Kentucky Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship

Volume 1 | Issue 1 Article 2

May 2017

"Tú hablas ahora:" Viequense Female Archetype and Agency in the Works of Carmelo Rodríguez Torres

Emma T. Comery
Centre College, emma.comery@centre.edu

"Tú Hablas Ahora:" Viequense Female Archetype and Agency in the Works of Carmelo Rodríguez Torres

Emma T. Comery
Centre College

Daniel Arbino, PhD
Centre College

Abstract: *Author Carmelo Rodríguez Torres incorporates many of his experiences with the U.S. naval occupation of Vieques, Puerto Rico into his novels and short stories. Few scholars have written on Torres, and even fewer have discussed him in terms of womanhood and feminism. Yet central to many of his works are figures of womanhood that are at once archetypal and progressive. In my paper I investigate Torres' treatment of his female characters in all his novels and two of his short stories. I place his presentation of women within the context of the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico and its feminist history, arguing that he uses his female characters to respond to the oppressive occupation of Vieques. While he fragments and objectifies women, he simultaneously elevates them to the level of deities, presenting them as agents of resistance and change who undermine a doubly patriarchal society.*

The United States, Puerto Rico, and Torres

Present-day Puerto Rico said goodbye to its independence the minute Christopher Columbus stepped on the island in 1493. Named by the Spanish for its prolific production of highly valuable commodities such as sugar cane, coffee, and tobacco, Puerto Rico remained an overseas province of Spain for the next four hundred years (Smithsonian.com, 2007). The potential profit margin provided by the island "led to the importation of slaves from Africa. As a result, Puerto Rican bloodlines and culture evolved through a mixing of the Spanish, African, and indigenous . . . races" (Smithsonian.com, 2007). Under the Treaty of Paris of 1898, control of the island was ceded to the United States, who gained unrestricted control of Puerto Rican politics and civil rights, and made substantial industrialization efforts (Azize-Vargas, 1994, p. 626). Once reliant on its sugar crop, Puerto Rico's economy became rooted in fishing, manufacturing, and tourism.

At the onset of World War II, the United States saw another use for Puerto Rico. In 1941, the U.S. Navy arrived and built a naval base on the island. As Baruffi (2002) details, the Navy "began forcibly expropriating land from the native inhabitants. The private properties of locals were seized on the grounds of eminent domain and they were compensated minimally for their losses" (p. 4). Countless Viequenses were forced from their homes, sent to the sugar cane fields, and left to piece together shelters from the scraps of their homes (Nemcik, 2000).

Furthermore, with the arrival of the Marines came the arrival of a new masculine force to the island of Vieques. In her book Military Power and Popular Protest, McCaffrey (2002) says the Marines were often "drinking, carousing, and harassing women, [and] created significant conflict. Underlying this tension was the threat that the navy would usurp the entire island and evict the civilian population" (p. 43). Soldiers verbally and physically abused locals, chasing them in the streets, urinating on their truck beds, and raiding their homes in search of women they deemed "señoritas" or "margaritas." As one Viequense woman states in Nemcik's (2000) documentary Vieques. . . un largometraje, this name calling was "a way of implying that all women there were prostitutes" (Nemcik, 2000). Moreover, the naval patrol of Viequense waters restricted fishing access in the name of U.S. commercial and military expansion, all but destroying the island's economy. This treatment and appropriation continued for 135 years, crippling the island and forcing young people to emigrate in order to find jobs and a chance at prosperity (Nemcik, 2000).

Authoritative, foreign, and trained for battle, the Marines were a far cry from the fishermen who comprised the male population of Vieques. The social effects of this introduction of a new masculine force to the island included sleeping with (whether through force, consensus, or monetary exchange) and impregnating many of the Viequense women. Thus it was not exclusively the Viequense men who were fathering the next generation of Viequenses, but the Marines as well, and possibly more often. The men of Vieques were figuratively pushed into impotence, a recurring motif in the work of Carmelo Rodríguez Torres, as I will detail. Due to the sexual involvement of the Marines, there was no longer a biological need for Viequense men. The Marines were, in essence, sexually replacing them by rendering them reproductively useless, and executing not only a military take-over of the island, but a masculine one, as well.

As mentioned earlier, U.S. control stripped Viequenses of not only their livelihood, but their civil rights as well. With heavily supervised and restricted sexual education, women were grossly uninformed of their sexuality and their sexual rights. In some cases, the government conducted experiments on Puerto Rican women; in other cases it persuaded them to undergo sterilization without first properly informing them of the consequences (Lopez, 2008, p. 91). Not only were some women sleeping with United States Marines but many also lost their ability to reproduce – whether by choice or not – completely. I point to the United States' sterilization of women because this program effectively took away the ability of men to be biologically productive. Through military and medical interference, the United States completely displaces the Viequense man, and his emasculation – his figurative impotence – is linked directly to its invasion and influence.

Among the Viequenses affected by the naval occupation was author Carmelo Rodríguez Torres, who uses his short stories and novels to preserve the realities of Viequense life before and during U.S. occupation.

Born in 1941 Torres never knew a Vieques unmolested by the United States. After receiving his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Hispanic Literature from the University of Puerto Rico, he obtained his Doctorate in Hispanic Literature from the University of Madrid (Tolentino, 1980, p. 11-12). 1971 saw the publication of his first novel Veinte siglos después del homicidio, and five years later he produced a collection of short stories entitled Cinco cuentos negros. Thus began a life-long career of writing that revolved around the impact of the U.S. occupation on Vieques, the problem of emasculation, and the subsequent Viequense responses.

Torres's fictionalized telling of Vieques both prior to Marine occupation and during becomes a universe of its own, flowing from one novel to the next and engulfing nearly every short story. Characters from one novel make appearances in another, and archetypes and allusions are the foundation Torres builds his characters and communities upon. Because of Torres' fragmented style, few studies exist on Vieques's most prolific writer. Those that do often consider it through the lens of race, as is the case in Eleuterio Santiago Diaz's Escritura afropuertorriqueña y modernidad (2007). In La mujer negra en la literatura puertorriqueña (1999), Maria Esther Ramos Rosado analyzes the role of the AfroPuerto Rican woman, but her study is limited to the intersection of race and gender in Torres's collection of short stories Cinco cuentos negros (1976). My article differs in that I am examining Torres's entire corpus as well as his characterization of Viequense women of all races. Herein I argue that Carmelo Rodríguez Torres's characterization of women, in which he fragments and objectifies them, deifies them, and ultimately presents them as agents of change, allows him to respond to hegemonic patriarchal discourse on Vieques. Through these processes that paradoxically seem to reinforce a pigmentocracy grounded in masculinity and economic wealth dating back to before the Marines' arrival, Torres undermines a doubly paternalistic society (the U.S. Marines and Viequense men) by repeatedly presenting archetypal women as catalysts of resistance and transformation.[1] Therefore, I will examine the emancipatory possibilities of his characterizations as well as their limits.

In his novels and stories, Torres often relies on a male writer-narrator to reflect the anxieties caused by the threat of emasculation. His writer-narrators convey their struggle to write through choppy, disjointed narration and inconsistent points of view that underscore how they suffer from a crippling creative impotence. This creative impotence parallels the social and sexual impotence experienced by the men of Vieques. In some cases – like in that of the writer-narrator in Torres' novel La casa y la llama fiera (1982) – the writer-narrator even suffers from figurative creative impotence and literal sexual impotence. His own infecundity forces the writer-narrator to seek it somewhere else: in women. Indeed, the disabling

1 For the scope of this article, I will focus on the feminine archetypes of Torres' created universe and how they reflect the reality of Vieques. It should be noted that archetypes are the central trope of Torres's universe as he uses them to flesh out and complicate nearly all his characters throughout his novels and stories. The use of archetype is not exclusive to men. Specifically, Torres employs an Adam archetype in the short story "Fuencarral" (1976).

apprehension that both Torres and his writer-narrators experience from the changes brought about by the arrival of the Marines manifests itself not only in a preoccupation with male impotence, but in obsessions with figures of extreme feminine fecundity, such as prostitutes and overly sexual women.[2] In looking at women through the lens of sexuality, however, he neglects to acknowledge their less physical attributes, and the result is a brand of feminine objectification that ultimately passes the torch of power and agency to the very women it objectifies.

Pre-Marine Patriarchy

As he shows in his short story "La única cara del espejo," from his collection Cinco cuentos negros, Torres' particular brand of objectification has two sub-categories: fragmentation and deification. For my purposes, fragmentation refers specifically to the breaking down of the female body into smaller parts, and deification refers to the way in which Torres and his narrators associate female characters with female deities of western mythology or religion. In "La única cara del espejo," the narrator pursues a woman named Falena but spends more time looking at her reflection in the mirror than at her actual face. Feminist writer Theodora Hermes explains the significance of the mirror in Reflections in Contemporary Feminist Literature (2012):

> In many texts, a female character's gaze into the glass is attributed entirely to vanity or: the extreme pre-occupation with her physical self. Rather than acknowledging any deeper parts of her subjectivity, the mirror's sole purpose is to aid a woman in validating her own physical beauty . . . mirrors in both culture and literature have long been associated with restrictive conceptions of female identity (p. 1).

The use of the mirror as a means of conveying a woman's character is an age-old trope that Torres relies upon to limit Falena to a pre-conceptualized version of womanhood where vanity and the external are the primary feminine concerns. The fact that a masculine narrator gazes at Falena through a mirror suggests even more overt emphasis on her 'physical self.' He spends more time describing her physical appearance than he does her personality, and it becomes clear that what he most wants from her is a sexual relationship. He achieves his goal, and the two sleep together.

Throughout the story, the writer-narrator repeatedly denies Falena her individuality, relegating her to the role as a symbol for black womanhood. He claims that, "su voz reproducía la presencia de todas las negras" [her voice reproduced the presence of all the black women], as if through only her words she has the power to conjure up an entire demographic of black

2 Torres juxtaposes Viequense male impotence after the arrival of the Marines with extreme virility prior. See the following short stories in Cinco cuentos negros (1976) as examples of male fecundity: "Fuencarral," "La única cara del espejo" and "Predela: Milagro de la estatuilla profanada."

female Puerto Ricans (Torres, 1976a, p.72). By treating her thus, Torres dehumanizes Falena by deeming her a symbol of a demographic rather than a living, breathing member of it. The writer-narrator acknowledges how his own objectifying perception and portrayal of Falena limits her when he describes her as a "mujer detenida como un espejo" [woman detained like a mirror] (Torres, 1976a, p.74). His use of the word "detenida" emphasizes how restricting Falena to a mirror – considering her reflection, rather than her actual being – detains her person and limits her individuality. Torres further dehumanizes Falena through fragmentation, specifically of the body. The narrator speaks of Falena in the following terms: "Tu piel negra estaba sudorosa y nacia de ella una docil fragancia a carne recien perfumada" [your black skin was sweating and out of it arose a docile fragrance of freshly scented meat] (Torres, 1976a, p. 68). His descriptions portion not only her physical body, but her persona, as well. By focusing on individual parts of her body, he prioritizes her physicality and sexuality over all other aspects of her person, and ultimately denies her significance and importance. Furthermore, his use of the words "docil" and "carne" renders her more animalistic than humanistic by conjuring up notions of tameness and flesh.[3]

As much as his objectification debases Falena, it also elevates her to a position of power and hope through religious allusions and deification. In "La unica cara," the most obvious moment of deification is when the narrator "le grita 'Fricka,'" [yells 'Fricka'] (Torres, 1976a, p.75). In her study, Maria Esther Ramos Rosado points out that Torres "hizo una combinación del nombre Freya. Este en la mitología germánico-escandinava significa 'mujer o amante y diosa de la fecundidad y el amor'" [made a combination of the name Freya. In germanicscandinavian mythology it means 'woman or lover and goddess of fertility and love'] (Rosado, 1999, p. 161). Fricka is a Norse goddess associated with love, sexuality, beauty, fertility, war and death (Daly, 2009, p. 32). She is a figure of both rebirth and destruction, a perfect example of the dualistic personality that fascinates Torres across all his novels and stories. While I agree with Rosado that Torres uses this reference to a goddess as a mode of deification of his character, I disagree with her claims that this re-naming of Falena is an attempt by Torres to access a literary movement called Diepalismo because Rosado fails to provide evidence for her claim. I argue that Torres is working to impose a new identity on Falena, so that even as his narrator elevates her to a godly status as I show below, he strips her of her personal rights by deciding who she is and how she is to be perceived. She becomes something other than a woman; she becomes a symbol of liberty and rebirth.

Torres relies on Catholic imagery to elevate Falena to a status of holiness. His short story is rife with Catholic imagery, from the convents he passes to the baptismal imagery of water scattered throughout. As a long-standing symbol for cleansing and purification, water has important

3 The technique of focusing on the Afro-Puerto Rican woman by fragmenting her body is not unique to Torres. On the contrary, Luís Palés Matos, a negrista poet, often dehumanized the AfroPuerto Rican woman by conjuring up body parts covered in sweat. See, for instance, "Majestad negra" (1937).

religious and literary significance that Torres plays upon when his writer-narrator says to Falena, "Quise correr, buscarte, echarme contigo debajo de las sábanas y sentir pesadillas absurdas. Desde el fondo de mi conciencia te sentí caer como una vasija de cerámica. Ven, recoge mis piezas como el agua, dijeron" [I wanted to run, find you, take you with me under the sheets and feel absurd nightmares. From the bottom of my conscious I felt you fall like a ceramic vessel. Come, collect my pieces like water, they said] (Torres, 1976a, p.70). According to the writer-narrator, the ceramic fragments of Falena are water; she is composed of purity and cleansing. Thus there arises a dichotomy of sexuality and purity within Falena, and despite the power that both qualities give her, this dichotomy complicates Torres' presentation of her as a woman. If her purity and redemptive power is innate, then it follows that her sexuality is also something purifying and redemptive.

This dualistic portrayal of Falena reveals how there can be power in objectification and symbolism. She is at once sexual and baptismal. Within her body lies both the fall of man and the birth of the next generation. For Torres and his writer-narrator, she represents all of black Puerto Rican womanhood. So while she loses her individuality, she becomes emblematic of liberty and rebirth in times of trouble, much as Lady Liberty and Marianne represent freedom for the United States and France. For the writer-narrator, she represents his personal redemption and becomes the vehicle for his reproductive success. For Torres, she becomes an emblem of renewed opportunity for Vieques, a sign of contestation to U.S. invasion, and it is through his dehumanization of her that she achieves this status of empowered national symbolism.

Torres continues his portrayal of women as figures of western religion in his novel Este pueblo no es un manto de sonrisas (1991), which casts the central female character in the role of the Madonna. Paying close attention to nomenclature, Torres names this character María, but has the narrator – her younger brother – refer to her as Purificación. The literal reason for this nickname is unclear, but it sheds light on both the brother and Torres' perception of her role. As Purificación, she is, like Falena, a vehicle for salvation. Unlike Falena, Purificación has the power of literal salvation, as well. Should she marry the wealthy, light-skinned plantation owner Don Pepe, she will marry into financial affluence and save her family and neighborhood from starvation. She can purify them by washing away their troubles with her sacrifice.

As María, she invokes the image of the Virgin Mary, a long-standing figure of purity in western religion. This interpretation of Purificación/María as a Virgin Mary figure is supported by the role of stand-in mother she plays in the family on account of her mother being bedridden with a chronic illness. By giving the mother an illness, Torres minimizes her role in the family and forces Purificación/Maria to step up both domestically and emotionally, taking care of her siblings in a strongly maternal fashion. But as much as she acts like a mother, she is not their actual mother, and

so there exists a level of emotional immaculate conception assigned to her that mimics the immaculate conception experienced by the Virgin Mary in the Bible. If immaculate conception is the doctrine that propels the Virgin Mary into motherhood without the taint of intercourse, then emotional immaculate conception is the force that propels Purificación/María into the role of Mother on the emotional level, rather than the physical. Despite her sexual purity, Purificación/María is essentially a mother to her siblings. These parallels to the Virgin Mary characterize Purificación/María as what has historically been treated as the ideal woman in literature: completely pure and maternal.

This ideal woman is herself a contradiction because motherhood is the result of a loss of purity, and Torres further complicates the dualism of this feminine archetype with Purificación/María's dual identities. He presents her simultaneously as a woman of innate purity (María/Virgin Mary) and a woman with the power to purify herself and others (Purificación). These two identities clash with one another when she shirks her maternal duties by refusing to sacrifice herself for her family and marry Don Pepe. Her refusal to marry him breaks a historical pattern of White machista expectations of the Afro-Puerto Rican woman. Taking charge of her characterization is an act of empowerment that might put her family at risk, but she also rejects a lifetime of domestic imprisonment that relies on models from the era of slavery in which a woman of African descent is reliant upon the light-skinned hacendado who decides the outcome of her family.

Torres offers a look into what that future held for her in his short story "El sapo de oro," where he portrays Don Pepe's nameless wife as simultaneously domestically inferior and superior. The exact identity of this woman is never revealed, so perhaps the story is meant as an alternate ending to Este pueblo no es un manto de sonrisas, or perhaps Don Pepe marries another woman after Purificación/María refuses him. Either way, the story presents marriage in its antiquated but still highly-practiced form: one where the woman suffers from a lack of power in her interactions and relationship with the man. In the story, "una mujer blanca, con una tristeza humilde sembrada en su corazón" [a white woman, with a humble sorrow sown in her heart] who is referred to only as "Madame" is stuck in a loveless marriage with Don Pepe, and while he spends his days in town and on his land – inhabiting a limitless external space – his wife is confined to the house (Torres, 1976b, p. 57). Constantly without companionship, she develops a sexual relationship with the Afro-Puerto Rican servant boy.

Through the starkly different relationships Madame has with Don Pepe and the servant boy, Torres examines how women of social and domestic inferiority can manipulate societal expectations to their advantage and work within their limitations to gain power. He reveals how Madame suffers from an initial lack of power through his use of animal symbolism. Each of the animals that live in the house represents a facet of Madame's personality. Don Pepe has a German Shepard, doves, and a golden frog, three animals that embody the characteristics of an ideal wife. Like the German Shepard,

a wife should adore and obey her husband; like the doves, a wife should be pure and innocent; like the golden frog, a wife should be ornamental and beautiful. All of these representations of the woman restrict her to a position of inferiority, a fact made very clear when "ella lo llamaba [a su esposo], pero él no se acercaba" [she called her husband, but he did no approach] (Torres, 1976b, p.3). Due to the patriarchal society already in place, Don Pepe can treat his wife like a dog, but when she reciprocates by calling him, he ignores her. It is clear that the relationship between Don Pepe and his wife is one of neither feminine power nor equality.

The absence of Don Pepe, however, allows Madame the space necessary to cultivate her own power. Here Don Pepe's house serves as a microcosm of preMarines Vieques. The light-skinned man is the sole breadwinner while women and residents of African descent play subservient roles. However, when Don Pepe goes away on business and responsibility falls to Madame, she fills in the space previously inhabited by masculinity with a stronger, more open femininity. In the first half of the twentieth century, the only situation in which a light-skinned woman can be superior to a man is when that man is black. So in making the man an Afro-Puerto Rican servant – intersecting the marginalized nature of his race and social class – Torres gives the woman power while upsetting social and racial hierarchies. Again, Torres emphasizes the sexual nature of the woman. Throughout the story, the relationship between the woman and the boy evolves from a mistress-servant relationship to a sexual affair. The woman abuses her power as Señora to increase her power in the household, becoming almost predator-like in the process. Yet at the same time the boy reveres her, placing her on a pedestal of womanhood, as can be gleaned from his confession, "Siempre pensé en tí" [I always thought of you] (Torres, 1976b, p.62). Madame, after all, initiates him into manhood through their sexual relationship, awakening and empowering him within the limits of his social position. The story's final scene indicates that the boy sees Madame as a figure of power beyond that of an employer. The boy narrates, "La miro y me veo en el espejo. Nos miramos" [I look at her and see myself in the mirror. We look at ourselves] (Torres, 1976b, pg. 62.) They see each other, and yet they also see in their reflection an alternate reality of ideals where an Afro-Puerto Rican houseboy could be with a white woman. Through the illusion of the mirror he can escape his double marginality and reap the benefits of a woman's theoretical agency.

This sexual relationship also reveals another way the woman of "El sapo de oro," like Falena and Purificación/María, embodies dualism because it signals the conflict between the innocence that her domestic position expects of her and the sexuality which she actually exhibits. She lives in an atmosphere of purity, described by the boy thusly: "La casa es toda blanca, con una ermita en le patio" [the house is all white, with a chapel on the patio] (Torres, 1976b, p. 3). These images suggest a scene of significant purity, which in turn suggests that the woman has a very pure and

religious existence. The doves only increase the aura of purity as established symbols of peace and purity. Western society has a tradition of considering purity and religious ideal aspects of femininity because these qualities are reminiscent of the Virgin Mary. So when the author refers to Madame with images of purity and religion, he describes a woman who adheres to social expectations.

Through her duality as someone who occupies both inferior and superior social positions, and as at once the pure woman and the sexual woman, it is possible to see how her sexuality functions as a source of feminine power. She strips off her skin of purity when she has a romance with the boy, but she exchanges it for the skin of a seductress. Patriarchal societies reduce the woman to one of two things: the virgin or the whore. Therefore, even when her purity is compromised by her sexuality, she still lives in accordance with societal expectations. But Torres shows that she can work within expectations and manipulate her role as a sexual aggressor to gain power and empower others. From this solution comes the feminine strength that becomes necessary in a Marine-dominated Vieques that is watching its masculinity fade.

The Viequense Woman And A Change Of Paternalistic Power

The aforementioned emasculation plays out in Torres's works that are set during Marine occupation. "La unica cara del espejo," Este pueblo no es un manto de sonrisas, and "El sapo de oro," which are set in pre-occupation Vieques all attest to the fact that Torres does not portray the arrival of the Marines as Vieques' only problem. In La casa y la llama fiera and Viente siglos después del homicidio, Torres uses that arrival to underscore the gender, race, and social class problems that already exist there.

As in "El sapo de oro," feminine dualism serves as a counterpart to male impotence in Torres' later novel La casa y la llama fiera (1982), in which he relies on a common symbol of feminine dualism to characterize a woman whose potential to be strong is simultaneously hindered and fostered by the men who project sexuality onto her. The novel revolves around an Afro-Puerto Rican writer-narrator named Aldo and his wife, Beatriz, a white woman, as they navigate racial anxieties in their predominantly white community where Aldo often feels inferior to his neighbors. As a writer by profession who has decided to chronicle Vieques' struggle with the United States, Aldo suffers from a lack of creativity that manifests itself in feelings of impotence and embodies the fear of emasculation. This impotence goes beyond his writing and extends to his relationship with his wife; as his creative abilities falter, so do his sexual abilities. As a result, Aldo pulls away from Beatriz and she becomes a victim of her own solitude. In her we see how emasculation affects women both positively and negatively and how it can make them vulnerable one moment and inspire empowerment the next.

Beatriz's vulnerability stems from her passivity in the defining of her

character. Not once does Beatriz herself contribute to her character; her personality, connotations, and characteristics are all applied to her by the writer-narrator and other male characters. Just as he does with Falena and Madame, Torres inconsistently stamps Beatriz with a sexual and dangerous connotation while assigning her a purity more in line with what society expects of a woman. When Beatriz walks down to the port one day, she encounters several sailors who decide to call her a mermaid (Torres, 1982, p. 61). They refer specifically to a mermaid named Amarillis, a figure whose English name – Amaryllis – stems from a flower. The Amaryllis flower, which is sometimes called "naked lady," is itself named after another literary character (Kruse-Pickler, 2015). The Amaryllis of Virgil's Eclogues is a "wayward, coquettish, and charming" shepherdess whose "bitter wrath and proud contempt" complicates her love life (Hahn, 1994, p. 232).
Each of these associations contributes to the characterization of the mermaid Amaryllis and, transitively, Beatriz. The flower association symbolizes both beauty and female sexuality. When considered in conjunction with the "naked lady" moniker, it becomes apparent that sexuality is an important aspect of Amarillis' character. Through the allusion to Virgil's Amaryllis, her sexuality becomes something negative, almost threatening.

By associating Beatriz with the sailors' Amarillis – a mermaid – Torres complicates his presentation of her. Over time, Mermaids have come to symbolize the lure of sexual pleasure ("Mermaid,"2015). By comparing Beatriz to this symbol, the sailors classify her thus. Yet even then Torres cannot settle on a classification for his main female character. Once again he complicates her presentation when the sailors say, "Así fue como vislumbramos que no estaba hecha para varón sino para la contemplación y los deleites del agua" [This is how we see that she was not made for man but for contemplation and the delights of the water] (Torres, 1982, p. 61). This affirmation returns Beatriz to a position of purity, or at least draws attention away from her sexuality and refocuses it on a less physical, more spiritual aspect of the woman that parallels the Yoruban deity Yemanja, a common fixture of Afro-Puerto Rican religions (Gonzalez-Wippler, 1992, p. 62). Mother of the sea, patron saint of all women and spiritual mother of fishermen, Yemanja opens up new possibilities in Beatriz to undo her lack of self-control while reviving society that has stagnated due to creative impotence. One of these possibilities is for Beatriz to become a voice for Puerto Rican women, an idea presented to her shortly after talking to the fishermen in a dream-like episode with Realidad, a central character and prostitute in Torres' first novel. Realidad implores Beatriz to take to the streets and forget about Aldo's failed attempts to chronicle Vieques's struggle (Torres, 1982, p. 84). Though her personality consists of fuzzy dualisms and contradictions, in this sequence, hers is the voice speaking for Vieques and figuratively taking up the fight against occupation.

In his first novel, Veinte siglos después del homicidio, Torres deals directly with the impact of the U.S. Marines on women. Though told mostly from the point of view of a male writer-narrator, Veinte siglos después del

homicidio is narrated in part by a woman, Realidad. As a prostitute, she both horrifies and fascinates him, personifying his every problem and hope for Viequense womanhood. It is not surprising that she comes into play extensively throughout the novel.

In this work the Marines pose the most direct threat to the men of Viequesand the island at large, as Torres shows when he refers to them through the following biblical allusion: "la llegada de los nefilim" [the arrival of the Nephilim] (Torres, 1971, p. 31). There is some disagreement as to the identity of the Nephilim, but according to The Bible the Nephilim were a race of giants who were the progeny of fallen angels and human women. The actions of the Nephilim are said to have warranted the Flood as punishment, and after the Flood, the Nephilim rose again because divine beings once again procreated with human women (The Holy Bible, 2001, Genesis 6:1-6). Torres' choice to refer to the Marines as "los nefilim" is particularly interesting because it is an example of how he extends deification to men, not just women. He turns the U.S. Marines into beings of divine status, suggesting that his characters perceive them at higher and more powerful than the Viequenses. Torres never elevates Viequense men to the level of the Marines, and to combat these deities, Torres and his writernarrator look towards Viequense women as the vehicles for change.

He cultivates that higher entity in Realidad through the archetype that she represents. As a prostitute who is also the vessel for Viequense regeneration, Realidad does not fit neatly into Eve archetype or the Virgin Mary archetype, as I will explain later when I discuss the various ways she succeeds and fails at embodying each. What, then, is Realidad's role in the novel? She is the point of convergence for man's fall and rebirth; sexuality and saintliness meet in her. This contradiction has been seen before in the biblical figure of Mary Magdalene, the prostitute who becomes a saint. Although recent historical discoveries and biblical analysis have concluded that there is no evidence Mary Magdalene was ever a prostitute, the perception of Mary Magdalene as both a sexual and saintly remains. In her study of women on pilgrimages inspired by Mary Magdalene, Anna Fedele concludes that for many women, "Mary Magdalene [is] both as forerunner of feminism and . . . a model for independent women" (Fedele, 2006, p.1). Despite no historical or biblical basis for Mary Magdalene's reputation as a prostitute, there is certainly basis for the popular interpretation of her as a prostitute. As The Aldine (1877) explains, "it is in this character of the great sinner that she is generally represented by artists [and] the erroneous opinion has, however, been too long the popular one to be successfully combated now" (The Aldine, 1877, p. 334). Although Mary Magdalene is upheld as a paragon of redemption and feminine independence and strength, her redemption and strength stem – like Madame and Falena – from her sexuality. She overcomes a society that both persecutes and relies upon feminine sexuality.

Realidad's connection to Mary Magdalene in no way diminishes the attention Torres and the writer-narrator give to her sexuality. In fact, the

writernarrator cites it as the source of all evils in Vieques, telling her that when she sleeps with the Marines, "caíste y el pueblo también cayó y hubo hambre y peste y miseria y prostitución y traidores" [you fell and the town also fell and there was hunger and plague and misery and prostitution and traitors] (Torres, 1971, p. 126). At first, the writer-narrator chooses to focus on the sexual -- rather than the saintly – side of Realidad, and punishes her through endless dehumanization: Much like the writer-narrator of "La unica cara del espejo" treats Falena, this writer-narrator describes Realidad in terms of disconnected body parts. He details:

> Observo su cuerpo. . . Una cadera ancha. Las piernas ligeramente delgadas resistiéndose a sostener esas calderas de carne. Huele a polvo de toilet [I observe your body. . . A wide hip. The slightly thin legs resist holding these boilers of meat. You smell of toilet powder] (p. 95).

This description reduces Realidad to the fragmented grotesque by emphasizing her individual body parts rather than her whole being. The writer-narrator denies her the wholeness that he feels denied of as an impotent man living on a powerless, colonized island that, like Realidad's body, is fragmented into military and civilian zones. Whereas in "El sapo de oro" and Este pueblo no es un manto de sonrisas such moments of feminine sexuality threaten the patriarchal hegemony of Vieques, in La casa y la llama fiera and Veinte siglos despues del homicidio, the patriarchal predominance that is threatened is Marine.

The irony is that, like many of Torres' female characters, Realidad does not wield her sexuality as a threat. Men assume her to be sexually dangerous, but Realidad is a virgin until she is raped by several of the Marines, and does not indicate any awareness of her sexual power. Realidad recalls: "...yo entregaba mi espalda y mi virginidad en un catre de lona y miles de hombres de esa raza inhumana me gozaban, me desquiciaban, me destruían" [I gave my back and my virginity on a canvas cot and thousands of men of the inhuman race enjoyed me, drove me mad, destroyed me] (Torres, 1982, p. 84). Her sexuality is not something she uses, but something others take advantage of. Here Torres conflates Realidad with the island so just as the Marines have socially, politically, and economically violated the island, they have physically violated her as well. Realidad comes to symbolize the raped reality of Vieques.

By retaining her sexuality in spite of the invasion of a foreign force, Realidad biologically overpowers the Viequense man because, though she may have sex with a U.S. Marine and bear his children, she will still contribute to the subsequent generation of Viequenses. A community's survival depends on its regeneration, and because of Puerto Ricans regularly emigrating to the United States in search of work, not to mention the control the United States has over women's bodies, Puerto Rico's population continually declines. Realidad's role in bio-reproduction highly important

to Puerto Rico's longevity because it must have an ever-growing population. Ridden with impotence, the Viequense man will not have a role as long as the Marines are present, and this puts him at a disadvantage at the same time that it carves out space for the woman to exercise her agency.

The result of Realidad's sexual encounter with the U.S. Marines is a pregnancy that ensures U.S. occupation of Vieques will perpetuate itself on the biological level. As the actual – rather than the potential – deliverer and nurturer of the island's next generation, Realidad becomes immeasurably vital. Recognizing that, Torres gives her a voice, imploring her to use it to tell the rest of story of the U.S. occupation of Vieques. Whereas the Viequense men have been emasculated, they no longer have any relation to or impact on the next generation of Viequenses. To that end, it is Realidad and the Viequense womanhood she represents that will yield the most power and influence on the island's future.

The writer-narrator decides that he no longer has a place in the tale of Vieques. He passes the torch to the feminine voice and says, "Tú hablas ahora, Realidad, porque te centellean aquellas palabras muy adentro todavía" [You speak now, Realidad, because those words still sparkle inside you] (Torres, 1971, p. 125). The writer-narrator uses the present tense indicative of hablar instead of a command, acknowledging the equality Realidad finally achieves. Upon receiving this voice, Realidad immediately takes him to task and orders him to "Levántate y ve a tu pueblo y proclama contra él que la maldad es grande" [Get up and go to your people and proclaim against him which the evil is great] (Torres, 1971, p. 125). Here, in the very person who the writer-narrator once believed to be the ruin of Vieques, is the strong, authoritative voice that the island has been lacking.

The paradox of Torres' hopes to break with patriarchal discourse by presenting women as agents of change is that he and his writer-narrators are still men using women for change that will re-affirm masculine power. Torres' role in feminine discourse is much like Aldo's, as Realidad tells Beatriz: "la vida de tu esposo es una contradicción, defiende los derechos femeninos y los destruye en una novela…" [the life of your husband is a contradction, he defends women's rights and destroys them in a novel] (Torres, 1982, p.84). His ultimate goal is the reclaiming of Vieques for the Viequenses, which means restoring the status quo of a patriarchal society ruled by Viequense men. Though Torres and his writernarrators address gender inequality in pre-occupation Vieques and turn to feminine strength and power to see the island through that occupation, it is yet uncertain whether or not that strength and power will be a permanent change to Viequense society or merely a temporary means to its survival.

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