sobte, mirar més.*" (ll. 10-11). For one look, she is no longer able to see, the agency she displayed ultimately costing her her life. Her disobedience is similar to that of Orpheus as he led Eurydice out of the Underworld, but unlike the Greek myth, the Biblical story has a much greater consequence. While Orpheus loses his love, he is still permitted life, albeit a sad and lonely one, but his very existence is not stripped from him. Although the sources are quite different, it does not seem just that a man who disobeys is permitted to live while a woman who defies authority through the very same action is killed instantaneously.

The poem portrays the pillar of salt as a straight jacket that blocks madness (ll. 12-13) and the screen of her life is blank (l. 13). The doubling of Lot's wife and the rest of womanhood is continued. A pillar of salt has no possibility of movement just as it is restricted for the wearer of a straight jacket. It is quite ironic that the straight jacket was the image chosen to be a barrier to madness since one is not normally placed into one unless one is already mad. But the color of the straight jacket is where the connection can be drawn: both the restraining device and salt are white. White imagery is continued with the blank screen: it shares the color of the straight jacket and salt and has nothing on it.

This emptiness refers to the end of Lot's wife's life and the (hi)story that was never finished. In the poem it doubles for the state of women who have not yet had the chance to write their own history: "A l'alba reverbera la història sense història" (l. 14).¹⁰⁴

In line fifteen the focus of the poem shifts to the actual look that Lot's wife gave over her shoulder as God smote Sodom with his fire and brimstone:

El gest es perpetua
gegantí i resplendent.
I en la duressa mineral impresa
fulgura la pregunta sense veu:

Quin era el Nom de la dona de Lot,

la qui donà la vida només per un esguard?

She was forever frozen in that movement, in the act of looking, but here Lot's wife as the pillar is "gegantí i resplendent" (l. 16), positive images that the women's collective can use as a message for their fight against a situation imposed upon them by the patriarchal structure which has subjugated them for so long. In this pillar blazes a question without a voice.¹⁰⁵

Women are traditionally passive, not active and so are not permitted engagement in "masculine" scopical activity. Lot's wife then, is punished two-fold: because she disobeyed the angels, who, by extension, are God, and because she dared to participate in a "masculine" activity. By so doing, she challenged the status quo of paternal/divine law, broke through her imposed limitations, and took initiative where none was to be taken. This is reminiscent of Eve not heeding God's and Adam's warning about the fruit from

¹⁰⁴ See "Pasquins per a la revolta vegetal" (277-9)

¹⁰⁵ The word "Nom" is spelled with a capital "n", in much the same way that "Veu" and "Sense Nom" are in both poems. This would seem to place Lot's wife on a par with God in this text.

the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Lot's wife was an uppity woman who decided that she was going to exercise some form of agency and activity (as opposed to passivity) and that decision terminated her life. This agency in the face of the divine (God) and human (Lot) power that held her in her defined woman's role is the ultimate act of resistance. In this poem, women are called to resist the same power with Lot's wife as their champion.

The women addressed in the poetic text who are equated with the biblical character have similar situations to that of Lot's wife: they are subjected to a law that they do not want to follow and they are made to be passive when what they desire is activity. This text serves "per atorgar a la dona tots el atributs propis d'un ésser actiu que vol viure a plaer, sovint al marge de les estructures establertes, es a dir, patriarcals" (Julià, "Memòria" 93). Therefore, disobeying patriarchal law, whether from God or the men who "rule" their lives by engaging in an active visuality, is the ultimate rebellion and manifestation of disobedience.

What Marçal does in this text through an objective lyric voice, who happens to be ungendered, is use the example of Lot's wife to plot a woman's revolt against stifling, and in this case, cruel and punishing patriarchal power. Although Lot's wife looks at Sodom and not other women as in "Pasquins" and "Avui les fades" the lyric voice entreats women to "look" to the story of Lot's wife and collectively question their own situation(s) that, in most cases, approximate hers. It is implied gynocentric looking that calls women to action: Lot's wife offers herself as an example for other women from which they can learn invaluable lessons about life, authority, and questioning patriarchal discourses of power. The use of a biblical story about a woman without identity "subverteix les

mitologies del patriarcat i, més en concret, del cristianisme” (Julià, “Memòria” 96).¹⁰⁶

Seeing is a way for us to approach “the essential historical experience of our relation to the past: that is to say the experience of seeking to give meaning to our lives, of trying to understand the history of which we can become the active agents” (Berger 33).

CHALLENGING THE HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX: EROTIC LOOKING AT WOMEN BY WOMEN

Although the texts analyzed above have a female focus, there are texts in which the gender of the both the speaker and the other poetic personae appear to be, at the very least, gender ambiguous. Upon first glance, the texts do not have any clear grammatical gender markers that clarify (or classify) the gender of the lyric voice or the poetic personae to indicate that there are two women involved in a romantic and sexual relationship.¹⁰⁷ Closer examination of the texts will lead the reader to the conclusion that many of them are in fact gender centered, and more specifically, gynocentric. Taking the poem as a part related to a much larger whole, there are clues as to the gender of the speaker and her lover. In line with other poems discussed that deal with women in a more openly political manner, such as “Pasquins,” symbols that represent the feminine or

¹⁰⁶ This comment was made about Marçal’s novel, *La passió segons Renée Vivien*, but it is applicable in this example. Not only does Lot’s wife defy God’s orders, given through his two messengers, but revising the story of Lot’s wife makes her a female neo-Christ figure. She dies so those (women) who follow her do not make the same mistakes that she made. Namely, subjecting oneself, or being subjected to, phallo and androcentric laws.

¹⁰⁷ It is not inappropriate to talk of the blurring of gender definitions in Marçal’s poetry despite the strong woman focus of many of the texts. Although one must take into account the opinions of the author her/himself when approaching her/his work, I do believe that there are textual elements that may not have been intentional or that might not have been noticed by the author at the time of her/his comments. This is true of Marçal. Despite the focus on women’s issues in many of her poetic texts, others have male poetic persona or no explicit gender mentioned which does not preclude a broader interpretation of the role of gender in her poetry.

female in Marçal's work are present. Some examples are the night, water, the apple and serpent, as well as the moon, blood, salt, shadows, and witches. These have not changed their overall gendered meaning and still offer the reader insight into the gender category into which the poetic personae fall. Also, it is difficult to discount Marçal's own comments, and those of many critics of her work, that directly point the reader to the theme of an erotic relationship between women.

This is especially helpful with Marçal's poems from Terra de mai. Perhaps some of her most erotic poetry, this book is about lesbian love as stated by critics such as Abelló, Julià, Cònsul, and Sabadell.¹⁰⁸ "Terra de mai," or "Neverland," is about the stages that a relationship takes from the point of view of one of the lovers: the happy times, the point where one realizes that the end is drawing near, and the end itself. Autobiographical in nature, the poems are modeled on a relationship that Marçal had with another woman that ended around 1981 (Sabadell "Allà" 21). In fact, the "never" of the title is personified and included as a proper name in poems in this book as well as others.¹⁰⁹

In "Sextina dels sis sentits," (304) the lyric voice finds her sixth sense in her lover. It is a poem of unity between two people who are so close that they practically fuse into one; unified in sight, the other senses, and themselves. When the speaker looks at her lover, the gaze is a sexually unifying agent between the two. This is mirrored in the fusing, or melting together, of the various senses; synaesthesias abound as one sense is mentioned in terms of another. The "mirada" is privileged because it is one of the six

¹⁰⁸ Terra de mai was originally published in 1982 by El Cingle. In Llengua abolida (1973-1988), it is included in the book titled La germana, l'estrangera (293-325).

¹⁰⁹ See "Mai" (306), "El corb absent" (310), "*Seda i ònix, parany de melangia*" (368); "*Benedicció*" (394); "*Llenço el teu nom als peixos*" (404), "*El port és ple de vaixells carregats*" (471), and "*L'espada de Mai*" (504). All page numbers refer to Llengua abolida.

words that appear at the end of the lines in each stanza of the poem, multiplying its meanings and “connotacions” (Marçal, *Llengua* 295). It is also the means through which all of the other senses come to life; they fuse with sight for a heightened sensory experience as the women fuse in the sexual encounter.

In the first stanza, the lover is the music of the eyes and the heart of the ruby red “sexe” that is open to the speaker’s gaze (ll. 4-5). The apple, representing the forbidden fruit as it did in Rossetti and here representing lesbian love, is also open to the gaze. The forbidden fruit is tasted and taboos are broken as sexual activity is initiated: “L’ amor és un carboncle / vibrant sota els dits tebis de la molsa” (ll. 11-12). Continuing the metaphor of the apple, the “serp del desig” in another allusion to Eden, sin, and the prohibited, praises the eyes and the gaze (ll. 17-18). The eyes are held in such high esteem because it is through them that all the other senses are perceived. As the poem progresses, the lover bears her teeth and tongue to the speaker’s gaze in what appears to be orgasmic ecstasy: “quan véns, amb dents i llengua a la mirada, / i culls tot el plaer, como una poma / assaonada” (ll. 25-7). “When in love, the sight of the beloved has a completeness which no words and no embrace can match: a completeness which only the act of love making can temporarily accommodate” (Berger 8).

Night begins to give way to daylight (l. 31). The night is often the symbolic time when women are the most active, politically or sexually in Marçal’s texts. It is linked to the moon, a strong female symbol, the darkness, and shadows concealing whatever activities take place under its cover. Before the night and gynocentric time ends, lips and the gaze melt together making touch and sight into one (l. 33). The fusion of the two lovers is reinforced in the last lines of the poem when the lyric voice gently sips her

lover's sense with her look (l. 30). In the daylight, these activities are exposed which is not desirable especially if the enterprise in which the poetic personae are involved is taboo as is the one described here.

In this example, the pattern of sight centered on phallocentrism is broken, because, as evidenced in other poems, there is a tone of "mutuality and interpenetration" between the lovers (Ostriker 165). Even though someone desires and someone else is the desired, the sight through which this desire is manifested is one of joining and union, of equality and not an imbalanced relationship of activity and passivity seen in many Rossetian texts. Although this particular poem is more erotic than political, like "Pasquins" for example, the viewing expressed remains gynocentric looking. The absence of the active versus the passive permits the viewing, as well as the erotic, relationship to be on equal footing. "Look" is one of the "key terms in the poetics of intimacy" in women's poetry (Ostriker 170), and the look is central here as well as in other texts.

The lovers in this poem and the fairies and witches in "Avui les fades" celebrate their merger under nocturnal protections as do the lovers in sonnet XVII, "*Aquest llençol és la plaça nevada*" (197).¹¹⁰ In this poem the sexual experience terminates due to the rising sun, throwing the "we" down a flight of stairs:

Aquest llençol és la plaça nevada
que hem baixat de les golfes. La neu fa de farina
damunt l'herbei, pel llac, pels turons i l'arbreda.
Enjogassats pastem un pa amb olor de lluna.

Ara, amb galtes d'arboç, apilonem estelles
per fer foc a l'aixella, o a la gola del llop;
i adés ens amaguem darrere el gran udol
de l'amor, atrapat al conc de la pastera.

¹¹⁰ This poem is from Sal oberta (1982). It is included in a section titled "Festanyal de l'aigua."

Pels vidres embugats inventem una estrella,
escabellada i sola, i la seguim, errants.
Fum xemeneia amunt, per l'esgambi de bruixes!
--Dins el cup del records bull l'ordi de la nit.

Però el sol ja, amb la rella, treu l'ull entre les teules
i ens fon la pell, i ens llença daltabaix de l'escala.

The sun is the masculine, active generator of light, compared to the passive and reflective qualities of the moon (Sabadell, "Maria" 365 and n6). Accordingly, daylight would be the moment for "masculine" acts and the time for women to hide. Before the night and gynocentric time ends, lips and the gaze melt together making touch and sight into one (l. 33). The fusion of the two lovers is reinforced in the last lines of the poem when the lyric voice and her lover's skin fuse before they are violently hurled down the stairs (l. 14).

Hiding from this masculine sun eye is prevalent throughout the poem. The sheet that the lovers use was taken down from the attic (l. 2) and it is during the night that they play and knead bread with the smell of the (female) moon (l. 4). They even hide their cries of love, cries that are trapped in the bowl used for "kneading" their nocturnal bread (ll. 7-8). The memories of the night are packed away in the pantry (l. 12). They live there, in fact, they boil, but they must remain there, out of sight, as a memory of nocturnal and therefore unknown activities. The lovers would like to be able to bring their love out into the daylight, but it is "atrapat" in the pantry, and they have no choice but to continue their kneading game under the cover of night.

The nocturnal connection continues in the third stanza when the lovers invent a lone star that they follow errantly. They both leave the established cultural boundaries of compulsory heterosexuality that are set for them, taking a risk to love each other. Shadows

and darkness in Marçal's poetry are generally positive symbols, the elements similar to the night when women are "free" to be women and do "women things" (whatever those may be) without the constraints of the daylight and (masculine) sun. The comforting, positive, and strengthening female elements (salt, shadow, the moon, the night, witches) are threatened with the rising sun.

Witches also make an appearance here as recipients of the smoke signals that the lovers send up through the chimney (l. 11). The smoke is for the witches' pleasure and diversion, they are able to rejoice in the fact that there are nocturnal beings like themselves who defy patriarchal and cultural expectations of women.

Although the lovers in "*Aquest llençol*" are the objects of daylight's gaze and do not do any viewing themselves, the poem follows the thematic line of "Sextina dels sis sentits:" resistance to the patriarchal and normative heterosexual gaze:

The distinction between what was considered to be normal and what to deviate from the norm—a difference so imperative for the formation and preservation of social codes and laws—continues to be negotiated...whenever sexual practices are labelled as being 'perverse.' (Bronfen 116)

In these two examples, the relationship between the lyric voice and her lover necessitates hiding because it does not fit the parameters of a "normal" sexual relationship. For Marçal, it was necessary for her to give voice to something that had been silenced for so long: "Així com amb l'homosexualitat masculina al llarg de la història més aviat hi ha una repressió molt més directa, en el cas de la femenina la negació es produeix per silenciament. És una relació que aparentament no existeix." (Abelló, *Homenatge* 172-3) As Monique Wittig stated in her essay "The Straight Mind:" "you-will-be-straight-or-you-will-not-be" (28). Although the lovers in both poems must hide from the masculine

light in order to be, their existence is an act of resistance to the power of the regulating and normative heterosexual gaze. Not having sexual encounters during the day resists and negates the power of the day as a metaphor for normative sexual relationships.

The biological sex and, by extension, the gender of the lovers is irrelevant under a system that requires everyone to be heterosexual. Wittig also stated that “[l]esbians are not women” because as such, they cannot be defined by phallogentric and patriarchal ideas about sexuality and sexual activity, also known as the “straight mind” (32, 27). If the normalizing premise is true that there are men and women who engage in “normal” heterosexual activities, lesbians are not women. They are not women because they do not have sexual relationships with men and are consequently extra-binary. The very fact that these “women” exist defies the constraints placed on them as does the fact that they look. People who look and who also are not a part of normative heterosexuality resist the power of the cultural gaze two-fold.

BEYOND THE CONFINES OF GENDER: MOTHERS LOOKING AT DAUGHTERS

Although maternity, childbirth, and the first few months of an infant’s life are times of great happiness for many new mothers, Marçal has written many poems on the subject that do not convey this joy, writing from the perspective of postpartum depression which she feels is universal in new mothers (Sabadell, “Allà” 18). In fact, this, what some might deem negative, perspective on childbirth and motherhood is what distinguishes her maternity poetry from others who treat the same theme. The first section of La germana l’estrangera, “El desig cicatritzat i en l’ombra,” is dedicated exclusively to the maternity

theme.¹¹¹ According to Marçal, maternity for her was an “aventura molt forta,” and although there are only 24 poems exclusively about maternity, it was an extremely important and difficult experience for her (Sabadell, “Allà” 18). Marçal rejects the traditional discourse on maternity as being the ideal expression of femininity, and focuses on the sensations of frustration and discontentment that can plague new mothers. It is only fitting then, that the poems about maternity follow the discussion of her erotic texts. They are dark, sometimes violent, and rather negative and sad, despite the fact that Marçal does not think she has a tragic view of life in her poetry.¹¹²

“[T]he contemporary world situation negates traditional expressions of joy which mothers are supposed to voice about the experience of motherhood” and Marçal’s poetic texts are no exception (Andrist 103). Many of these poems discuss the lyric voice seeing her daughter and wanting to kill her. These are expressed through violent desires caused by frustration from postpartum depression that a new mother may feel when faced with her infant.¹¹³ Images of blood and water both join the mother and her child and sever that bond. The blood that courses through the veins of both is also spilled in the child’s death; water is what sustains the child in utero in the form of amniotic fluid, but it also causes death ex utero; one cannot breathe in water as one breathes in amniotic fluid. Three of her poems about maternity include sharks that tear off body parts, the confusion of a new mother who prefers her child in utero to that just born, and knives.

¹¹¹ The epigraph dedicates the section to her daughter: “A l’Heura, és clar!”

¹¹² See note 85.

¹¹³ Marçal thought that postpartum depression is universal in new mothers and not anything specific to her experience as a young mother (Sabadell, “Allà” 18).

“*Com si un tauró m’arranqués una mà*” (336) is about childbirth. Bringing life into the world is likened to a shark tearing the hand off of the lyric voice’s body and spitting it onto the beach. Water is a natural place where boundaries are broken (Ostriker 174), but here the water is a place of violence from which one is expelled, not one of reentry from the original expulsion (childbirth). This hand on the beach no longer listens to the speaker’s brain, in much the same fashion as the newborn is not controlled any longer by the mother’s body:

Com si un tauró m’arranqués una mà
it tot seguit l’escopis a la platja
i ella mogués els dits per manaments
estranyals de la meua voluntat
i ja no obeís més el meu cervell
--tal como el cap del gall decapitat
obre i tanca la boca i el cos corre,
esparverat, llunyà, sense retorn--,
jo contemplava aquell bocí de mi
esdevingut, ja per sempre, estranger,
i ahora imprès per sempre, a cor i a sang,
en el desig cicatrizat, i el l’ombra.

The lyric voice further extends the metaphor likening the newborn to a chicken with its head cut off: the body runs around, but the head stays behind. She contemplates the little piece of her that has become a stranger and will so remain forever (ll. 9-10), imprinted in the shadows of patriarchy.¹¹⁴

Looking at the newborn is painful for the mother, there is no pleasure in seeing her, and her presence causes psychic pain. This pain was felt in Marçal’s real experience with her daughter:

Jo vaig viure molt el part com una ruptura. A més a més, és molt curiós que existeixi la idea de trencar aigües, perquè hi ha alguna cosa que clarament es trenca i després comença una relació diferent, de la qual al llarg del

¹¹⁴ See “*Sóc de dia l’obrer*” (351) and “*Tan petita i ja saps com és d’alta*” (353).

temps estic molt i molt contenta, però que durant molt de temps vaig veure molt conflictiva, fonamentalment mentre no hi havia paraules pel mig. És a dir, que a diferència de moltes dones que se senten bé amb les criatures molt petites...És possible que hi hagi dones que siguin capaces de projectar la vivència de l'embaràs més enllà. En el meu cas, no passa així, i la ruptura es fa molt present des del moment del part. (Sabadell, "Allà" 19)

Marçal's lyric voice expresses these sentiments in other poems about childbirth and the beginning stages of motherhood. In "*Heura*" (338), the young mother expresses frustration at her inability to understand her child.¹¹⁵ The language her child speaks is "bàrbar i violent" (ll. 5-6) and it proves a challenge for the mother. Although she cannot understand her, she is also unable to flee from the situation (ll. 6-8).¹¹⁶ The speaker asks herself whose eyes and hands will be able to see this person as "la bellesa feta carn" (l. 11), and she comes to the conclusion that they are not hers. Again, her eyes are unable to enjoy the newborn that she has, that came from her, and she longs for the time when this baby was still inside her, a mere thought, "l'ombra d'un murmur" (l. 15).¹¹⁷

"*Sóc com el llançador*" (382) is another poem in which the speaker appears to be a mother who is not only unhappy in her role as such, but wishes death on her child. Not a part of the first section of *La germana, l'estrangera*, this text is a little less clear on whether the speaker is referring to a child or a lover. Symbols normally associated with childbirth and motherhood, such as water, pain, and separation, are absent in this poem but the violence present in the other maternity poems remains.

¹¹⁵ See note 92 for comments on ivy, rue, and Marçal's daughter.

¹¹⁶ Marçal was a single parent. She had been separated from her husband for about three years when her daughter was born (Julià, "Introducció" 57-8).

¹¹⁷ See "*Clavo els ulls en el roig*" (383).

The speaker is like the carnival or circus knife-thrower, following the contour of the “you”’s body so as not to hurt the “you”, despite the fact that bodily harm is something the lyric voice would like to inflict on the child. The daggers and blood are symbols of death here. It is a struggle to not kill the other person as the reigns of blood are held tightly (ll. 5-6). The speaker is waiting for the moment when the “you” will shake and convulse before the speaker’s dead, rigid eyes that invite the “you” to death. The speaker controls the ability to kill whether with daggers launched at the body of the other person or with her/his eyes, the preferred instrument of death, since they can figuratively wound more deeply than knives, which merely cut the physical, not the psychic, body. The figurative cutting that the eyes do is much more painful than any corporeal wound that the “you” might suffer.

Similar to the looking in “La dona de Lot,” looking in this poem brings death. The lyric voice has the power to take the life of the person viewed. Part of the reason that the speaker sees maternity in a negative way is that she knows what awaits her daughter in the world. It is a world full of barriers and cultural expectations for women. As evidenced from the experiences that the various lyric voices have had, the maternal poetic voice fears what may befall her progeny. This poem is also devoid of the typical Marçalian female symbols, making definitive conclusions about the gender of the speaker and the “you” difficult. The lyric voice’s death wish for the other persona is consistent with that of other maternity texts, so it is not inappropriate to consider the speaker a woman.

SUMMARY

For Maria-Mercè Marçal, gender is important to writing which should not transcend gender:

En primer lloc la idea que el sexe (o si voleu, el gènere, per dir-ho amb aquest mot més prestigiats en alguns àmbits) és intranscendent per a la poesia. Segons aquesta visió hi hauria només poesia bona o dolenta. Només foren els criteris estètics i estrictament literaris—als quals se suposa, d'entrada, una objectivitat certa—els que determinen el valor d'una obra. (“Més” 157)

This opinion is quite fascinating because on the one hand, gender (the female) is very present in her work. But the female is not the feminine and Marçal challenges patriarchal and cultural ideas of femininity and what it means to be a stereotypical woman. She takes subjectivated women, whether due to their tasks, sexual orientation, or non-adherence to established gender performance norms, and aids them in their process of subjectification. They become other than what they are (culturally) supposed to be: self-sacrificing housewives, seen and not heard, heterosexual lovers, and happy mothers. In becoming other than what is expected, traditional idea(l)s of femininity and the female are discarded. This rejection dismantles the masculine/feminine and male/female binaries and leaves room for a differently gendered or ungendered being to emerge.

CHAPTER 4

AURORA LUQUE: THE GAZE AND VISUAL CULTURE

Aurora Luque Ortiz was born in 1962 in Almería. She spent her youth in Cádiar in Granada's Alpujarra and attended the University of Granada where she studied Classic Philology. She is currently a professor of Classical Greek in Málaga where she has worked since 1988.

Her published books of poetry are Hiperiónida (1982), Problemas de doblaje (1990), Carpe noctem (1994), La metamorfosis incesante (1994), Transitoria (1998), and Camaradas de Ícaro (2003). For these she has won various awards.¹¹⁸ She has also published numerous anthologies of her work in which many poems that first appear under the heading “Unpublished,” are later included in her non-anthologized collections.¹¹⁹ Some variants exist between the “unpublished” poems and their later versions, suggesting that the poet revisits her work. Her professional activities are not limited to composing poetry and teaching, for she has also translated Greek poetic texts to Spanish and directs and co-directs the poetry collections, Cuadernos de Trinacria and MaRemoto.

¹¹⁸ Problemas de doblaje received the Accésit of the Premio Adonais in 1989, Carpe noctem the Premio Rey Juan Carlos I de Poesía 1992 del Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Marbella, and Camaradas de Ícaro the I Premio Fray Luis de León de la Diputación de Cuenca in 2003.

¹¹⁹ Luque's anthologies include Fecha de caducidad (1991), Carpe mare (1996), Cuaderno de Mallorca (1999), Las dudas de Eros (2000), and Portvaria (2002).

Greece is integral to her poetry, but Luque combines the Ancient with the everyday by creating texts that are not “muertas ni eruditas, como es corriente, sino como algo vivo que reinterpreta en claves de hoy (Benegas, “Prólogo” iii). Grecian themes and myths as well as intertextuality with other texts are combined with death, the futility of life, love and its failures, and the passage of time, to create a new and personal poetic language that challenges that which is inherited from previous poets.

Luque uses the senses abundantly in her poems. The eyes are prevalent and they are used in the sense of the gaze and the power to destabilize it. In Luque’s poetic texts discussed here, the eyes are not passive. They are “actual perceptual systems” that achieve new practices of looking, especially at women (Haraway 193). Her texts decipher ingrained cultural ways of viewing that have made women and their images commodity objects to be possessed by men. Part of this new practice of looking includes the exclusion of gender. Either the lyric voice is ambiguously gendered or the object viewed has no specific gender assigned to her/him.

Traditionally, women who write without an explicitly gendered speaker in their texts are said to write like men and are consequently criticized for it (Mayhew 338). The genderless form that Luque uses in these texts does not express particularly female experiences, but rather broadens them to include those that do not fit into the man/woman gender binary. This is not to say that all people have the same experience(s) but that all will be (potentially) included in the different experiences mentioned in the poems. Incorporating a lack of gender with visuality, she questions the cultural and patriarchal power structures that uphold these ideas as mainstream and prevalent in everyday practice. Although Luque’s speakers often observe women, or images of women, it is not possible

to talk of the general presence of a female identity in the texts chosen in this study; the discussion must widen to include a genderless identity for the various lyric voices.

CHALLENGING CULTURAL IMAGES: THE GAZE AND COMMODITY CULTURE

Problemas de doblaje, published in 1990, was Luque's first book after an eight year hiatus following Hiperiónida, published in 1982. This book focuses on memory(ies), forgetting, music, reality not being what it seems, love and failed love, and death. Many of these themes center on the senses, sight being one of many that is considered.¹²⁰ In "Problemas de doblaje" (9) sight is coupled with visual culture, namely the cinema. In this poem, the dreams of an ungendered speaker are likened to a film. In fact, the speaker is part of a collective in which reality is difficult to live up to. In sleep, a movie is produced in dream form only to disappoint the viewer(s):

En la toma perfecta, cuando el guión es bueno
y los actores fingen dignamente ser héroes,
el tiempo marca estrías, va apagando
uno a uno los focos y la banda
sonora se interrumpe.
Sensación de pantalla desgarrada
la insuficiencia siempre de vivir.
Qué frágil la película
que intentamos rodar en esas horas
para sesión privada y clandestina
en la pantalla interna de los párpados.
Un insípido tono pudoroso
de noche americana
en las irisaciones del deseo,
ni siquiera el siena matizado
del pasado indoloro nos acude.
Sueño de gabardinas
por calles satinadas de humedad,
labios muy densos, casi
negros desde la sala. Juventud,

¹²⁰ Hearing and touch are also important in Luque's poetry but are left for subsequent studies of her work.

cinta de celuloide erosionado,
un gui3n mediocre,
problemas de doblaje.

The lyric voice opens the poem with mention of the perfect take, when the actors are good and they pretend to be heroes. What blemishes the perfect take however, is the fact that the spotlights turn off and the soundtrack gets stopped (ll. 3-5). These opening lines can be interpreted in many ways. Mar3a Elena Oliv3 states that it is a real film in the beginning that the speaker attempts to replicate in her/his dreams (155). The interruption of the lights and the soundtrack could indeed be the end of a film that the speaker views. However, in order to produce her/his own attempt at perfection the lyric voice dreams her/his own movie. Because this personal version of the film is a dream, the interruption of the lights and soundtrack represent the speaker falling asleep, entering the state in which s/he can produce the film/dream. Regrettably, the attempt at “filming” fails and only produces mediocrity.

The “pantalla desgarrada” (l. 6) exists because the poetic voice realizes that her/his film/dream is so disappointing. Avid cinema-goers attend films because they are out of touch with the world and are looking for something in the darkened theater and on the screen that they have lost in life “ ‘out there’ ” (Silverman, “Lost” 99). What happens in this text is that the speaker must create what s/he is looking for inside and on a subjective basis, in her/his dreams, since what is searched for has not been found in life.

The subjectivity expressed by the apparently personal experience of the poetic voice is in fact universalized by the use of verbs in the first person plural. While everyone’s experience(s) may differ, the sensation of the “insuficiencia de vivir” (l. 7) drives others to do the same thing as the speaker: create their own film. It is here that we

have a type of role reversal: the poetic voice is the filmmaker, the person with control over what is seen and not seen. This implies that this person is in control of the gaze, not subjected to that of another. Because the person/people dreaming direct the “camera” to what they want to see, they are able to choose what is viewed and the way that it is viewed. They are the bearers of the gaze, and are therefore not bound by the same elements when the “movie” is filmed by someone else. What the observer does when s/he observes the film/dream is subject her/himself to the “power/knowledge structure” and takes “part in her/his own subjection” to this power structure (Hope 20). The lyric voice realizes the insufficiency of the film/dream because of the viewer’s subjectivation to the gaze. The speaker and the “nosotros” group consequently rebel against the gaze by attempting to effect their own; they will be in control, they will not subject themselves to the control of someone else’s gaze and way of viewing life. But the movie is fragile because it is a dream and dreams are ephemeral; they only last as long as the dreamer sleeps.

The “sesión privada y clandestina” (l. 10) underscores the fact that the speaker and others who film similar film/dreams are in fact avoiding the gaze of others. If not speaking is an act of desire not to be noticed, closing one’s eyes can be interpreted the same way (Dralus 31). If one cannot see the world, it is as if one does not exist in that world, and when it comes to dreams, the person can create their own reality, one free from the constraints perceived in the world in which one sees and is seen. Closing one’s eyes and sleeping is tantamount to escaping the obligation to perceive life in a certain way, to distance oneself from the expectations and disappointments one sees daily. Being in a private, clandestine filming session (sleep) in which one is in control of the images viewed

permits one to oppose the system and create a reality not controlled by others. The viewer in this poem is part of a “performance of meaning” from which s/he wishes to flee (Pollock, “Feminism” 6). Unfortunately though, the film/dream is not ideal, but rather one with a “guión mediocre” (l. 22). One may attempt to escape an insufficient life, but the film/dream created is just as disappointing. This displeasure is manifested in youth: eroded celluloid complete with dubbing problems (ll. 20-23).

An individual who is relegated to a normative gender performance may very well pretend to be something s/he is not much like actors (l. 2). Attempting to create a film in which s/he controls the gaze, potentially frees the individual from normative restraints, whatever they may be. The same can be said for gendered individuals who fit outside the parameters of normative gender performance. It is in this way that Luque’s lyric voice is universalized. This universalization does not restrict experience(s) but rather opens them up to infinite manifestations and performances of personhood.

Despite the evident freedom that the film/dream provides, the image that is “filmed” is not one that necessarily evokes happiness. The film/dream’s tone is insipid in which not even the sepia-toned, harmless past aids in the filming (ll. 12, 16). The setting in which this film/dream is situated appears to be that of classic American film noir.¹²¹ This is perhaps an allusion to the “pasado indoloro” (l. 16) of Hollywood’s Golden Age.¹²²

The eyelids are the screen for the film/dream and that turns ideas of feminist film theory around. In a movie theater, the spectator of the film identifies with the (male) gaze

¹²¹ The setting comes from lines 17-20. “[N]oche americana” (l. 13) refers to the filmic technique “day for night.” Exterior scenes shot during the day appear to have been shot at night when this technique is used.

¹²² See the poem “Again” (Problemas de doblaje 55) as well as Olivé’s discussion of the poem (152-5).

of the camera and the male characters in the film. The masculine viewing position with which one views a film as well as the female characters permits this “masculine” identification.¹²³ The screen then, acts as a kind of mirror in which the spectators, both male and female, see themselves as the bearers of the camera’s gaze as well as the gaze of the male characters in the film. The spectators are therefore subjected to the dominant gaze, which in this case is masculine.

The lyric voice in this poem mentions that a “we” are the filmmakers of the film/dream. This dramatically changes the dynamic of identification with the gaze. The viewer of the film/dream is simultaneously the spectator and the filmmaker which creates a different relationship between this viewer with the images on the “screen” than that of the average moviegoer. Since the lyric voice films the scenes, whatever they may be, when s/he views them, it is analogous to viewing dailies; in the film/dream the spectator views her/his point of view, not that of someone else. The “we” are not the classic film viewers because they are in control of the filming/dreaming; they see what they want to see, not the product of someone else’s vision and gaze.

In so doing, the traditional relationship between an individual and the filmic gaze is shattered. The fact that the lyric voice has no gender, but includes her/himself in a collective indicates that gender is superfluous in this particular situation. Whereas the typical moviegoer is subjected to the “masculine gaze” of the cinema, the individual filmmakers/dreamers effect their own gaze which consequently rejects the dominant, masculine gaze. They project personal desires into their film/dream, desires that do not

¹²³ The masculine viewing position is one that is assumed to be from the vantage point of the male. He is the filmmaker who films through his personal lens. This consequently obliges all viewers, regardless of their gender, to metaphorically see through his eyes. See pages 18 and 23-25 of the Introduction.

necessarily fit the mold of the controlling, patriarchal gaze. Although the “privada y clandestina” version of the film is eroded and mediocre (l. 10), the fact that a film/dream was made itself is an act of rebellion and rejection of the gaze.

Much the same way that Maria-Mercè Marçal rejects the androcentric gaze, Luque rejects it in this poem as well. While not woman focused, like many of the Marçalian texts, this one is a good example of how gender does not have to be a major factor in looking. Not naming gender in “Problemas de doblaje” opens doors for anyone to reject the dominant way of looking and identifying with images that are put before one. The observer in this text could very well be a man, a woman, or a transgendered person, there are no limits to who sees here because each individual creates their own film/dream on their own terms. Unfortunately, the result of those terms ends up as disappointing as the gaze that the speaker attempts to leave behind.

The mediocrity of the film/dream is analogous to life and the “insuficiencia siempre de vivir” (l. 7). The attempt to replace the masculine and normative gaze of life with the “filming” of the dream does not yield utopic results. Also, the fact that classic Hollywood filming techniques (“noche americana” [l.13]) are used in the film/dream does not preclude a rejection of the gaze that produced such films. In much the same way that certain terms fraught with normative meanings can be used to discuss them in new and different ways (Butler, Undoing 178), a normative cinematic gaze can be used to discredit that very gaze. While no doubt exists that the viewers are ensnared in insufficiency and mediocrity, these two terms are not necessarily synonymous to nor opposite the normative masculine gaze. Not all attempts to break from normative practice

are successful or pleasing. “Problemas de doblaje” uses visual culture to show the possible difficulty in manifesting certain subjectivities when one rejects a normative and subjectivating gaze.

“Red de ferrocarriles” (Transitoria 13) is a poem with an ungendered speaker who looks out the “límpida ventana” (l. 11) of a fast-moving train in disgust at what s/he sees: elements that indicate “progress” and visual culture: neighborhoods, billboards, videos, a newspaper, and a duffle bag, as well as viewing other passengers and what s/he imagines is their purpose for the trip.

The introductory verses of the poem serve as the commentary of the lyric voice as s/he travels by train to an unknown destination. A tone of contempt permeates the poem as the traveler looks out the window at what is considered progress, but in fact, offers nothing to the imagination or the eyes but depressed and sterile images. The seeing here is “tainted by cultural biases, expectations, and desires” (Hope 103); the lyric voice disparages the images s/he views because they do not live up to her/his expectations. The new train, the “Talgo doscientos” (l. 2) devours the countryside that the passenger views:

devora los arrabales
de cemento,
bloques con ropa colgada,
cien adosados grotescos,
depósitos ilegales,
coches muertos en corrales,
el Caminito del Rey
y los limoneros muertos. (ll. 3-10)¹²⁴

¹²⁴ See “Las dudas de Eros” (Las dudas de Eros, 57; Portvaria 61; Camaradas de Ícaro, 46) in which the speaker views lemons that trigger bad memories of a love experience. It uses as an intertext “I limoni” by Eugenio Montale.

Nothing viewed has any meaning or style for that matter and what is offered to the eyes is a dead, concrete, rusting environment that is but a fraction of what it once was. All of the concrete has sucked the life away and the dead lemon trees illustrate this (l. 10).

The viewer is not invested in what s/he sees, however, since the “límpida ventana” (l. 11) is a barrier between the speaker and the outside world, which offers the sterile view that repels the looker and offends her/his look in the process. The window may be limpid, but what happens on the other side of it at this point in the poem is not. What literally catches the lyric voice’s eye are flashy billboards for Siemens and Sony (l. 12). So flashy in fact, that the colors on the video hurt the eyes of the onlookers and the music that comes from them offends their ears.¹²⁵ Both Siemens and Sony, brands for communications and electronics, form part of commodity culture whose primary mode of address is the visual (Solomon-Godeau 114). But because of the train’s velocity and the separation between the speaker and the images through the window, the lyric voice can exercise the choice to disregard the visual outside the train. Neither the views of the suburbs nor images of commodity culture speak to the lyric voice, so s/he consequently turns her/his attention to the train’s interior. Through not visually consuming the images, the speaker rejects the meaning(s) encoded in them. These images “bear the traces of the capitalist and patriarchal social relations in which they are produced, exchanged and consumed” (Kuhn 10). This lack of connection with visual images however, is not limited to those outside the train.

¹²⁵ It is unclear whether or not the video and the music come from outside or inside the train. Regardless of their origin, the importance here is that they are offensive to the lyric voice.

Inside s/he looks at the newspaper that someone is reading, sees a retired couple,
and looks at her/his duffle bag:

Enfrente de mí un equipo
con Carlos, su entrenador:
waterpolo femenino.
Sale su foto en color
en el *Marca*.¹²⁶
Dos jubilados esperan
huir en tren de su Parca.
Yo contemplo mi equipaje,
mi bolsa negra de *Adidas*. (ll. 22-28)

Much the same way that the traveler focused on the Siemens and Sony billboards, s/he focuses on these three visual stimuli inside the car of the train.

The speaker eventually bores of both the outside and inside views and interiorization begins. The Adidas bag is the link between the pop culture images s/he already viewed and the process of looking inward. Adidas is a famous brand of athletic gear and links the speaker to both Marca and the famous brands displayed on the passing billboards. Contemplating this bag allows the lyric voice to travel back and remember other trips made, trips that appear to have been full of tradition, life, and passion; not concrete and obnoxious billboards:

Recuerdo los viejos viajes,
los proyectos fervorosos,
las rutas todas perdidas
--pinos de Epidauro, llenos
de cigarras,
almendros abandonados
de Granada-- . (ll. 31-37)

¹²⁶ Marca is a sports newspaper in Spain.

Compared to these memories, the present trip is empty and trivial. In fact, it is so insignificant that the speaker realizes that the only thing that s/he carries is her/his verses as baggage (ll. 44-46).

The cement barrios, rusting cars, Siemens, Sony, Marca, Adidas, none of these offer anything to the speaker so s/he has to look for an alternative to hold her/his attention. By so doing, s/he effects an individual struggle, not a universalizing one (Foucault, “Subject” 432), with images of commodity and popular culture that do not interpellate the speaker. The lyric voice is in a field of visibility because the gaze “ ‘issues from all sides’ ” (Silverman, “Fassbinder” 277).¹²⁷ The presence of images both outside and inside the train is for visual consumption and consequent socialization due to their consumption (Feldstein 52). The gaze, in this instance, attempts to control what the speaker views and her/his interpretation.

The power in the commodity images is unseen; it has to do with those who choose and produce them for others to view. Choosing not to preoccupy her/himself with the visual that passes outside the train or what is inside is an act of agency that rejects others’ ideas of what is culturally important or necessary, therefore removing the lyric voice from subjectivation to underlying cultural meanings of the images. The external stimuli are superfluous and by saying no “to the structures of power which ask us to consume” images and representations “uncritically,” this speaker turns to her/himself to fill the void left by viewing images of pop culture (Kuhn 8).

¹²⁷ See Lacan The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis for discussion of the sardine can and the all-around presence of the gaze (95, 109).

REJECTING GENDER ROLES: THE GAZE AND CULTURAL IMAGES OF WOMEN

Another poem in which Luque employs elements of visual culture to challenge the cultural and patriarchal gaze is “De la publicidad” (Problemas de doblaje 11-12).

However, this poem differs from the previous two discussed because it questions and challenges practices of looking at women. The poem has five parts; two of them, the first and the last, deal with visual culture and the viewing of women. While gender comes into play in these two texts, it is the gender of the one analyzed and her (re)presentation on a (movie) screen and in a magazine advertisement that the ungendered speaker calls into question thereby challenging the patriarchal gaze.¹²⁸

In the first poem, there is a woman on a screen who wears polka-dot leggings or a leotard, twirling around like a “falsa muñeca” (l. 2). The twirling image of Loulou that appears only does so for a few seconds (l. 3). As in “Problemas de doblaje” the image viewed is projected on a screen, so Loulou is subjected to the gaze two-fold: the gaze of the camera and the gaze of the person who views her image on the screen.

In the last two lines of the poem, there is a complete lack of desire when faced with the image: “y la absoluta falta de estructura / del desear” (ll. 5-6), which removes the power structure of the gaze from the image when the lyric voice views it. This indicates that (masculine) desire is wrapped up in this gaze in the way in which the spectators look at the woman on the screen. The person who looks at the image on the screen will, in theory, be imbued with the same desire that the camera operator holds due to the fact that s/he views the image in the same manner as the person behind the camera. The spectator does not get to choose the vantage point from which s/he looks, so s/he is interpellated not

¹²⁸ The second, third, and fourth poems deal with the passage of time and limits, the accumulation of papers, and days sorted like photocopies respectively.

only by the point of view and desire of the camera operator, but also the power that the gaze has over what is viewed. This is out of the spectator's control and in this example the woman is offered for the desiring viewing pleasure of whomever views her image.

The lack of desire in lines five and six calls into question the viewer's ideas about desire of the image. If there is no "estructura / del desear," (ll. 5-6) and desire is innate in the viewers of film, then it is logical to conclude that there is some element that disrupts the normative structure of the desire in the gaze that is missing. This "thing" is the fact that the speaker of this poem is ungendered. Feminist film theory centers on the relationship that exists between male and female viewers of film and male filmmakers whose points of view are transferred to the camera. Given that there is no gender to the speaker of the poem, who is also the viewer of Loulou's image, the ideas of desire and the (masculine) gaze in film theory do not apply to this short text. Women's desirability "becomes a function of certain practices of imaging" such as lighting and framing (Doane 133).

This text demystifies those ideas because there is nothing with which the lyric voice can identify. S/he is not engaged in the power relationship that exists between the image, the one who captures the image and the spectator's identification with the image when it is viewed on the screen. So the lack of structure of desire in this text about a filmic and popular/visual culture image indicates that the viewer does not feel a part of the controlling patriarchal structure of the gaze which includes the male/female gender dichotomy.

Control over an individual may be difficult if one does not ascribe to that control and this is what happens in this poem. Many times, one has a choice as to what subject

positions one takes and which discourses one follows. If, as a spectator, one chooses not to be part of the power structure inherent in film and the projection of certain images, by means of the patriarchal gaze and identifying with the (masculine) desire projected, then this small act of rebellion will partially free the individual from such structures. The ungendered speaker rejects the meaning(s) Loulou's image imbues and consequently refuses to participate in certain practices of looking. By so doing, s/he becomes liberated from normative heterosexual desires regardless of her/his gender.

The fifth poem of "De la publicidad" also rejects the power of the gaze. Again there is an ungendered speaker who looks at a woman portrayed in a visual form: a magazine ad for perfume. She is exotic, in an exotic place, and offers woman as a visual commodity.¹²⁹ This short poem not only calls into question the role of women and the underlying message of the ad, but it also challenges photographic truth and the power of the gaze. The individual look of the viewer of the ad challenges the patriarchal gaze and the supposed power it holds over women. It is possible that the speaker of the poem is a woman since there seems to be great interest on her/his part regarding the condition of the woman in the photograph and the tedium of everyday life that the ad appears to dismiss or cover up. However, the underlying meaning is not dependent on the lyric voice's gender. Similar to Marçal's poem "Pasquins per a la revolta vegetal," this text challenges the way that women are depicted in print, questioning those values.

The woman in the photo is one who is to be looked at, which permits commentary on her situation and addresses (perceived) problems with (female) gender performance:

¹²⁹ See Olivé's discussion of this poem. She states that the exotic place, Marrakech, and the French in the advertisement, universalize the idea of banality and through that criticize consumerism (163-4).

REPORTAJE de moda en Marrakech.
Très loins de l'innocence este perfume.
Una fotografía retocada
con acuarelas suaves. Si desea
reparamos su piel. Esta revista cuenta
familiares parábolas al fin:
de cómo maquillar los sueños agresivos
o cómo estilizar la derrota y el tedio.
Perfumada de Armani
la nada es altamente soportable.

First, the woman is in Marrakech, and is desirable because of the unknown and wild factors to her beauty. The perfume that aids in her exoticism also keeps her far from innocence (l. 2) permitting her to be the subject, and object, of fantasies. One must have certain cultural knowledge to understand the hidden codes in the advertisement which constitute an “institutional activity” (Barthes, “Photographic” 31).

The image is false however, since it is retouched.¹³⁰ The product in the touched up ad can fix a woman’s skin apparently just as easily as an artist can fix a photograph. This magical solution does not just apply to the skin however. Whatever might be wrong or unsatisfying in the life of the viewer can be refurbished, and falsified, with as much ease as the alterations to the original photograph. The ad implies that with a little bit of make-up, the daily touch-up ritual in which so many women (and others) take part will soften the aggressiveness of dreams in much the same fashion that the “acuarelas suaves” (l. 4) were used to soften the picture of the perfume model in Marrakech. The magazine also offers ways in which defeat and tedium can be overcome by stylizing them. In the end, if you are like the woman in the ad, covered in Armani perfume, you can make the nothingness of everyday life bearable.

¹³⁰ The poem is a bit ambiguous as to which elements of the photo are actually touched up. Though it is not clear whether it is the scenery or the woman, many fashion advertisements airbrush the models to give them a flawless appearance.

This ad encourages viewers to perform their lives and uphold an ideal perpetuated by “vision and the visual world in producing meanings, establishing and maintaining aesthetic values, gender stereotypes, and power relations within culture” (Rogoff 24). Very similar to the way in which the speaker of the first poem challenged the image of Loulou that appears on the screen, this speaker challenges what is offered not only in the Armani perfume ad, but also in the magazine as a whole. What is illustrated by the (false) image of the female model and the city is that it is very easy to cover up whatever shortcomings and inequities exist with the superficial fix of perfume and makeup. It is much easier to hide behind a mask than confront “la derrota” (l. 8), “el tedio” (l. 8), and “la nada” (l. 10). Stereotypes may not be easily eradicated, but part of their elimination is their rejection (Barrett 92).

Although the ad attempts to sell a certain performance of femininity in which life is masked by make-up and perfume, the speaker and reader are not deceived by this performance. The lyric voice recognizes the falsity on many levels: the retouched photograph, the made-up life, the familiar lessons the magazine sells. The speaker recounts the image and message of the advertisement but nothing in the poem indicates that the lyric voice will fall prey to the enticing ad. The poem states that if the reader/viewer desires, her skin will be repaired. The magazine assumes that the reception of the ad will be the same for all viewers. Those who see

are presumed to be at once historically innocent and purely receptive, as if they too existed in the world immune from other social practices and discourses, yet immediately susceptible to images, to a certain power of iconism, its truth or reality effect. (de Lauretis, *Alice* 38)

The viewer, who is the lyric voice, is not immune to social discourses and refuses one with the aim of subjectivating her/him.

There are certain cultural expectations of women of which the ungendered speaker is fully aware: they will look flawless and will cover up anything less than perfect while they perform their lives. Ideas about gender congeal over time, but the lyric voice rejects those ideas all the while knowing that women are expected to look and act in the way glamorized by the perfume ad (Butler, Gender 43-4).

This poem challenges the way women are viewed, and the hypothesis that the speaker is ungendered challenges the ideas of the patriarchal gaze because

there is a strong consciousness among both sexes that the real agents enforcing the myth today are not men as individual lovers or husbands, but institutions, that depend on male dominance. Both sexes seem to be finding that the full force of the myth derives little from private sexual relations, and much from the cultural and economic megalith ‘out there’ in the public realm. Increasingly, both sexes know they are being cheated. (Wolf 288)¹³¹

In line with “De la publicidad,” “Justicia poética” (Las dudas de Eros 54) has an ambiguously gendered speaker who criticizes past versions of schoolmates and what they are like now when s/he sees them:¹³²

A algunas compañeras superpijas
del colegio de monjas de Granada
me las encuentro ahora
ligeramente histéricas, curvas,
hastadas y mechadas,
hablando de pastillas.

¹³¹ Wolf operates on the gender binary as well as the heterosexual matrix or compulsory heterosexuality and only superficially mentions homosexuality or gay relationships among men and women. To my knowledge there is no mention of differently gendered or transgendered people. She also slightly touches on the ideas of race, class, and culture in her discussion, (incorrectly) assuming that all women share the same experience with the beauty myth.

¹³² There appears to be a typographical error in the index to this volume: the poem is titled “Justificación poética.”

Jugaban a poner nervioso al cura
y a acostarse, triunfantes, con el entrenador
--aquellas joyas de testosterona—
por patios marianos y uterinos.
Consiguieron muy pronto los novios adecuados:
todas tienen chalet-calabozo adosado. (54)¹³³

The speaker goes back to her/his youth in Granada, thinking of the snobby girls who used to have it all. When the lyric voice runs into these ex-schoolmates, s/he finds them in quite bad shape: hysterical, fed up, and talking of pills. This is quite a scathingly critical observation of the girls turned into women who are the embodiment of what the lyric voice rejected in “De la publicidad V.” They are hysterical, a quality that women are traditionally supposed to, or expected to possess and display. They are also fake with their dyed hair, and they use pills as an escape mechanism. They hide themselves in much the same way that the perfume ad in “De la publicidad” incites women to conceal the ennui from which they suffer. In this text the women cover up grey hair or put in streaks of unnatural color to give the appearance of youth and hipness, a prerequisite for status as a *pija*. They are tired of life and, like the highlights that cover up undesirable signs of aging they conceal their unhappiness and disgust with medication. They are in effect expressing a fabrication (Butler, Gender 173). They play their gender and although it is but one manifestation of womanhood, it is a stereotypical and culturally accepted one.

These games are not exclusively the domain of their adult years. Even in their youth they played games and it does not appear that they took anything seriously, as their “superpija” status permitted them certain liberties with priests and coaches. In their game they were happy with their macho and manly testosterone trophies.

¹³³ Although it is probably true that the lyric voice is female, there is no definitive proof.

The last two lines return the poem to the present with the final judgment of the speaker. These *pijas* have received poetic justice in her/his eyes because they and their “novios adecuados” have a jail-like condominium (ll. 11-12).¹³⁴ It is obvious that the lyric voice’s former schoolmates are looked at with a mixture of disdain, pity, and self-satisfaction. Although one might assume that the speaker is a woman because of the criticism and possible envy raised by the “superpijas,” this assumption does not necessarily determine the interpretation. This poem permits readers with similar experiences and knowledge to enjoy the text. In this sense it universalizes the reaction to the “superpijas” making the gender of the speaker irrelevant, leaving room for different genders. A man could just as easily have the same reaction to former female classmates as a woman, although most likely for different reasons. Perhaps he may not have been one of the “joyas de testosterona” (l. 11) and maybe suffered rejection at the hands of one of the “superpijas,” therefore rejoicing in their current mediocrity. If a transgendered person were the lyric voice, s/he may also rejoice in their ordinariness since in their youth the “superpijas” may have had everything s/he did not.

Along with the past/present relationship in the poem, there is also a visible me/them mentality. The speaker, no matter what the gender, recognizes the “superpijas” as other; they are people with whom no common ground is evident. Unlike various poems by Maria-Mercè Marçal in which the lyric voice unites women to form a female collective

¹³⁴ *Chalets adosados* are fashionable for some. They are adjoining homes/townhouses/condominiums generally found in the outskirts of cities and have small, fenced yards. The U.S. equivalent would be a condominium or townhouse community with many blocks of adjoined homes. See discussion of “Red de ferrocarriles” pages 136-139 for further commentary on *casas adosadas*.

with strength in numbers and shared experience, the opposite happens in this text.¹³⁵

Those who were viewed as the ideal in the past are but remnants of their former selves in the eyes of the lyric voice.

This separation between the speaker and the other is done, in the present, consciously by the speaker. S/he exercises the agency to not adhere to and rejoice in these idea(l)s of femaleness. Whereas the speaker was overlooked by the “superpijas” in youth s/he rejects their current form of being and is smugly content not to be a part of that group. They do not question their gender role and find it impossible to “exist in a socially meaningful sense outside of established gender norms” (Butler, “Variations” 149).

The idea of the *superpija* is one that society imposes on individuals and members of a biological sex group with the ends of a certain gender performance. Young women are supposed to look and act certain ways; teasing priests and sleeping with testosterone-filled coaches (ll. 7-8), as are women past adolescence. This is the normative, patriarchal, and heterosexual view of the typical woman: she is the private seductress while being publicly good. The lyric voice in this poem, as is the case in others, rejects the normative performance and the gaze it symbolizes, and recognizes the masking for precisely what it is.

Unlike the other poems discussed in this section, “Transitoria,” (Transitoria 37-42) Luque’s longest text, has a female speaker.¹³⁶ She looks at a string of pearls soaking in port and knick-knacks that belonged to her dead great-grandmother, Tía Tránsito. The personal effects take the lyric voice on a journey of memories that ultimately leads to the

¹³⁵ See “Pasquins” and “Avui les fades” pages 101-110 in Chapter Three.

¹³⁶ The lyric voice includes herself in a group of girls in line sixty-three.

conclusion that life is transitory and worth nothing. The main focus in the poem is Tránsito's pearls that symbolize femininity, the feminine, and the hardships accompanying the stereotypical female gender category:

Transitoria locura. Perlas, perlas,
mojadas que gotean en la copa
sola de oporto *tawny* caoba y transparente
y hablan de mares muertos de la vida,
de olas paralizadas, del dolor de durar
inmensamente más que un pecho tibio. (ll. 1-6)

The description of the pearls continues, focusing on their color which mirrors the color of the mahogany port that they are dripping. The reader discovers that the great-grandmother's necklace, the photo the lyric voice looks at, and the little bottles of perfume arrived together upon her death:

que llegó junto a frascos diminutos
de esencias que una muerte paciente evaporaba,
Dos Luises o Divisa:
no se encontró ocasión para que ungieran
las sienes orgullosas. (ll. 11-15)

The dead woman may have been proud, but her pearls and perfumes were superfluous to her life. They were unnecessary and treated "con el mismo abandono involuntario" (l. 17) that time eats away at "vestidos rancios" (l. 18). The sheets that the great-grandmother embroidered are also discolored with age, the initials that she spent hours sewing are "color de hueso gris y herrumbre de baúles." (l. 23)

As the lyric voice continues to rummage through the effects of her departed family member she focuses on a fan that depicts a woman from the 1920s with her skull cap and lap dog and a chain that is "exenta de suave tintineo" (l. 27) because it is a mere representation of a chain. She is similar to the great-grandmother in that she appears to be

proud and she is adorned (with the dog and the chain). But there is an air of difference between the “real” person who just died and the woman represented on the fan. The “real” woman is represented by stained pearls and discolored clothing and sheets, as well as by a photo in sepia, monochromatic tones connoting old age and antiquated ideas that contrast sharply to the clothing and environment of the woman on the fan. She appears to enjoy the type of life that Tía Tránsito most likely did not.¹³⁷

The focus of the poem begins to shift from talking about objects that the speaker sees, to activities done and sensations experienced. There were French and piano lessons, embroidery sessions on the balcony close to the cathedral, and guitar workshops on her street, convents, and refreshing forests (ll. 30-6). But Tránsito was not happy and she suffered “la miseria no dicha / de la esperanza propia” (ll. 36-37) with “su alma alfilerada, / bosque arriba los sueños descosidos del cuerpo, / casi del alma misma desprendidos” (ll. 41-43).

The decor of Tránsito’s home mirrored the interior wilting away from which she suffered. She has a homemade altar to the “Niño Jesús” that never concedes any miracles (ll. 44-49), the silk of the bedclothes is a gray magenta (l. 51), the damask “para ninguna historia sostenida” (ll. 54-55), the red sink with a broken corner (ll. 56-57), and etched glasses for no one’s lips (l. 58) are some of the lyric voice’s memories that point to her great-grandmother’s lonely life. The text continues through a list of happy childhood memories only to return to the port-drenched pearls and the present in line eighty.

After a series of more memories of Tránsito and articles left by those who passed before her, the speaker addresses herself instead of the photo and memories of her great-

¹³⁷ Tránsito is mentioned by name for the first time in line thirty-nine.

grandmother. Here the speaker talks of how she will also leave photos behind as well as equally mistreated but more ambitious dreams (ll. 105-104), although in addition to the pearls she bathes to dissolve Tránsito's memory:

Tú dejarás más fotos,
sueños más ambiciosos e igual de maltratados.
Fotos de largos viajes. También este collar
que esta noche conviertes en oráculo
y le pides que deje
su memoria disuelta en el oporto (105-110)

At this moment, with the pearls in the port, the lyric voice examines what she will leave behind determining that life is transitory and that she will suffer the same fate as her great-grandmother:

Y nunca te detienes a pensar
que todos los objetos de tu mesa—la petaca menuda,
los cuadernos de *Bauma*, el lacre verde bronce
de El Escorial, el cuarzo de Alozaina
sobre cartas recientes, la pluma regalada
en aquella lectura ornamental de un club con ínfulas—
durarán más que tú
mas no hablarán de ti. No dirán nada. (119-126)

There is a strong, albeit negative, bond between the speaker and the deceased relative and what links them are the objects left behind. Photographs are not the only articles left, but everything the speaker inspects simultaneously attracts and repels her. Far from being “worthless trinket[s]” (Durand 146), the objects viewed serve as the link to the past. They attract the lyric voice because she comes from this woman and repel her because she sees that she is destined for the same fate as Tía Tránsito. The trinkets are the key to the speaker recovering meaning from Tránsito's life: that she was subjected to a patriarchal gender performance (Seyhan 231). The lyric voice inherits another aspect of this woman's legacy: to be forgotten in death. As she contemplates her own (future) death and what

people will see when she is gone, she continues the tradition of the pearls as a symbol of failed femininity. They will be passed on to someone else, and hopefully the lyric voice will be remembered if only in name, as she does Tránsito.

All of the objects that the lyric voice observes are symbols of the subjugated status of women, invested with cultural meaning. The speaker, as viewing subject, attempts to sort out what she sees and her connection to it and is consequently “caught up in, formed by, and construct[s] meaning” from what she views (Linker 392).¹³⁸ The images that the speaker sees, discolored pearls, embroidered sheets, a magenta-gray duvet, and solitary glasses, all aid in guaranteeing the patriarchy by pointing to a lonely, gloomy woman who did not do what women were expected to (Feldstein 53). The speaker challenges this idea by imagining leaving other things behind when she dies. She may leave behind the pearls, but she will not be subjected to the forces that controlled her great-grandmother, at least not in the same form.

The lyric voice is able to recognize that Tía Tránsito’s life did not meet expectations of femininity and that what she, the speaker, will leave behind (ll. 119-126) is not associated with any particular performance of gender. She desires to position herself outside of the masculine gaze and normative gender expectations. While she looks at Tránsito’s belongings, she is conscious of her great-grandmother’s subjection to cultural gender norms and her failure to live up to them. The lyric voice does look at them with a sense of sadness, but it is due to her relative’s inability to release the grasp that normative gender had on her life. The sympathetic (empathetic?) viewing in which the speaker engages is not bound by the masculine gaze. It is effected by a woman who wished to not

¹³⁸ I have removed the emphasis from the original: “*caught up in, formed by, and construct meaning.*”

suffer the same in life or death as Tránsito did. The objects the lyric voice leaves behind when she dies will not tell a story. Not having a story is better than having one of coerced and failed gender performance and unhappiness.

OUTSIDE THE NORM: UNGENDERED DESIRE

Varying from the other poems discussed, “Fecha de caducidad” (Carpe noctem 9) is a poem that is rich in sensory images: touch, hearing, smell, and sight; sight dominating the others.¹³⁹ These senses lend themselves to a sensual text about a sexual/sensual encounter at the beach. Again there is no gender to the speaker which gives the poem a certain universality as in “Justicia poética” that is not always present in the other poems discussed. Here the object of the lyric voice’s look becomes the subject as the message inscribed on this person’s back either incites the desire of the one looking or keeps it in check:

Con el traje de junio
la vida se mostraba casi dócil
entre toallas verdes y amarillas
y lycra luminosa compartiendo
fronteras con la piel. Olor a mar templado
y la pereza cómplice
de olas y bañistas: era propicio hundirse
en esas lentejuelas soleadas del agua
o en las selvas pintadas sobre los bañadores,
desmenuzar el velo finísimo de sal
de unos hombros cercanos
y posponer la noche y su aventura.
Parecía la vida un puro litoral
pero avanzó una sombra:
al borrar con saliva la sal de la mañana
pude ver la inscripción junto al omóplato:
FRUTA PERECEDERA. Consumir

¹³⁹ The poem was first published in the anthology Fecha de caducidad (24) and marked as *inédito*.

de preferencia ahora. El producto se altera fácilmente,
antes que los deseos. No se admiten
reclamaciones.

The beach and what is seen there, removes the hostility of life and almost turns it into a dreamlike state of bliss. The docility of the day also contrasts markedly with the ferocity with which the speaker must eat the perishable fruit so that it does not spoil. The reader of the poem is first assaulted by visual imagery of the beach scene. In the first five lines of the text, bright summer colors are shown by the green and yellow towels spread out on the beach as well as the “lycra luminosa” of the bathing suits (l. 4). The smell of the ocean comes into play, coupled with the laziness of both the bathers and the waves. The poetic voice wants to lose her/himself in the shiny sequins of the ocean or in the “selvas pintadas sobre los bañadores.” (l. 9) S/he also states that s/he wants to “desmenuzar” the velum of salt that is on the shoulders of someone who appears to be a nearby swimmer or sunbather. Analyzing through looking is consistent with the visual cues in the poem: the towels, bathing suits, ocean, and shoulders. Seeing the shoulders introduces the desire that is held in the look of the lyric voice.

The desire of the lyric voice is clear since s/he wishes to kiss or lick the salt from the desirable shoulders. The desire is so potent that it postpones nocturnal adventures in order to enjoy it now, converting the text into a type of *carpe diem* poem. This enthusiasm is curbed slightly by a figurative shadow: the inscription on the shoulder.¹⁴⁰ The speaker must consume the “fruit” before it spoils, and unfortunately cannot return the produce if the experience is not to her/his liking.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ There is a slight variation between the texts in Fecha de caducidad and Carpe noctem. In the former, line seventeen reads “*Fruta perecedera*,” in the latter, “FRUTA PERECEDERA.”

The look here is from one person to another. The power of the look is stripped from its bearer, the speaker, because of the inscription; as soon as the message is read, there is a different dynamic. The lyric voice observes her/his surroundings and makes judgments about the day and desires a body. However, with the appearance of the message of imminent spoilage, it is the object of the gaze who now has the upper hand: s/he has become the subject and as a result controls the action(s) of the speaker. The gender ambiguity in both the lyric voice and the “fruit” lends a type of universality to the text offering the sexual/sensual experience to anyone. It is not a matter of women and men and normative heterosexuality, although that is a possibility. Gender here is not a performance as it was in the fifth poem of “De la publicidad,” but rather an absent element which enables all manifestations of gender(s) in the reader(s) to potentially identify with the experience described in the text. There are no elements of compulsory heterosexuality in this text that would prohibit a sexual/sensual encounter between a same-sex couple or a differently gendered people (Butler, Gender 80). The only biological elements mentioned are saliva and shoulders, two things not reserved exclusively for men and women. So not only are references to biological sex absent, but also references to gender. The biological body is not limited by culture in the same manner as gender is, but the absence of biological sex and gender challenges culturally accepted notions of who can have an experience similar to the one expressed in the poem (Butler, “Variations” 150).

Due to the lack of biology and gender, subjectivity is given to both parties of ambiguous gender(s), regardless of the fact that the message on the shoulder of one takes

¹⁴¹ See Cardona. She reads the experience on the beach as a revision of the story of Adam and Eve.

some decision-making power and agency away from the lyric voice. The patriarchal gaze allows for men and women, because it “fears and prohibits both” female and ungendered subjectivity (Ebert 36), and because of this fear subjectivates them. Allowing for the possibility of manifestations of a homosexual physical relationship or one between differently gendered people destroys cultural and patriarchal (synonymous?) ideas of “normal” gendered sexual/sensual relationships. The text is quite possibly Luque’s most controversial poem on looking, gender, and the established norm.

SUMMARY

A female lyric voice can resist the power of the patriarchal gaze by challenging established ideas of femininity and femaleness. The gaze controls women in many different manners such as stereotypical ideas of female appearance: sexy, fragrant, and exotic like Luque’s “De la publicidad” and “Justicia poética.”

The gaze, and the power that is derived from it, operate on the assumption that there is a normative heterosexual matrix: that the only “natural” relationship that can exist is between men and women. Women who challenge the “natural” power of patriarchal culture, and its gaze, while performing a worthy service to other women, do little to disarm the “inherent” heterosexual matrix. They do not belong to that gaze or the cultural system from which it came, but the “natural” gender categories still exist. Women are still opposed to men even though they may have rejected the power they (men) appear to represent.

When a homosexual or an ungendered speaker questions the gaze the result is quite different. Like non-gendered looking with a scopophilic or scopophobic outcome, a

non-gendered speaker who challenges the patriarchal gaze fully shatters the premise that compulsory heterosexuality is natural. It is one thing to fit into pre-established gender categories such as “man” or “woman” and challenge a system in which you are a player, wittingly or otherwise. It is quite another to be of a category that does not fit neatly into the mold. This is especially true for questions of sexuality.

Luque’s ungendered lyric voices are placed outside of all established gender and sexual categories, just like the lesbians in Marçal’s texts.¹⁴² They also challenge the power of the patriarchal gaze. A system that has no name for one does not know how to handle the defiance and possible rejection of those it cannot define. Not male, not female, not necessarily gay or straight. If the speaker does not make gender an issue, s/he nevertheless does reject the powerful gaze of a system that holds gender, and all of its power and limited relationship possibilities, as one of its central tenets.

Compared to Rossetti and Marçal, there is very little gender at all in Luque’s poems. Where the gender of the speaker is known in many of Rossetti’s and Marçal’s texts, it is almost never mentioned in Luque. When she does mention it, as in “Transitoria,” the gender of the lyric voice serves as a way to arrive at an ungendered category.

Luque goes a step farther than both Rossetti and Marçal by rarely recognizing any gender in her lyric voices. Her general lack of a gendered speaker seems to universalize her poetry in a way that does not happen with Rossetti and Marçal. The subject is not universal, and the fact that there is a discussion about gender and its many manifestations or absences points toward that idea. Here, it is not the difference between being a man and

¹⁴² Because lesbians do not fit into the heterosexual matrix and are not considered “women” in the sense of the gender binary, looking at another lesbian dismantles the gaze.

a woman, of having specific “masculine” or “feminine” qualities, but the ability to express selfhood that is not a part of the pre-established, unnatural, heterosexual gender dichotomy. The genderless lyric voices permit expression of difference(s) from the norm in a subject that struggles with power and rebels against that power. Regardless of whether the speaker is a woman or ungendered, Aurora Luque successfully challenges and resists the power the patriarchal gaze wields.

CHAPTER 5

MONTSERRAT ABELLÓ: LOOKING IN THE MIRROR

Montserrat Abelló is a Catalan language poet whose literary production spans more than four decades and whose poetry centers on questions of gender, identity, self-discovery, communication, and the creative process. Abelló was born in 1918 in Tarragona. She spent her childhood in many places due to her father's employment as a naval engineer (Izquierdo 12). Her family sided with the Republican cause and went to England when Franco and the Nationalists won the civil war in 1939. They continued their exile in Chile in 1940 where Abelló lived for the next twenty years (Izquierdo 13-14). Although she would have preferred to resume living in Spain after Franco's death, familial circumstances required her to return in 1960. Her life colors her poetry in which she leaves "l'empremta de les vivències, dels coneixements i de l'experiència" (Panyella, "Montserrat" 51).

Her published books of poetry in Catalan are Vida diària (1963), Vida diària/Paraules no dites (1981), El blat del temps (1986), Foc a les mans (1990), L'arrel de l'aigua (1995), Són màscares que m'emprovo (1995), and Dins l'esfera del temps (1998). All of her works were collected and published under the title Al cor de les

paraules. Obra poètica 1963-2000.¹⁴³ She worked with Maria-Mercè Marçal and others on various women's issues and defines herself as a feminist: "Seré feminista mentre no hi ha una igualtat real entre homes i dones en tots els aspectes" (Clos n. pag.). Her interest in feminist issues was the impetus for her involvement in the organization of "Cartografies del desig. Quinze escriptores i el seu món" that took place at the casa Elizalde in 1997. Although she has written and published poetry for more than four decades, she began her creative career writing stories in Spanish during her exile in Chile. She has always done translations and considers herself first and foremost, a translator. Abelló has spoken English since she was six years old and feels great affection for the English language (Nadal, "Montserrat" 49). She has translated many women poets, but is best known for her translations of Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich.¹⁴⁴ She also compiled and translated an anthology of English-language women poets titled Cares a la finestra: poesia anglesa feta per dones del segle XX (1998).

In 1998, Abelló was awarded the Creu de Sant Jordi by the Generalitat de Catalunya for her Catalan translations of poetry in English as well as her feminist activities and contributions (Izquierdo 28).¹⁴⁵ She also received the Premi de la Crítica Serra d'or in 1999 for Dins l'esfera del temps (www.escriptors.com/autors/abello).

¹⁴³ The volume includes poems under the title "Indicis d'altres moments," which is the title of her forthcoming volume. Al cor de les paraules also includes various translations of English-language poets.

¹⁴⁴ She has translated Plath's Ariel, Winter Trees, Three Women and Rich's An Atlas of the Different World.

¹⁴⁵ This award is the highest honor that the Catalan government bestows.

Her poems are generally short and, with only one exception, do not have titles.¹⁴⁶ Although she uses her life as a woman and lived experience(s) as the inspiration for her poetry (Nadal, “Montserrat” 47), she is pleased that readers may take something from her texts that she did not consider at the time she wrote them.¹⁴⁷ Very little critical attention has been paid to her poetry although numerous book reviews have appeared in newspapers and journals. Those who have written about her work are generally favorable in their assessment. “[L]a pulcritud dels seus versos, l’exactitud de les seves paraules...combinen en proporcions sàvies la gravetat amb l’accessibilitat” which incorporates her own ideas about her poetry offering something for everyone (Alzamora xi). According to Maria Àngels Anglada, Abelló’s poetry is “confidencial, senzilla i rica de suggeriments” (“Ressenya” 33). Abelló states that her poetry is not concrete: “La faig una mica atemporal i no parlo de coses determinades, sinó del que sento respecte a moltes coses en general, tot i que, és clar, està basada en l’experiència” (Nadal, “Montserrat” 47).

Regardless of the abstractions and various possible interpretations of her texts, this accessible and rich poetry focuses on identity. The poetic voice many times undergoes a search for renewed identity from one masked by cultural and societal expectations that conceals a distinct version of the self. Abelló plays with other voices and looks for a certain doubling in her poetry. Vision and visuality are key elements to these searches and

¹⁴⁶ Her titled poem is “Retorn” (74-8). References to Abelló’s poems included in Al cor de les paraules will be noted first by page number and verse number where necessary.

¹⁴⁷ Titles are very limiting for Abelló and too many limitations to her poetry make Abelló feel “menys universal.” That is one reason for the lack of titles to her poetic texts (Nadal, “Montserrat” 47).

often focus on the lyric voice or others' eyes. Many times this vision finds what it pursues in mirrors both real and metaphorical. It is this aspect of her poetry that I examine in this chapter.

Abelló does not attempt to reveal a true self in essentialist terms, but rather a self that is truer and more subjectively authentic than the image seen in the mirror. It may be one of many selves or it may be the self that is "true" at that moment. This self and the manner in which it manifests itself differ from text to text. It may be reflected in a photograph, in another person, it may be an outwardly older self that covers and hides a younger, more vibrant, interior self, or the self may be fragmented into various component parts that search for a new whole. The various identity quests are effected both individually and collectively, challenging dominant cultural norms with regard to gender. The lyric voices are not always successful in their search, but they nevertheless attempt to break through heterosexist performativity of the self and gender(ed) definitions of selfhood.

The thematic divisions of the poems may seem arbitrary although that was not the intent. It is difficult to neatly separate and classify Abelló's poems because themes overlap and recur throughout her texts. She tends to lean "més a l'abstracció," but I have attempted to make the poems a bit more accessible by grouping them according to commonalities (Nadal, "Montserrat" 47). While composing this chapter, I also felt that the thematic divisions were more important than the class of mirror that was gazed into, since anything that gives an image of the self or a false self for that matter, or that is used to

“see” the self can be construed as a mirror.¹⁴⁸ However, it is imperative to keep in mind that Abelló uses both real and metaphorical mirrors in her poetic texts. At times the lyric voice will see the self reflected in another person, a vase of flowers, or a simple mirror that hangs on a wall. All classes of mirrors are used for the same ends: to attempt to view a different self, a self that is not tainted by cultural constraints and normative binary gender categories.

FACING THE SELF: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE REFLECTIONS IN THE MIRROR(ED) GAZE

In “*La nit*” (104), the lyric voice is in the dark of night unable to see with her/his eyes.¹⁴⁹ A series of objects are felt by the speaker as if s/he had lost the sense of sight. This is vital at the conclusion of the poem because s/he “sees” a photograph of her/himself by touching it, not “seeing” it in the conventional sense. The photo acts as a type of metaphorical mirror for the lyric voice, and “reflects” an undesirable image that causes her/him self-reproach.

The night, a time of rest and sleep, when one forgets about the goings-on of the day and possibly various preoccupations, is quite the opposite here. It is a time of restlessness that increases in intensity as the poem develops, which ultimately culminates in the lyric voice’s shame at “viewing” photographs of her/himself. The poem begins very

¹⁴⁸ See Sweeney (54) for her distinction between a mirror and a looking glass. Concerning Abelló’s texts here, the act of looking at the reflected self is more significant than the precise class of object utilized to view the reflection. This is not to discount Sweeney’s valid distinction, but for purposes of simplification, I will use the term “mirror” to refer to what Sweeney classifies as both mirrors and looking glasses.

¹⁴⁹ This poem is from Paraules no dites. It was published in 1981 with Vida diària under the title Vida diària/Paraules no dites with a prologue by Marta Pessarrodona. See page 379 of Al cor de les paraules for the prologue.

simply with a two-word verse: “La nit.” The succinctness and punctuation of the line make the statement matter-of-fact but leave questions about what will follow.¹⁵⁰ Instead of talking of the comfort of night, a pulled down, unslept-in bed confronts the lyric voice which indicates a possible battle with insomnia. The inability to sleep, for which an explanation is not offered, initiates the stream of memories. In fact, the speaker goes to the room apparently looking for solace but what s/he finds is anything but:

A la cambra recorro
amb dits tremolosos
aquells discs encesos
que ahir escoltàvem.
I els llibres que
amb afany llegies
i els diaris rebregats
de tant buscar-hi paraules,
entre línies atapeïdes,
fotografies de canons,
i d’insípides princeses...
I de mi, me’n dono vergonya! (ll. 6-17)

The objects that the lyric voice “sees” with trembling fingers all bring back memories: the records, books, and newspapers are elements of experiences/moments with an undetermined “you” (ll. 9, 11). Individual words combine to establish the tone of uneasiness that permeates the text: “dits tremolosos” (l. 7), “discs encesos” (l. 8), “amb afany” (l. 11), “els diaris rebregats” (l. 12), “entre línies atapeïdes” (l. 14), and “d’insípides princeses” (l. 16). Although why this uneasiness exists in the first place remains unknown.

Many shifts of subject and/or object occur in this short text: the night (l. 1), the bed (l. 2), I (l. 6), we and you (ll. 9-16). In the last line the poem shifts the focus back to the

¹⁵⁰ Abelló’s poems are generally short with short lines. Here the length of both the poem and the quoted verse mirrors the lyric voice’s restlessness.

lyric voice. After the series of relatively negative words and images, such as “squeezed words” and “insipid princesses”, the speaker mentions photos of her/himself. The ellipsis at the end of line sixteen cannot be overlooked. It seems as if the fingers have momentarily stopped outlining the objects in the room to concentrate on her/his photographs. The connection between the photos of the princesses and the speaker is rather ambiguous, but is most likely the fact that the princesses and the lyric voice are portrayed by the same visual media.¹⁵¹ If in fact the lyric voice has continued to “see” with her/his fingers, and there is no textual evidence to assume otherwise, it stands to reason that the photo is not “seen” in the conventional sense. In other words, vision is absent but visuality is everywhere.

The photos act as a type of metaphorical mirror for the lyric voice. Because they are not actually seen with the eyes but are either physically felt and/or mentally perceived by the speaker, it is the thoughts and images the photos evoke that cause the lyric voice shame. More specifically, they are the thoughts and impressions the lyric voice has of her/himself as s/he “views” her/his own image. In this case, the perceived image is not “only and always its own poor self” because cultural codes and experience(s) in those codes inform the subjective reading of the image in question (Siebers 1323).

This extreme nocturnal uneasiness that climaxes as shame has causes that are also textually ambiguous, although the reaction strikes one as gendered. This anxiety when faced with a photograph or photographs of the self is stereotypically a woman’s concern. When a woman views her specular image in a real mirror or otherwise, she forms a

¹⁵¹ Another possible reading is that the speaker is a woman who sees herself among the ranks of insipid princesses. While I do not discount this interpretation it does not fit my focus on (lack of) gender and identity.

personal judgment of others' judgment of her (Deppman 38). The "other" is informed by hegemonic and patriarchal culture. So women and their reflected images are minimized by men who believe themselves to be superior to them (Wolf, 35). Because women have an interior male surveyor, they see themselves as men and patriarchal society do (Berger 47). There is a stereotypical and normative femininity and masculinity to which Western culture holds people. One who deviates from that norm falls out of their prescribed gender role and into (possible) ridicule and/or ostracism. If they do not do their gender correctly, they suffer "punitive consequences" (Butler, "Performative" 394). In this case the damages are the lyric voice's shame upon viewing her/himself.

The stakes are higher for someone who is ungendered. The only gendered people mentioned in this poem are the princesses (l. 16). Even the "you" is genderless and the rest of the poem mentions inanimate objects. The lack of gender to the speaker in this poem is a manner in which the lyric voice can counteract the power relations inherent in gendered discourse: s/he does not have to perform or "be" a specific gender. Regardless of resisting normative and compulsory gender structures, the lyric voice has an adverse reaction to viewing the (ungendered) self as others (patriarchal culture) do. There is no place for the person who chooses not to define her/himself as a gender under the current binary system. The result of this choice is similar to that of women and men who do not fit their gender role and are not viewed as stereotypically female or male, feminine or masculine.

The photographic image(s) envisioned by the lyric voice are those that do not fit established cultural norms of gender, whatever that gender may be. The person who views them is imbued with the cultural norms that inform her/his (un)gendered self. The same

can be said of a cultural or sexual man or woman who breaks gender stereotypes. Anyone who transgresses accepted norms may feel disquiet when s/he realizes that s/he is viewed with disdain by others.

Nevertheless, an ungendered person is in a type of double bind: if s/he is gendered male or female, s/he masks her/his differently gendered self; if s/he is neither male nor female or any combination of the two, her/his difference is marked. Because of this difference from the established (forced? coerced?) cultural norm there is no place for her/him. The lyric voice in “*La nit*” feels uneasiness when her/his photos are “viewed” because of the pressure to participate in cultural gender norms. The resistance to this cultural compulsion to classify people into two categories has negative consequences for the lyric voice in this poetic text. There is no closure for her/him; the shame felt because of the photographs hangs at the end of the poem in much the same way as does the ellipsis in the penultimate verse.

In some cases, those who do not hold power cannot transform cultural codes because they do not make them (de Lauretis, *Alice* 35). This is true for the lyric voice here. Without recourse to a voice, the only option available to her/him is the shame felt when s/he views her/his image through the eyes of others.

“*La nit*” is one of few of Abelló’s mirror poems in which the lyric voice feels this desperation. The majority of her speakers in mirror texts do appear to transform cultural codes, at times on an individual basis, others at the collective level. This particular lyric voice has not reached positive conclusions about the self, but most of the poems discussed

in this chapter have lyric voices that do. In most cases, the very existence of an ungendered subject begins the transformation process, however small the transformation is perceived to be.

“*Vine i et diré*” (111) is a poem that does just that.¹⁵² In this example, the lyric voice directs her/himself directly to a “you.” The focus of this particular text is on the passage of time and how the doubled lyric voice confronts death that envelops her/him.¹⁵³ Instead of faltering because of the wind, the lyric voice is steadfast when the winds of death attack her/him. The pupils and eyes are a central part of this resistance:

Vine i et diré
com n'és, d'inutil,
voler vèncer el temps.
El vent m'ebolcalla
amb remolins de mort,
mes no vacil·lo pas. (ll. 1-6)

Here the lyric voice appears to be doubled. Although the poem provides no concrete evidence as to whom the lyric voice directs her/himself, the focus on the eyes and pupils indicates that the “I” and the “you” are mirror images. Death is something that we all have to face, but in this imminent threat the lyric voice finds strength in her/his double. With the focus on both the “I” and the “you” and the distance overcome by them in the battle against old age and death, the two versions of the self find union. The eyes are central to this union and serve as the vehicle through which the lyric voice comes to conclusions about the life that is still evident when s/he peers into her/his own eyes.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² From *El blat del temps* (1986). “*Vine i et diré*” is from the section titled “Tu.”

¹⁵³ Memory and death are “sovint traduïdes en el símbol del vent” in Abelló’s texts (Izquierdo 19-20).

¹⁵⁴ Eyes are a prevalent symbol in Abelló’s poetry. See “*Desembasto els anys*,” “*No hem parlat de res*,” “*Dins el mirall*,” and “*Estimo els teus ulls*” in this chapter. See also “*M’aixecaré del llit*” (85), “*Les paraules*” (95), “*M’he esbandit els ulls d’odi*” (137), “*No mitiga la puresa del capvespre*,” (142), “*Caminem*

The lyric voice's open eyes act as a metaphorical mirror for the "you"'s pupils. The "remolins" (l. 5) are the agent which incites them to movement that opposes their previous immobility: "Les teves pupil·les, fins ara / immòbils, tremolen / dins els meus ulls oberts," (ll. 7-9). Open eyes are those that perceive what happens around them without difficulty. Not only do they serve as the locus of knowledge and identity between the you and the I, but they also mirror the resolution of the lyric voice when death nears. They are not eyes that waiver when death approaches and surrounds the speaker, but eyes that remain wide open, eyes that know that death will not prevail. The lyric voice's eyes in fact appear to have experience with the passage of time and advancing death. Not only are they open, but they are "buits de sorpreses" (l. 10) which indicates that they have experienced much up to this point.

The lyric voice's eyes are also not surprised when the "you"'s eyes speak and the moment of understanding between the "I" and the "you" arrives:

petites guspieres des
dels teus ulls en diuen
que ja no hi ha res
d'estrany entre tu i jo;
que cap camí no ens és vedat. (ll. 11-15)

As with many of Abelló's texts, many ambiguities exist here. One possible reading of this particular poem is that the lyric voice is speaking to another person, one that has been distant and alien to the speaker for some time; one that finally has come to the realization that nothing can be done in the face of time and death other than acceptance. On the other

a l'atzar" (145), "*M'he despullat del tot*" (167), "*No-res*" (178), "*Enllà de l'inconscient*" (180), "*Ulls foscos que miren*" (196), "*Voler dormir, no sentir,*" (218), "*No em puc desprendre*" (222), "*Numeren les pàgines*" (224), "*Com ric mireu*" (263), "*Aquest teu aire suau*" (267), "*Invoco cels clars i oberts*" (269), "*Es com si sol tingués*" (287), "*Sovint diem*" (320), "*Em veig embalsamada*" (334), "*Saber que ja no hi ha ulls*" (335), and "*He vist en el fons*" (345).

hand, it is quite feasible that this is a lyric apostrophe in which the lyric voice directs her/himself to her/his self in another form, the portion that houses self doubt and fear manifested in the trembling pupils (l. 8). So although this poem does not mention mirrors per se, nor does it offer an extra-corporeal object that stands in as a metaphorical mirror (see "*La nit*") the eyes function as a looking glass. The open eyes of the speaker reflect the pupils of the "you" as well as see the other version of the self in much the same way as when one looks at her/his reflection in a "real" mirror.

The lyric voice in the form of the "I" and "you" never explicitly mentions gender and this omission is quite telling. In much the same way that Aurora Luque universalized experience by omitting the gender of the lyric voice, the experience of facing time and death is something that all humans will go through regardless of gender. For Abelló questions of gender omission are very simple, because they indicate universal experience. By not mentioning the gender of the lyric voice or the "you" in this poem, Abelló is simultaneously universalizing and particularizing the experience. It is universal in that anyone can live this circumstance, but individual as well because there is room for infinite difference in such a non-specified experience. Whether the lyric voice is gendered a man, woman, neither, or any combination of the two is inconsequential in the face of time and impending death. However, the differences do not stop at gender since race, nation, socio-economic status, religion, are all superfluous to the main questions of the text: the acceptance of time, death's approach and the process of self-knowledge.

In a normatively gendered economy of vision, women should be seen and not observe (Sweeney 65). They are the visual object, subjected to the patriarchal gaze. When a woman looks back she resists the power structure inherent in the gaze and gender-based

visuality. When there is no apparent gender, this further resists power structures. A person who is not gendered male or female is not (culturally) recognized and does not figure into the equation of social seeing. Consequently, both being seen and observing places the ungendered speaker out of the role s/he has in gendered visuality which is basically none. The ungendered lyric voice takes a non-existent role (as observer and observed) and carves a role for her/himself. S/he does not do what men do (observe) nor what women do (be observed) but rather defies both prescribed gender roles through participation in two activities traditionally denied the differently gendered.

The resistance to prescribed activity(ies) under normatively gendered practices of vision is focused on the speaker's eyes. Unlike women who look into mirrors, the union with the self in this poem is based in the eyes, not the face itself which is normally the case (LaBelle 106). The metaphorical mirror between the speaker and the "you" solidifies union and identity with the self. "Mirrors, textual or otherwise, simultaneously grant temporary identity and 'dispossess' us, break us into incomprehensible fragments" (Kochhar-Lindgren, "Obsessive" 220).

What takes place in this poem is not temporary identity, but permanent identity with a stronger speaker capable of continuing her/his journey despite surrounding death. The lyric voice does not view the entire body but focuses on both her/his eyes and those of her/his other. Rather than fragmentation that renders identity incomprehensible, it is the fragments (or fragment) that permit union with the other. The union between the two selves is based on their fragmentation, not on the desire of one to be like the complete other. In Lacan's mirror stage the one who regards her/his reflection in the mirror

recognizes the specular image as other and strives to be that cultural ideal. Here, the other, or metaphorical specular image, is viewed as an equal. They join and together face what lies ahead.

What is important for the discussion of the lack of normative gender is the idea that no avenue is closed off to the lyric voice and her/his other. The lyric voice resists culturally compulsive gender practices of looking and self-definition more positively than the speaker of “*La nit*.” One’s gender, or how one chooses to label and view oneself, is of little importance when faced with certain issues like time and death. Because the lyric voice stands up to death and unites with one of her/his others through the fragmented body, the result is strength and the sensation that nothing can stop the unified self. This self has broken down conventions of gender and unnamed prohibitions, to enable the experience to have a far-reaching effect.

Another poem in which Lacan’s mirror stage is questioned is “*Desembasto els anys*” (266).¹⁵⁵ The lyric voice struggles for identity and self-knowledge upon examination of her/his reflection in the mirror and the perception of her/his own skin as a metaphorical garment. It appears that the speaker needs to take apart the skin to reveal hidden elements of the self. Sewing vocabulary is used in the first three lines to emphasize the idea of the skin as a garment and s/he removes the base stitches to reach the substance beneath: “*Desembasto els anys / que damunt del cos / s’han tornat cuirassa.*”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ From *Són màscares que m’emprovo* (1995).

¹⁵⁶ Both needlework and mirrors have long been thought fundamental elements of the feminine. I do not agree that they are exclusively feminine or essential to womanhood. Including them in a text with an ungendered speaker positions them as another dimension of the questioning of the normative gender binary.

Textually however, it is not the stitching of the skin that s/he removes, but rather that of the years s/he has lived. It is these that have become tough and callous and that conceal the livelier self, the self that encases the blood which courses through her/his veins. Because time has accumulated on the skin, in effect, s/he wears them like clothing and it is both skin and years that fuse to become her/his armor. This is not protective armor, but armor that prohibits self-knowledge and appreciation; armor that is a culturally constructed idea of self. As Trinh Mihn-na states “when armours and defense mechanisms are removed, when new awareness of life is brought into previously deadened areas of the body,” opportunities for different experiences arise (259).¹⁵⁷ Here, the lyric subject takes her/his battered, toughened body and reaches out for assistance in self-discovery. This assistance comes about by looking at her/himself in the mirror.

According to Jenijoy La Belle, mirrors often replace society for affirmation of the existence of the person using them (19). Viewing oneself in the mirror is not only a way to confirm the person’s existence, but also to “gain insight into the reciprocal interchange between interiority and exteriority” (LaBelle 9). In this poem, the lyric voice is faced with an image that gives her/him no satisfaction. It is this dissatisfaction that serves as the impetus for delving further into the search for an image to mitigate the uneasiness. The assuagement is not automatic though, as the speaker must come to another unpleasant realization before s/he can get to her/his concealed self.

Upon observing the reflection, the lyric voice is only capable of seeing the skin that now, is not only hardened by the passage of time, but has also faded with the years:

¹⁵⁷ This quote refers to women and how they can experience life differently, but I feel the same holds true for any marginalized individual or group that has a new-found consciousness of the self.

Em miro al mirall
i no veig altra cosa
que aquesta pell

que se m'adhereix
com un guant destenyit
que he dut massa temps (ll 4-9)

S/he returns to the idea of the skin as clothing or a class of garment established in the first verse, likening it to a glove. This is not just any glove, but one that s/he has worn. The image is in sharp contrast to what thoughts of an old leather glove evoke. An old glove is usually something that invokes feelings of comfort and coziness, not uneasiness and repulsion. But not only has s/he worn the years/skin/glove, but s/he has worn them for too long (l. 9). Here the lyric voice is desperate to rid her/himself of this element that encumbers self-awareness.¹⁵⁸

As s/he views her/his reflection in the mirror, s/he acknowledges that s/he is looking at “aquesta pell” (l. 6), not “my skin”.¹⁵⁹ However, this impersonality when faced with the reflection and skin underscores the distance between the speaker and the specular body. S/he perceives this skin/glove as something that does not belong to her/him and, on one hand, the distance and impersonality serve as an alienating factor. Although s/he can “see” the skin in the mirror, s/he feels it is not a part of the searched for self. On the other hand, this estrangement in turn leads the lyric voice to further self-examination.

Regarding mirrors and the culturally constructed reflections they offer the viewer, women do not often challenge the power of the glass. They often accept their reflected

¹⁵⁸ See “*M’he despullat del tot*” (167) in which the lyric voice casts aside clothing and jewels, material possessions stereotypically associated with women, to reach an identity not constructed by cultural idea(l)s of femaleness.

¹⁵⁹ In Catalan, the demonstrative adjectives “aquest” and its forms can mean “this/these” or “that/those.” No clear marker is given to distinguish its meaning here.

image no matter how distorted it may be, without realizing that what they see is not them, or that it might be a false image (LaBelle 60). Given that patriarchal culture defines “true” womanliness and womanhood, which in many cases is false, as well as other manifestations of difference from the masculine norm, it is logical that an ungendered voice would have a similarly negative reaction to her/his specular image. The rejection of the reflected self is a challenge to the “truth” of the mirror. What you see is not what you get. Therefore, the lyric voice looks elsewhere for a self that is truer to her/his own perception(s) of selfhood whatever that (those) may be.

The accumulated years, hardened skin, and glove impede this perception. The lyric voice concludes that those elements are false renditions that have been reiterated over time and that s/he lies somewhere beneath them. When the speaker looks in the mirror s/he confronts cultural perceptions of the self as manifested in the armor-like skin/glove. In fact, the very agency in the act of self-observation questions these notions and consequently upsets the balance of power. Removing the base stitching that holds these notions together and in place on the body fosters this imbalance. What the speaker does in effect is further deconstruct cultural notions of the self by reversing what was put in place: s/he undoes and unsews a false part of the self in order to arrive at a more subjective and individual authenticity.

Vision and visuality, as a manner of knowing not just seeing, are important in this poem. When the lyric voice looks at her/his reflection, the idea of multiplicity of self is not difficult to ascertain. S/he sees the body encased in the hard years that have accumulated on the skin as one, albeit false, manifestation of the self, but s/he also sees the eyes as another. These are the eyes of the person looking into the mirror, but also those

of the reflection, the other self, which gaze at the lyric voice from the inside. The speaker here becomes conscious of her/his agency and what Nicholas Mirzoeff calls “visual subjectivity”: the knowledge that one is seen and sees oneself being seen (“Subject” 10). S/he sees her/his reflection looking back at her/him and consequently is able to peer through the hardened-through-the-years skin and view a truer self as well as her/his life force: the blood that courses through her/his veins: “Però em queden el ulls i sé / que dins d’aquest cos / encara m’hi corre ben roja la sang” (ll. 10-12).

The speaker therefore uses a part of the body to aid in self-discovery and identity formation: the eyes. It is necessary to undo and look through the toughened skin to see the blood that is constantly in motion, in order to know that s/he has not fallen victim to the accumulation of societal and cultural demands. What the lyric voice sees is her/his reflection. S/he also “sees” that her/his initial understanding of the specular image is tainted by how others view her/him. Once s/he gets past the rough skin/glove exterior available to those who look at her/him and “sees” the blood, s/he can confirm that the inner self has not hardened like the surface of the skin/glove.

In this poem the fragmentation of the body is into only two parts: blood and eyes, universal and active corporeal components, in theory, shared by all genders. In employing an active element of the body to know the self, the lyric voice further deconstructs the established cultural norm. In order to see oneself as different from the ideal, one must look beyond the foundations of societal and cultural definitions and perceptions. The false subject and the ideal, reflected image are determined by cultural factors; an authentic self is constructed by the person who recognizes the falsity and masquerade in the mirror.

Again, according to LaBelle, women construct themselves inside the mirror, men outside of it (21). Women tend to take the reflection as their “true” self and men construct their identity(ies) independent of the image that they see in the mirror. In this example, the speaker appears to do both. The lyric voice recognizes the specular image not as the ideal self, but rather as a “fake real” and non-ideal self (Sturken 366). Instead of striving to become that “fake real” ideal, which is both present in the mirror as reflection and outside the mirror as others’ demands on the subject (object), the lyric voice decides to separate her/himself from that image. What takes place is the reverse of Lacan’s misrecognition (*méconnaissance*). The lyric voice recognizes the specular image as the false one and reverts to the self to find a unique identity independent of that which is culturally constrained.

Lacan’s mirror stage is exclusionary in that it does not account for any difference other than sex/gender. That foundational binary is what is questioned here (Moore, Henrietta 89). The speaker’s lack of gender and search for self oppose the very nature of the mirror stage allowing her/him to use both others’ opinions out of the mirror and the reflection in it to reach conclusions about the self.

What the speaker in this poem sees is in fact not Lacan’s ideal “I” but rather a non-ideal “I” reflected back. For this reason s/he needs to distance her/himself from the false reflection. What s/he views in the mirror, in fact, is not an image that encourages and establishes union with others, but one that serves as an instrument of repulsion. It propels her/him away from this social and cultural self, demanding that s/he look elsewhere for her/his identity. This undesirable specular image demands that the lyric voice look to the self and not to others to draw and find conclusions about the self s/he desires to find. This

agency allows the lyric voice to cast aside others' interpretations. S/he chooses to identify with an interior self, not an outwardly cultural idea or ideal of what s/he should be, using vision to bring the identification to fruition.

In this voyage, the lyric voice rejects the self that others see, but not the self s/he sees per se. Not only does the speaker undo the skin/glove, but this garment is also years lived. Disassembling it consequently rejects old age. This is not an attempt to be young, but rather to find that pulsing life continues behind the accumulated years (Woodward 80).¹⁶⁰ The lyric voice also does not reject the mirror since that, along with the eye, is the vehicle through which s/he achieves the self-discovery. The need for unrestrained selfhood manifests itself in the ability to deconstruct years of expectations, disappointments, experiences, and life to unveil so to speak, an authentic identity of the lyric voice.

Another poem in which the eyes and the look are central to the genderless speaker is "*No hem parlat de res*" (295).¹⁶¹ The "I" and the "you" look at each other and the non-verbal communication between them emulates the type of looking that takes place when one looks at her/himself in a mirror:

No hem parlat de res,
ens hem assegut mirant-nos.

La primavera era
un espai somort
vora un estiu

¹⁶⁰ Abelló was in her early seventies when *Són màscares que m'emprovo* was published in 1995.

¹⁶¹ From *Dins l'esfera del temps* (1998). "*No hem parlat de res*" is from the section titled "Vora l'illa roja."

que tot just començava.

No hem parlat de res.

La maduresa
dels nostres esguards
era ben plena
de paraules.

Spring time is a metaphor for the beginning, when things are fresh, but this spring is a moribund space. It dies to make room for the budding summer, the time when spring plants mature, which is mirrored in the gazes of the “we” (ll. 8-9).¹⁶² Because of the maturity of the gazes of the lyric voice and the “you,” they say everything necessary without saying a word. This is most likely because of the close relationship between the “tu” and the “jo.”

Like all of Abelló’s poems discussed here, there is an obvious absence of gender references to the speaker and in this example, the person that s/he views (the reflection as object?). When the lyric voice views the other, there is no recognition of either the superiority or inferiority of the speaker her/himself to the other. If the speaker were gendered female, or a gender that did not fit the compulsory and normative male/female binary, the lyric voice would recognize the other as the (cultural) ideal and her/himself as a copy that fell short of that ideal. Similarly to “*Vine i et diré*” the speaker and the other are on equal footing in this poem. No ideal needs to be met and no relationship of inequality exists between the lyric voice and the “you.”

¹⁶² See “*Agost, estiu*” pages 194-196 in this chapter for a discussion of the summer as a calming, pleasing, and fulfilling season for the lyric voice.

No body fragmentation is present here, so this text is a bit distinct from Lacan's mirror stage in that the person viewing the other (the reflection as a copy of the self) is not moving from recognition of the self as a fragmented being to recognition of a whole, intact body. The focus in this poem is instead on language. The lack of exchanged words and language is one of the poem's prominent elements. Although the infant in the mirror stage does not directly enter into language (the symbolic) after viewing his reflection (gender intended), it is a subsequent step in his formation. Here two people completely forego the use of verbal communication and choose to communicate everything through the gaze in a mirror-like unification.

When men enter language, which is the law, the Name of the Father, they "possess" the phallus and the power implied by that law. When women enter language they "are" the phallus and thus pose the threat of castration to those (men) who "possess" the phallus. Since gender is based on the false natural state of the male/female binary, the phallus is an imaginary idea as well because the mirror stage is based on that binary and the supposed male superiority over the female.¹⁶³ "The mirror-stage is precisely the primary identification, presocial and determined "dans une ligne de fiction," along a line of fiction (imaginary, specular) which precipitates the secondary (social and dialectical) identifications" (Butler, Bodies 260 n6). A gender that does not fit in the (false) binary, or the lack of gender, is not subjected to the laws of the binary. Not only does an ungendered person not have a place, but s/he may choose not to subject (or subjectify) her/himself to a system that discounts her/him. Since the lyric voice and the "you" look at each other, they both have subjectivity. If a person does not look back when being observed, it facilitates

¹⁶³ With use of the term "imaginary" I refer to something that is false, not Lacan's Imaginary.

the viewer's ability to objectify the person viewed (Starr 13). The equality on which the viewing relationship is based here negates the objectivation that is inherent in the gaze and the mirror.

This is an ultimate act of resistance and rebellion to a system with only two places at the table. There is no discourse which the "we" of the poem desires or in which they can participate. The alternative is to use the gaze as a substitute means of communication to an oppressive and repressive binary system of communication between culturally defined and accepted men and women.

"*Vine, et vull veure*" (300) is a text in which the ungendered lyric voice again directs her/himself to a duplicitous "you."¹⁶⁴ S/he requests that the "you" stand before her/him as if viewing a reflection in the mirror. Evident here is the conflict between one version of the self as authentic and the double, or cultural self, as inauthentic. In the lyric voice's opinion, the more legitimate version of the self prevails when faced with cultural pressures to perform an ungendered selfhood:

Vine, et vull veure
davant meu.
No com pretenies
sinó tal com ets.

Ja res no desfarà
aquesta imatge perfeta,
que ha de quedat clavada
en mi. (ll. 1-8)

¹⁶⁴ From Dins l'esfera del temps (1998). "*Vine, et vull veure*" is from the section titled "Vora l'illa roja."

The lyric voice requests the “you” to appear as s/he is, not how s/he attempted to be. Pretending indicates that the “you” strove to be something that s/he was not, a “fake real” and simulation of the more authentic manifestation of the self (Sturken 366). The real version is an “imatge perfecta” (l. 6), one so perfect that it cannot be undone. When the lyric voice views this other as a specular image, it does not anchor her/him in the “false” reflection, the way the “you” endeavored to display her/himself (LaBelle 19). S/he deciphers the false version to view the perfect image of the “you” as s/he is. In other Abelló poems with mirror imagery, many times it is the lyric voice’s body or others’ bodies, that are undone.¹⁶⁵ But not only is the image enduring, it is “clavada” in the lyric voice (l. 7).

In the third stanza, the “you” and the lyric voice appear to switch roles. Now the “you” is the one who wanted the speaker to change and be someone or something that s/he was not. The reflection, the other, desired that the lyric voice become more like her/him, to be what s/he tried to be, the cultural ideal that the lyric voice ultimately rejects. The lyric voice, therefore, has not fallen into the trap of striving to be the ideal in the mirror; s/he realized a long time ago that s/he did not want to be what the “you” wanted of her/him. In fact, s/he does not have the faintest recollection of what that was:

I d’allò que tant
volies que fos,
ja no me’n queda ni
el més lleu record. (ll. 9-12)

¹⁶⁵ See “*Dins el mirall*,” pages 186-191; “*Són hores decisives*,” pages 196-199; “*Estimo els teus ulls*,” pages 199-205 in this chapter and “*Jo no sóc jo, sóc l’altre*” (302).

The lyric voice changes the manner in which s/he speaks to her/his double, the mirror-like image. In the first four lines of the poem, the conversation focuses on the “you” and what the lyric voice wants the “you” to do. It continues with the almost nostalgic memory of the perfect image of the “you,” the one that the lyric voice desires to see. So the “you” is subjected to the speaker’s gaze not only for her/his viewing pleasure, but also to fulfill the speaker’s desires: to recuperate “aquesta imatge perfecta” (l. 6) that the speaker has “clavada / en mi” (ll. 7-8).

Although the desires of both appear to be similar, the one who does the desiring shifts. The “you” wanted the “I” to be a certain way, a way of which the speaker now has no recollection. For the brief moment that the focus moves from the lyric voice and her/his desires to those of the “you” (ll. 9-10) the mirror stage is turned up-side down. The specular image not only visually demonstrates what the false ideal subject looks like, but it ventures to actively impose its will on the lyric voice. It is not the lyric voice who looks at the mirror image with an inclination to be like what s/he views.

The “you” originally attempted to be something that s/he was not, to strive to be a person or a certain type of person, which is culturally imposed. This person was to perform who they were, and not be how they are. This is in no way to insinuate that there is a true way to be but, in the lyric voice’s opinion, there is a truer way to be. That way of being casts aside cultural expectations of the self in order to be who one is free of those influences. The result is a type of pre-mirror stage person, when one does not know what the cultural expectations for the self are. This metaphorical specular viewing allows the lyric voice “to see social conventions,” examine and question them, and determine whether or not to adopt them (Kochhar-Lindgren, “Obsessive” 219).

The mirror supposedly tells truths but the “truth” of the specular image is not shared by the lyric voice. Much like the magic mirror in Snow White, the reflected image enters into dialogue with the person looking. The one on the inside of the mirror, so to speak, demands that the one on the outside be like her/him: the cultural ideal. The one on the outside demands that the reflection be like s/he is: the rejection of the cultural ideal to be a more unconcealed version of the self. The lyric voice is perspicacious; s/he realizes that mirrors metaphorical or real, offer a “fragment of a perspective and thus speak partial truth (Deppman 47). Both parties in the poem feel that the other should be more like them: the reflection wants the performed cultural ideal, the lyric voice wants the stripped down, pre-cultural representation.

Cultural and gender performance are present as evidenced by the desires of both the speaker and the reflection. The other not only desired the lyric voice to be something distinct from what s/he was, but also attempted to be something/someone else as well. This is not quite the same type of performance as Butler puts forth because no punishment exists, per se, for choosing to be one way or another (“Performative” 394). No one version is privileged over another, although both the speaker and the “you” feel that their manner of being, through performance or otherwise, is the ideal way to be.

The lack of gender in the poem makes it easier to be a person that does not adhere to a cultural ideal and performance of the self. It is not so much the idea of having punitive damages to pay if one does one’s gender incorrectly (Butler, Gender 178), but rather having the freedom to decide not to perform in such a way. No gender signifies the

freedom of the viewing subject from the power of cultural domination. If the lyric voice's gender is absent, the normative binary that dictates and controls gender(ed) discourse and behavior is no longer a limiting and punitive factor.

Even though the "you" greatly desired the lyric voice to be something that s/he was not, or at least not willing to be, the speaker has the wherewithal to resist falling into the performance trap. S/he does not give up her/his self to attain any cultural ideal, s/he is what s/he wants to be. In fact, the cultural ideal to which the "you" wishes the lyric voice adhere is so insignificant, it is nothing but a dim memory for the speaker. The cultural influence may be negligible due to the distance with which the lyric voice remembers the "you"'s desire for her/him to perform the self, but its insignificance is not to the degree that the lyric voice does not wish the opposite for the "you." Because s/he has already rejected the cultural performance it is inconsequential for her/his own self, but not for the reflection. It is as if the lyric voice wants the person and the reflection to be the same as s/he is: a true reflection of the person who looks in the mirror.

The last stanza of the poem shifts the focus again, this time back to the lyric voice and her/his desires. S/he comments on the sweetness of the perfect image from line six, an image that is more certain than the previous one who used to reluctantly be beside the lyric voice in the form of the other:

I ara se'm fa més dolça
la certesa
que aquell altre tenir-te
a prop a contracor. (ll. 13-16)

The “altre tenir-te” (l. 15) is the “you” that pretended to be someone s/he was not. The sweet certainty is the “imatge perfecta” (l. 6), the “you” “tal com ets” (l. 4) without the hindrance of cultural expectations. In the end the non-cultural self triumphs. The lyric voice and the “imatge perfecta” are post-cultural entities. The lyric voice is content to be whomever s/he is without subjecting her/himself to cultural prescriptions and proscriptions. There is no need to perform the self when one is comfortable with the “real” self in the first place. This lyric voice has come to the realization that the self and its other are more perfect without cultural performance and persuades her/his other that that is the case.

The poems discussed in this section focus on the ungendered individual’s conflict between the self as a cultural ideal and a version of selfhood that refuses to conform to that ideal. The lyric voices discern clear lines between the culturally constructed, undesired self and its opposite, while experiencing certain autonomy and agency in the decision not to reconcile restrictions inherent in the compulsory gendered binary. However, some of the lyric voices in other poems focus on collective desire(s) in front of the mirror while they simultaneously grapple with the enclosed and confining space of the mirror itself or the room that houses the mirror.

THE CONFINING MIRROR: COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL STRUGGLE

Different from the previous five poems analyzed, “*Dins el mirall*” (169) begins with a lyric voice who looks in the mirror, and comments on what is inside it.¹⁶⁶ This is a poem

¹⁶⁶ From Foc a les mans (1990). “*Dins el mirall*” is in the section titled “Foc a les mans.”

about aging, but similar to “*Vine i et diré*” the eyes have life; they are the center of the speaker’s vitality while other elements of the self wither and age as time passes. Key concepts such as sparks radiating from the speaker’s eyes parallel others of Abelló’s poems.¹⁶⁷ Others, like hiding the lyric voice’s uneasiness and shadows were not evident in the poems previously discussed.¹⁶⁸ Although the lyric voice is faced with an apparently blurred and bitter body with little room for renovation and rejuvenation, what is viewed in the mirror is not a detriment to living life at its fullest regardless of the unsettling images and the walls that imprison her/him.

The first stanza is one of quiet desperation as the lyric voice views her/himself in the mirror:

Dins el mirall,
vagues, incertes ombres
desdibuixen el cos
en fugaços oblits.
No hi ha res que anunciï
cap nova deu. Ni tampoc madurem
com la fruita ni el blat.
Verds i durs serem
dallats pel temps. (ll. 1-9)

Instead of viewing the body per se, vague and uncertain shadows are what meet the lyric voice’s eyes when s/he peers into the mirror. In fact, these nondescript shadows actually hide and blur the body (l. 3). The disintegration is so complete that no possibility for

¹⁶⁷ Sparks are a common symbol in Abelló’s poetry. They demonstrate resilience, resistance, and the desire to live. See “*Vine i et diré*,” pages 168-172 in this chapter; “*Jo no sóc jo, sóc l’altre*” (302); “*Em veig embalsamada*” (334). The last two page numbers refer to *Al cor de les paraules*.

¹⁶⁸ See “*Són hores decisives*,” pages 196-199 in this chapter.

renovation and new beginnings remains (ll. 5-6). The violent imagery escalates with the comparison of the “we” to fruit and wheat that will never mature like those plants have, but rather will be cut down by time.

Although this poem appears to be about the aging process, it is not necessarily limited to this topic. It is about anyone who has had to struggle for their existence based on difference from the norm: gender, race, nation, sexuality, etc. The fact that the lyric voice views a blurred body indicates that the person who looks in the mirror sees themselves the way that others do. A nebulous being is one that is difficult to pinpoint and categorize within certain cultural parameters. Consequently, when the collective “we” looks in the mirror, they cannot see the contours of their bodies because they are so blurred and virtually invisible. If society cannot see them, for whatever reason based on whatever perceived “difference” from the norm, they will not be able to see themselves.

Not only are the bodies in the mirror imprecise, they are young in many ways. They are unripened fruits and wheat reaped before their time, before they have the opportunity to live and experience what mature plants do. They are, in effect, killed by time because they do not have sufficient occasion to reform a system to which they are subjected.

The negative imagery continues and it seems as if the collective “we” were subjected to a system of domination. Domination is a structure in which there is no freedom because someone or something has total control over someone or something. Restriction and normalization dictate no possibility of positive aspects about the

system.¹⁶⁹ There is basically no way out of the domination of one group over another because it is static. The only way in which reversal of systems of domination can take place is “through revolution or collective resistance” (McLaren 65-6). This collective resistance begins in line ten. Instead of being “absorbed in the ‘they,’” those that control and dominate how one views oneself, the lyric voice and the collective “we” are cognizant of the “despised seeming” that takes place when they view their blurred bodies in the mirror (Silverman, World 24, 14).

Here, the perspective of viewer and viewed also changes. In the first stanza, the lyric voice looked at her/his reflection considering it part of a collective that shared the same basic experience.¹⁷⁰ Both the walls look at the collective and the collective looks at itself, seeing remnants of bodies that were once more beautiful:

Pàgina sobre pàgina, les veus.
Les parets blanques ens miren.
Contemplem cossos nus,
rèpliques amargues
d’altres cossos més bells. (ll. 10-14)

The collective is enclosed in a room with white (blank?) walls (a symbol of what they did not accomplish due to their premature cutting?), framed and enclosed in much the same way that their image is framed and enclosed in the mirror. When the collective looks at itself it sees bodies, naked bodies that are not just remnants of other, more beautiful bodies, but “rèpliques amargues” (l. 13) of what their bodies used to be. These are the

¹⁶⁹ A system of power is one that yields positive results because with systems of power there is “always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions” (Foucault, “Subject” 427).

¹⁷⁰ This is not an essentialist experience, rather a shared experience of separation and not belonging. Nothing indicates that everyone is the same, or that some underlying essence universalizes the “we” in this poem. The text will have various interpretations depending on who reads it and these dissimilarities give “resistance to the concept of universality” (McDougall 228).

younger versions or the pre-cultural bodies that were fragmented, unified, and unaware of the coercion to adhere to a restrictive cultural ideal. Some resentment occurs when the lyric voice compares the current bodies with the previous ones. These ill feelings aid in the group's resistance to domination.

The last three lines of the poem return to the unsettled and unnerving tone established at the beginning. After the lyric voice and the collective "we" view and assess their bodies and situations, two things are left: uneasiness and the eyes: "Queda el neguit sota / l'aixella i el guspireig / viu d'uns ulls" (ll. 15-17). The interesting element here is that the uneasiness that permeates the poem is hidden beneath the armpit much the same way in which the unmentioned clothing hides the old, naked, replicas of once more pulchritudinous bodies.

The nakedness of the bodies is important because it is a way to express power versus the lack of power. The clothed are powerful, the naked powerless (Menon 1810).¹⁷¹ A naked body in the context of this poem, though, represents a person who resists prescriptions and codes versus one who does not. Removing clothing gives the ungendered speaker and the "we" the means to manifest their difference(s) from the norm. Because they resist a system of domination collectively, they are able tip the scales of power in their favor. Where they were previously vague, uncertain, and blurred (ll. 2-3) they are now discernible.

This should give the group freedom from the culturally defined and essentially obscured version viewed in the mirror. Nevertheless, what occurs is not bodies freed from

¹⁷¹ This idea refers to visual arts such as painting and mainly to nudes of women. The power relationship is many-fold: the artist and the model, the representation of the naked (female) body and the (male) spectators of the work (Menon 1810). However, the comparison also applies when clothing is a metaphor for cultural imposition(s) and a mask for those who may not desire to be a part of normative conventions.

restricted visibility, but bodies that return to culturally defined and confined bodies, bodies trapped in a new class of clothing: the older uglier version of the self. These bodies are ensnared in cultural expectations of what a body should be in much the same fashion as “les parets blanques” (l. 11) enclose the lyric voice and the “we.”

The eyes are also left but are not complicit in the rejection of the body. Despite the immaturity of the fruit and wheat and the collective being cut down by time, the eyes survive. The bodies are so battered and abused so to speak, the only thing left alive is the spark that radiates from the eyes: “i el guspireig / viu d’uns ulls” (ll. 16-17). They are a class of “nova deu” (l. 6) suggesting that all is not lost.

“*Som miralls deserts*” (229) is another poem in which the gender of the lyric voice is not apparent and also in which the speaker forms part of a collective.¹⁷² This time not as a group that necessarily looks at themselves, but rather a group that looks out from inside the mirror, at the hands of the alluded to but never mentioned, person who looks at her/his reflection in the mirror.

The “we” that is inside the mirror finds themselves in an aquatic space of deep, still waters that enclose them.¹⁷³ They are deserted and forgotten until they see hands slide across the top of the water/mirror¹⁷⁴:

Som miralls deserts,
nascuts d’aigües fondes,
quietes, closes.
Les mans hi llisquen per damunt.

¹⁷² From *L’arrel de l’aigua* (1995). “*Som miralls deserts*” is from the section titled “Dins el mirall.”

¹⁷³ See also “*M’es necessari l’ordre*” (87) and “*M’e esbandit els ulls d’odi*” (137). Water in these texts is not deep but does possess mirror-like characteristics in its transparency.

¹⁷⁴ This image is reminiscent of Narcissus who looked at his reflection in a pool. See pages 202-205 in this chapter for a discussion of the Narcissus myth in Abelló’s poetry.

S'hi emmirallen alçades,
plegades, obertes; conqués
de rius oblidats per on
s'escola la sang.

Mans multiplicades amb la suor
de molts dies vençuts. (ll. 1-10)

Both the mirror and the hands are personified as the ungendered “we” inside the mirror as well as the ungendered hands outside.¹⁷⁵ The hands look at themselves in the mirror, but in fact, it is the mirror that views the hands while they view their reflection. Looking at themselves is not the only action highlighted; they also rise up, fold, open, and spill blood (ll. 5-8). This contrasts with the relative inaction of the we/mirror whose only option is to remain motionless in the water, look at the hands, and reflect them.¹⁷⁶ Not only are the hands active and free compared to the enclosed “we,” they are the vehicle through which blood is emptied:

S'hi emmirallen alçades,
plegades, obertes; conqués
de rius oblidats per on
s'escola la sang. (ll. 5-8)

The hands multiply because they are reflected, so a minimum of four hands are present: the two “real” hands and the two that are “inside” the mirror as specular image. Not only do they multiply when reflected but they metaphorically multiply because of their many days of toil (ll. 9-10) which implies constant struggle. This may be a confrontation with age as in “*Desembasto els anys*” and “*Dins el mirall*” or it could be the

¹⁷⁵ By “ungendered hands” I refer to whom they belong, not the grammatical gender of the word “mans” which is feminine.

¹⁷⁶ Water is often used by women writers as a type of sanctuary and they display “a sense of trust” toward it (Ostriker 109). Here, water is quiet and deep, but it is not a complete sanctuary since it is the medium through which there is distance and mystery. See “*Com si un tauró m'arranqués una mà*” pages 124-125 in Chapter Three.

battle against cultural coercion. Again, the lack of gender to the speaker and hands, or any other marker of social definition and/or identification for that matter (race, sexuality, nation, etc.), simultaneously makes the experience universal and individual.

Countless people can relate to having conquered many and difficult days even though nothing indicates what type of struggle has taken place in the life of the hands, nor that of the *we/water/mirror*. The hands spill life, the “we” is doomed to cope with their stationary nature and seemingly forced inactivity and to watch. It is only apparent that the hands have overcome many days (l. 10). The hands are merely a small fragment of the whole body, yet they are the only objects the *we/mirror* sees. The *we/mirror* speaks of the hands in the third person as if they/it were the eyewitnesses to the hands’ folding and opening, an objective and distant observer. This idea is corroborated by the opening lines of the poem but appears to be contradicted in the last three: “I no gosem penetrar-hi per por / de trencar no sé quins misteris / ignots d’espill” (ll. 11-13).

The only specific “place” mentioned in the poem is the mirror so if the “we” is the mirror, it stands to reason that the “hi” of “penetrar-hi” (l. 11) is the extra-mirror space. Again, the relationship between interiority and exteriority permeates the text. Inside the mirror, the “we” may be enclosed and deserted, but they are safe from “la suor / de molts dies vençuts” (ll. 9-10) and the battle(s) those days imply. The interior space saves the “we” from subjection to and objectification by the exterior space. It allows them to maintain the “misteris / ignots d’espill” (ll. 12-13), whatever they may be.

When one looks at her/his reflection in water, the slightest disturbance not only disrupts the surface but distorts or destroys the reflected image (Kochhar-Lindgren, “Obsessive” 220). In this poem, it is the mirror that desires not to destroy itself and what it

contains, not the observer who does not want to muddle the reflection. The specific struggles that the “we” do not want to face are left to individual readings of the text, but the lack of gender and other ambiguities throughout the poem open interpretive possibilities that simultaneously universalize and individualize the experience of the lyric voice.

In “*Agost, estiu*” (235) the lyric voice is once again not the object reflected in the mirror, but the ungendered first person speaker is in an enclosed space that becomes further enclosed and limited by the mirror:

Agost, estiu,
esplendorós i càlid
colors que sobten els ulls.

I en aquesta
cambra closa, ja sense
enyor submergida

en l'esguard
que es perd mirall enllà,
en el llom de tants llibres. (ll. 1-9)¹⁷⁷

A tone of quiet desperation or perhaps resignation infuses the poem with no nostalgia in the look, nor in the room. In fact, the enclosed room is submerged in the gaze of the lyric voice and her/his gaze is lost in the mirror (ll. 6-8). The look that loses itself in the mirror is in turn submerged in the reflection of the room instead of the specular image of the self. It is lost in “el llom de tants llibres” (l. 9) creating a complete circle: the room

¹⁷⁷ From *L'arrel de l'aigua* (1995). “*Agost, estiu*” is from the section titled “Dins el mirall.”

is submerged in the look, the look is submerged in the mirror that reflects the book bindings which are a part of the room. The lyric voice has no escape from this enclosed space and no joy in what s/he views.

The mirror here is “an oppressive apparatus” that physically traps the lyric voice in it and the room (Deppman 36). Because the relationship between the lyric voice, the room, and the mirror is cyclical it could conceivably repeat itself many times over. This effectively ensnares the lyric voice in an inescapable maelstrom. Although it does not objectify the lyric voice by observing her/him, the room is similar to the white walls in “*Dins el mirall*” because it does restrict the speaker in much the same way. This enclosure and containment describes the ungendered status of the lyric voice. This is not necessarily a poem about gender performance, but it is about being trapped in a system from which one desires escape. The lyric voice looks in the mirror in order to view her/his likeness, something other than the room, but what is reflected back at her/him is exactly what s/he attempted to elude in the first place.

Estival praise continues the general cyclical characteristic of the poem; it opens and closes in the same fashion:

en qué el color verd
d’una sola fulla
de gerani que mou el vent

càlid i quiet d’estiu
m’omple de tendresa,
de plenitud.(ll 13-18)

Green, geraniums, wind, and summer all fill the lyric voice in a way that the room and its reflection cannot. Where s/he appears to feel emptiness manifested in the lack of longing when s/he looks at the room, s/he is replete with tenderness and plenitude when s/he looks at plant life. The exact location of the geranium is unknown, but it contrasts so greatly with the enclosed room, it is most likely outdoors. If it is not outside, it is close enough to a balcony or window for the wind to rustle a leaf of the plant.¹⁷⁸

This is not a text about how others may see the lyric voice and how their viewing defines the individual, but rather how a subject can be isolated and prohibited from seeing her/himself. The proximity to the outside world, of which the plant forms a part, represents escape for someone who feels trapped. It is the hope that life is more than seclusion (enclosure) and invisibility in the mirror and fills the lyric voice with sensations not proportioned by the specular image.

THE REFLECTED BODY: SPECULAR FORMULATIONS OF THE SELF

“*Són hores decisives*” (230) is a short poem in which the ungendered speaker talks of looking at her/his naked body in front of the mirror.¹⁷⁹ Again there is a collective of which the speaker is a part, making the experience of viewing the naked body(ies) more universal, although as in other poems, the “we”’s identity is ambiguous. Here time, the mirror, the body, and darkness are all important images, playing off one another to give the sensation that the collective is defenseless against the passage of time:

¹⁷⁸ Abelló’s study is a relatively narrow room lined with bookshelves. It has a balcony filled with potted, flowering plants.

¹⁷⁹ From L’arrel de l’aigua (1995). “*Són hores decisives*” is from the section titled “Dins el mirall.”

Són hores decisives
aquestes en què ens volem
nus del tot davant del mirall.
Hores en què cal preguntar-nos
on va la nostra innocència.

Ens sotgen les tenebres.
Les paraules s'esfondren
entre cossos desfets.

An aspect differentiating this poem from others, such as “*Dins el mirall*” and “*Som miralls deserts*,” is the agency that the collective has. They may be “hores decisives,” (l. 1) but the people are the ones who decide that they want to see their naked bodies in front of the mirror. It is noteworthy that they are to be “nus del tot” (l. 3) which not only refers to their clothing, but to any cultural “garments” that they may be wearing. By this I mean cultural definitions and/or restrictions that may have been placed on them or to which they have been subjected such as normative gender practices. This can refer to any number of “groups” that are defined by patriarchal culture as outside the norm. Discarding their clothing and what it connotes places all members of the group into ostensible equality and apparent universality or shared subjectification.

Even though they are all naked, nothing in the poem suggests that everyone is equal when they are undressed, presumably freed from cultural constraints. It appears that there is universality in that all are to disrobe before the mirror and look at their nakedness, but nothing indicates that they are the same or have the same experience in front of the mirror. Normally the mirror will “misrepresent the experience of the body” but in this text, the collective does not necessarily recognize the naked, specular image as one

divested from the cultural and gendered ideal of self (Cousineau 55). The “we” asks where their innocence went, but nothing in the text offers an explanation as to why or how they lost it. The poem comes full circle in the last three lines where the shadows attack everyone. The other commonality is the fact that all of their bodies are “desfets” (l. 8) which demonstrates that although the experiences may not have been the same, the end result is. They are broken, undone bodies that cannot withstand more. “The medium of reflection *does* have enormous power, the power of the world [culture, men, others] to determine self” (LaBelle 40, original emphasis). The image of the undone bodies is so powerful that words get lost between them; they are not strong enough to overcome the likeness in the mirror.

Gender, or lack thereof, plays an important role in this poem because of the fact that the people in the collective decided to discard cultural definitions and burdens. This is not necessarily an exercise exclusively for women or men, although there is nothing to qualify their inclusion or exclusion one way or another. The possibility exists that those who denude themselves in front of the mirror are a combination of genders and/or sexes. The universal aspect of this decision to rid the self of all restraints, clothing and otherwise, provides a deceptively liberating experience from cultural constraints with little or no regard for conspicuous differences when the real and cultural clothing are donned.

It is a deceptively liberating experience because in their freedom from the cultural and patriarchal they are pursued by shadows.¹⁸⁰ Because they have had to fight against

¹⁸⁰ Shadows are generally a symbol of otherness and death in Abelló’s poetry. See “*El temps acumula*” (127) and “*Ombres confonen el meu viure*” (146). See also “*Dins el mirall esgot*” (236) where shadows are a false copy of the self. Shadows are also mentioned as a copy/reflection of the self in “*Marxaré per*” (92).

their subjectivation, their bodies are “desfets” (l. 8); they are left without much wherewithal. In fact, they were so outwitted by the cultural performance that they lived for so long that they were not even aware that their innocence had escaped them. Unfortunately, it is now too late. Their innocence is gone as well as their bodies and there is nothing left to do except allow the shadows to overtake them.

This cultural performance is punitive because the collective is left empty-handed. The act of disrobing is comparable to removing a class of mask or cultural costume imbued with cultural meaning(s) not acceptable to the collective. We do not choose gender like clothing (Butler, *Bodies* x), so I do not mean that gender, racial, national, or any other type of performativity is theatrical or as simple as the act of removing clothing.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, what happens in this poem is the “we” eventually arrive at a moment in time, the “hores decisives” (l. 1), in which they recognize the performance as such. To begin to redefine themselves, they cast aside their prior citation(s) of gendered existence to uncover the self behind the masquerade. What they find underneath is broken bodies and darkness waiting for them. Revealing the performance for what it is affords the lyric voice and her/his collective no rewards.

In the poem “*Estimo els teus ulls*” (306), the reader is presented with the fragmentation of a body that the ungendered speaker loves and esteems in all of its component parts and pluralities.¹⁸² It is unclear at the beginning of the poem however, to whom the speaker is directing her/himself as well as whose body is fragmented. The body

For clothing as a mask/masquerade that symbolizes false adherence to cultural definitions imposed on the self, see “*Comença temps ha*” (119).

¹⁸¹ This is one of Butler’s criticisms of interpretations of her work (*Bodies* x).

¹⁸² From *Dins l’esfera del temps* (1998). “*Estimo els teus ulls*” is from the section titled “*Vora l’illa roja*.”

parts mentioned, eyes, hands, mouth, hair, and lips, all belong to a non-specific “you.”

This “you” is reflected in a vase of daffodils on the table that ultimately aids the lyric voice in the quest for a new sense of self:

Estimo els teus ulls,
les teves mans, la teva boca,
els teus cabells, els teus
llavis molsuts y càlids.

Els narcisos grocs
dins el gerro blau
allargat damunt la taula,
em miren erts i gentils,
elegants, indiferents a
la passió desbordada
del meu viure.

A l'insistent reclam
de la meva mà que escriu.

The lyric voice uses the vase of daffodils as a metaphorical mirror and sees her/himself embodied in the flowers. From their place on the table the personified flowers view the speaker in a way that s/he cannot, consequently reflecting a new and revised manifestation of her/him. The flowers are stiff and polite, elegant and indifferent to the passion of the speaker's life (ll. 8-11). Their ability to see is an important element to the lyric voice's comprehension of the self and therefore an active agent in the creation of the speaker's renewed subjectivity.

This is a poem of self-discovery, of struggle to find a unique identity that ultimately comes through in the creative process of writing. The lyric voice effects this voyage through the fragmentation of the body as mirrored in the vase of daffodils. S/he is aware of her/his body in two ways: how others perceive it and how s/he sees her/himself. This new-found body consciousness aids in establishing difference from the norm and

reestablishes a voice taken from the speaker due to cultural restraints to which s/he may be subjected. In order to undertake this self-discovery, it is necessary to dismantle that which hinders the process; in this case the body as an entity, the outer shell subjected to cultural ideas of the self. The lyric voice names specific corporeal components and “comes into being” (Butler, Bodies 241). This does not mean that s/he is looking for an essence behind the mask so much as s/he searches for a manifestation of self and individual experience independent of that which culture dictates. The lyric voice recognizes the mask as just that and the fragmentation in effect undoes expectations and appearances of the self when viewed as a monolithic external whole. In fact, the mask cannot cover all of the self underneath because it is divided (McDougall 228).

The lyric voice uses the multiplicity in the body to find a unique identity. Through this discovery, s/he is ultimately able to love her/himself as a free being defined on new terms that are independent of culturally constraining definitions. The body fragmentation therefore deconstructs a compulsory performance of the self and how others view that body. The speaker performs a falsehood that demands eradication which is achieved through a new consciousness of the body and therefore a revised subjectivity. This is evidenced by the first line of the poem “Estimo els teus ulls.” The love and/or value the speaker feels for the self is purposefully articulated which indicates the fresh attitude of the lyric voice toward the self.

However novel this new self may be, the lyric voice cannot come to this self-love or value entirely on her/his own; it is not as simple as merely fragmenting the body and

reconstructing a new self from old parts. The self-discovery, of which the fragmentation and examination of the body are only a part, culminates in a revision of the Narcissus myth.

After fragmenting her/his body, the lyric voice calls upon her/his others, symbolized by the vase of daffodils, to help deconstruct the views s/he holds of her/himself. What is “reflected” in the flowers is quite different from the image of the self that is projected to the rest of those who view the body. The daffodils as metaphorical mirror reflect the revised and fragmented version of the speaker which allows the writing to continue at the end of the poem.

The flowers are essential to the speaker’s sense of self because the fragmented body is manifested in them. The daffodils are reminiscent of the Narcissus myth, the young man in love with his own reflection who later turns into the flower named after him. The number of daffodils is not specified, but one can imagine a number that corresponds to each fragmented body part. The individual flowers in the vase make up the arrangement as a whole in much the same way that the fragmented body comes together to form the whole body of the speaker. Both the flowers and the lyric voice enjoy an identity that is at the same time individual and collective. Each flower is its own being while simultaneously forming part of the floral arrangement. Each body component views itself anew as an individual part as well as an important factor to the construction of a new whole.

In order to contemplate the poetic subject, the flowers as the speaker’s reflection must have eyes, metaphorical as they may be. The sight afforded these eyes is active and in fact, they are the agent in the self-discovery of the poetic voice. Without reflecting and

viewing the speaker, s/he would have no sense of self as different from the cultural mask normally displayed. Instead of objectifying the speaker which is what happens when those with power over (an)other view her/him, the daffodils “see” and reflect the lyric voice as s/he is, not the way s/he may be culturally defined. The flowers, the reflection of the speaker’s more authentic self are indifferent to the passionate life that others oblige her/him to lead (ll. 9-10). They are able to see through the mask to reflect an image that is neither a unified body nor a cultural and patriarchal ideal.

The parallel with the Narcissus myth has already been drawn, but there are great differences between the myth itself and how Abelló treats it. At first glance it seems as if this were a mere inversion of the myth; there is a subject who contemplates her/his reflection with what appears to be an attitude of self-adulation. Also the use of daffodils is an obvious reference to the myth in question. But Abelló does not simply copy the myth. She does use a story with a male protagonist, consequently challenging Narcissus’s central place, but she radically changes the outcome of the tale, tailoring it to the needs of the new self that the ungendered poetic voice ultimately finds.

The reflection that the speaker views does not incapacitate her/him like the reflection that Narcissus sees. Although it does appear that the lyric voice has fallen victim to self-admiration at the beginning of the poem, as the deictic “you” becomes clearer one can see the love and value felt for the body. Its reflection in the daffodils is what empowers the speaker to write. The poetic voice does adore her/himself, in much the same way that Narcissus does, but through the body fragmentation and the consequent dismantling of a previously performed identity, this supposed love affair with the false self is a positive force. Part of the journey to self discovery is being able to love the self

behind the performance. Whereas the love and intrigue of the reflection in the original myth is a source of frustration for, and ultimately death of Narcissus, the reflection in the revised and ungendered myth is a positive force that not only permits the speaker to live, but also to acquire knowledge of the self (Kochhar-Lindgren, "Obsessive 216).

The capacitating love the speaker has found for her/himself also enables her/him to value the image s/he receives from her/his reflection and appreciate that which gives her/him power to write.¹⁸³ Instead of dying in desperation before the formerly culturally constructed self, the self and selves now have a legitimate existence in the fragmented body as reflected by the indifferent daffodils. Because they are impartial to gender and the culturally constructed self, the speaker is able to write. S/he receives a textual voice and subjectivity as a direct result of the "reflection." The speaker is not judged by the daffodils but rather is seen simply the way s/he desires to be seen both by her/himself and others.

If one envisions a daffodil the flower is turned downward, as was Narcissus's face when he looked at his reflection in the pool. The flowers in the revised and non-gendered myth are not bending, but are stiff in an outstretched vase (ll. 7-8) in order to return the gaze of the person regarding them. Although they are indifferent to the passion in the poetic voice's life, they are intent on making this an accessible reflection, much unlike that in the Narcissus myth. It is a source of strength and life, as manifested in the writing process, not an unattainable being as in the case of Narcissus. In this revision of the myth, there is a celebration of the self-discovery effected by the speaker in writing. Unlike

¹⁸³ Words are essential to Abelló. The ability to speak, the lack of that ability, and silence are recurring themes. See "*Volava l'alosa dins el mati*" (60-61), "*Al meu voltant només silenci*" (65), "*Vora mar*" (73), "*M'aixecaré del lliç*" (85), "*Les paraules*" (95), "*Avui les paraules*" (112), "*Visc i torno*" (130), "*És com si en la nit*" (134), "*Sense voler escolto*" (149), "*Paisatge mort duem dins*" (175), "*Al caire de la nit*" (215), "*De sobte m'he sentit*" (225), "*Et parlaré amb*" (249), "*Som nosaltres*" (252), "*Parlen les dones*" (285), "*Vagarejo per un món*" (314), "*Es fonen els breus silencis*" (331), "*De sobte en mi tot crema*" (337).

Narcissus, the speaker here is able to fuse with the reflected image and consequently the new identity, as manifested in the daffodils. It is through this union that s/he effects change in her/his perception of self and consequently writes about it.

SUMMARY

The use of an ungendered lyric voice shatters the traditional and stereotypical association between women and mirrors. None of the lyric voices use the mirror to talk about beauty or their vanity, and this complicates a possibly clear correlation between the gender of the various lyric voices and that of the poet. What Abelló does with the mirrors in her poems is write an ungendered subject that sometimes reflects a radically universal but particular subject position or experience. It is radical because it is based on the speakers and poetic personae being non-gendered selves.

Women aren't subjects in Lacan's symbolic, according to Luce Irigaray, because they are subjected to the name of the father and patriarchal law. They are also subjected to the laws of patriarchal language where men hold power and women are subjected to that power. Because of their lack of subjectivity, women also have no reflection in the mirror (Irigaray uses the term "speculum") "[e]xcept those which man has reflected there" ("Theory" 120). That is to say the cultural ideal of woman, femininity, womanliness, etc.

The same may be said for ungendered subjects (objects?) with a slight variation. Although woman's place may be one of subordination, she has a place; an ungendered or ambiguously gendered person has no place in the Lacanian structure even if it is one of the subordinate to the dominant as women are to men. Lacan's imaginary and symbolic operate on the idea of normative heterosexuality: the notion that there are only two sexes

and genders. In order to have subjectivity then, an ungendered person must choose a gender and suffer the subsequent subjection to the same laws and codes in much the same way as women. Therefore, they can also reject patriarchal and heterosexist law in much the same way women do. Through recognition of the falsity of the specular image, an ungendered speaker forges a place not defined by the law of the father.

The various poetic selves in Abelló's texts that are masked, confined, and/or fragmented desire a version of the self free from the constraints of gender performance and cultural limitations. To do this they face the mirror; sometimes from the outside as well as inside it. The mirrors that they use are not always pieces of glass with quicksilver backing, but range from photographs, to other poetic personae, to a floral arrangement. Although the majority of the lyric voices in the poems discussed in this chapter are successful in their quest for a truer, freer, more authentic self, not all arrive at similar conclusions. The difficulty that some of the speakers face demonstrates that although there may be a great desire to express agency in order to arrive at new subject positions, the effort is occasionally thwarted by cultural forces more powerful than the individual (or collective) in question. Unlike the majority of Luque's lyric voices who view unpleasant cultural images, Abelló's focus on the self and how s/he is seen by the self and external others. Her approach to the question of gender(ed) identity further broadens the work of the three poets already examined.

CONCLUSION

The genesis of this dissertation was one of similarity: all of the authors studied are women who have spent the majority of their lives in Spain and use vision as an important element in their poetry. While this may seem like an essentialist approach to the analysis of their work, the similarities end there. Not only does each author have her own story and a perspective that differs from that of her contemporaries, each writes with a unique style. The differences between the four poets are quite amazing when one considers that they all lived during the Franco regime and subsequent democracy. Montserrat Abelló is the only one of the four who experienced the Second Republic. Although she was very young at the time, the government of the 1930s provided quite a stark contrast to life under Franco by offering greater personal freedom amidst a period of enormous change. All four also witnessed the transition to democracy that took place with Franco's death in 1975 even though at very different stages and ages of life and in different cultural atmospheres.

Although all are biological women, essentialism cannot and should not be the basis for discussing their similarities. However, some basis for unity must exist for a group to come together, and as I stated above, it is first their status as biologically and gender defined women and second, their general interest in the use of vision and visuality in their poetic texts. Nevertheless, even with two Spanish-language poets and two Catalan-language poets, it is virtually impossible to classify Ana Rossetti and Aurora Luque in one

group and Maria-Mercè Marçal and Montserrat Abelló in another. Despite the shared language of poetic production, their respective uses of vision and visuality and where they lead are quite distinct from one another.

Rossetti uses vision and her way of seeing the world poetically to mock established norms. Whether Catholic rites or established norms of gender performance, no topic is sacred. Overall, her poetry is light-hearted and often disguises everyday occurrences with strong sexual undertones. Those who look in her poetry are generally ambiguously gendered lyric voices that look at women, men, and ambiguously gendered persons as well as objects. The looking is scopophilic or pleasurable, or scopophobic or unpleasurable and centers on voyeurism and exhibitionism. In many cases, hers is still a gendered world, but it is turned upside down. Rossetti's poems about vision take established cultural norms of the male observer and the female observed and reverse them. Her challenge of this normative behavior is a necessary step to their erasure although not all of the texts analyzed here have that result. Normative heterosexuality is often upheld because the man/woman binary still exists in many of Rossetti's poetic texts, albeit in reverse order. Some poems, such as "A un traje de pana verde que por ahí anda perturbando a los muchachos" and "Homenaje a Lindsey Kemp y a su tocado de plumas amarillas," do in fact explicitly challenge established gender norms and ideas of gender performance with regard to practices of looking. Although Rossetti does not have definitive answers to questions of gender and gender roles and many times maintains the established man/woman gender binary, her texts are important because they question traditional looking relationships with regard to gender.

Maria-Mercè Marçal approaches visuality in a different way than Rossetti in that she strongly questions the hegemonic male gaze and women's place in that gaze and by extension, other marginalized and differently gendered people's place. Marçal had the personal experience of living in a region of Spain with a minority language, being a woman, and defining herself as a lesbian. This makes it possible for Marçal's texts to reach beyond her situation to that of other marginalized people. The topics included in the poems, such as negative feelings toward child birth and motherhood, stem from her experience, which ostensibly distinguishes her poetic texts from Rossetti's. The fact that she writes about women's position in society and sometimes about people who, in the words of Monique Wittig, "are not women" (32), vehemently challenges the gaze under which her poetic personae exist. Both she and Rossetti challenge ways of looking although they go about it in very different ways. Marçal and Rossetti both turn the phallogocentric use of vision on its head. The main difference in Marçal's texts is that it is women who often look at other women, therefore taking the focus of looking away from the traditional man/woman, observer/observed dichotomies. Marçal's texts challenge cultural ideas about what it means to be a woman which in turn dismantle established ideas of the masculine and the feminine and their place. Because of that, her ideas on gender leave room for others who do not fit the established cultural gender(ed) norm.

Aurora Luque challenges the power of the male gaze by questioning established cultural gender norms in much the same way that Marçal does. She appears to be more theoretically advanced in her method(s) of questioning the phallogocentric gaze as well as the heterosexual matrix than does Rossetti in the majority of her poems. Luque's poems talk of potentially universal experiences because of the lack of gender of her lyric voices. I

say potentially universal because not all people will have the same experience(s) but the fact that gender is in effect absent (except in the viewed images as in “De la publicidad” and “Justicia poética” and the female lyric voice in “Transitoria”) opens the door for a more unbiased and shared life experience. What happens in Luque’s poetic texts discussed here is not reserved solely for the participation of men and/or women. Luque also shows her relative youth in her texts. She is the youngest in this group of poets and the inclusion of comparatively high tech cultural images and visual aids such as cinema, television, and billboards demonstrates the importance of visual culture in her texts. It is quite high tech compared to the eyes and mirrors used by the others. (Although Rossetti takes inspiration from a huge billboard in Times Square, she does not mention cultural icons or other visual technology.) The ungendered nature of her poems coupled with visuality question the power structures that uphold mainstream, gendered practices of looking. An ungendered lyric voice is able to express a selfhood that does not fit the heterosexual matrix and reject definitions of “normal” relationships within the heterosexual matrix.

While the three poets mentioned above turn their vision and visuality outward, Montserrat Abelló’s poetry is more introspective in that her lyric voices often look at their reflection in “real” or metaphorical mirrors. Her lyric voices in these poems also do not have a gendered voice, which again questions the patriarchy and the phallogocentrism under which they are asked to view and define themselves. They search for an identity free of the gender(ed) restraints set by the man/woman binary and phallogocentric looking. Abelló distances her lyric voices from a “true” identity, but they do look for a self that is more authentic according to the terms defined by them. An attempt is made to view the self freed from binary gender(ed) categories. In Abelló’s poetry, she

gives voice and subjectivity to the ungendered who are otherwise overlooked and disregarded by a normatively gendered system of looking and self-identification.

The poets included here are also a small sample of what is being written in poetry by women who live in the geo-political unit Spain. Rossetti, Marçal, Luque, and Abelló are most definitely not the only ones who employ vision and visuality as a means to identity. It also appears that Spanish poetry by women is taking a turn to the genderless. While some texts only scratch the surface of questions of gender(ed) identity and normative gender(ed) practice as in the case of Rossetti, others focus almost exclusively on the same questions as evidenced in Abelló's texts. Despite the quantity of ungendered lyric voices, gendered voices also exist in their works. It cannot be said that the four poets are exclusively poets of non-gendered experience or ungendered voices. What can be said however, is that the majority of their texts with a gendered or ungendered speaker firmly question and challenge gender-based cultural norms. This is as true when questioning a woman's "place" in the world as when the speaker has no readily defined gender assigned to them and searches for a truer version of the self, freed from cultural parameters.

What Ana Rossetti, Maria-Mercè Marçal, Aurora Luque, and Montserrat Abelló do is give questions of vision and visuality and normative gender(ed) identity(ies) a prominent place in their poetry. Albeit on distinct levels through different approaches, they show that a genderless lyric subject is not only a device that their male counterparts utilize in their poetry. The ungendered lyric voices in these four women poets broaden human experience and textually permit these experiences to be had by all, not just the culturally assumed male universal subject. Although alignment with the feminist movement or a feminist agenda is not something that all four share (Rossetti and Luque

refuse to define themselves as feminists while Marçal and Abelló do not), their very status as women and poets permits them a subjectivated view of the world. This gendered marginalization enables them to textually explore a world in which gender can and should be inconsequential and a concept of the past. None of the four poets offer a real and practical solution to the questions of and problems with normative gender(ed) discourse, performative behavior, and identity. However, their poetic texts that deal with how gender colors and conditions the way we look and at whom we look, help to bring these questions to the foreground. They have paved the way for others to follow and further develop these ideas.

Finally, I hope that this dissertation has opened the door for more inclusive studies on Spanish literature in general. In an ideal world, many different types of poets would be included in anthologies and there would not be the great need for those that seem to exclude poets deemed “other,” however that is defined. This has also not been an effort to Castilianize the Catalan-language poets or to Catalanize the Spanish-language poets, nor an effort to colonize any community be it linguistic, gender based or otherwise. Although the poets themselves, as well as this analysis, pose questions about looking, gender(s) and identity(ies), many of those remain unanswered. This topic is still in relatively uncharted waters and it is left to future scholars to broaden this analysis and provide future questions and answers. As Michel Foucault stated: “[t]o be the same is really boring” (“Sex” 166). This dissertation has been a humble attempt to utilize underlying similarity(ies) to ultimately embrace difference(s).

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