

New Possibilities for Female Subjectivity in Southern Cone Literature

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This summer, I closely studied a variety of texts in the Southern Cone tradition, that, through their highly unconventional, unsettling narratives, offer novel and potential liberatory possibilities for women within a patriarchal society. The research I completed laid the groundwork for an honors project in Hispanic Studies within the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures that I hope to undertake in the following academic year. My project combines my interests in literature and gender studies and deals with a question I feel is fundamental to both fields: what does it mean to truly resist?

While my primary focus is on contemporary writers, I began my research by analyzing the short stories of their 20th century precursors Clarice Lispector and Silvina Ocampo. The female protagonists of each of their works variously negotiate their own internalized oppression and the desire for freedom without ever finding a definite resolution to their struggle. Lispector's stories in particular inspired me to incorporate post-structuralism and psychoanalytic theory into my research. Building off my engagement with Joan Copjec and Jacques Lacan in an English literary theory course from the previous semester, I began to look for moments where the text seeks not to represent or interpret desire but instead to engage it as an untreatable, irreducible excess. By upholding ambiguity and resisting metaphorization, these subjects seem to resist oppression more radically than those that simply replace one metaphor with another.

In the second stage of my research, I read and analyzed the short stories of contemporary Argentine writer Mariana Enríquez, particularly "Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego" or "Things We Lost in the Fire." In this unsettling tale, a group of women burn themselves in protest of the increasingly prevalent phenomenon (based in part on reality) of men disfiguring or killing their female partners by setting them on fire. This text gets to the heart of my research question – how can we determine whether a strategy resists or merely reproduces an oppressive system? Can such brutal self-violence really be emancipatory? I read several journal articles debating this issue in order to come to a well-informed conclusion. I also read Samanta Schweblin's story "Pájaros en la boca" ("Mouthful of Birds"), in which the male protagonist is initially disturbed by but ultimately comes to accept his daughter's habit of eating live birds. In this text, the birds do not merely serve as a metaphor or symbol but also force the acknowledgement of their material, organic embodiment. The girl's practice of consuming these live animals invites the idea of posthumanism, by which the boundaries of the human are questioned by the proximity of the animal. I read a few fundamental works of posthumanist theory by Rosi Braidotti and Gabriel Giorgi to supplement my analysis.

For the final component of my research, I explored texts that violate cultural taboos related to gender, particularly parental regret and a negative experience of motherhood. In Ariana Harwicz's novel *Mátate, Amor* (Die, My Love), the female protagonist feels tormented by the confines of domestic life and suffocated by the presence of her newborn child, whom she contemplates abandoning or killing. Her defiant rejection of the conventions of motherhood forces reflection on the ways her torment may be a symptom of an oppressive patriarchal society. Similarly, the protagonist of Fernanda Trías' novel *La Azotea* traps herself in her apartment with her aging father and young daughter, bringing about both of their deaths with her paranoia. With Professor Urli's guidance, I sought to look past the disturbing literal events of this text and gain insight from it as a metaphor for the ways in which society entraps and alienates women.

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