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**AN EYE FOR AN "T":
WOMEN WRITERS AND THE FANTASTIC
AS A CHALLENGE TO PATRIARCHAL AUTHORITY**

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Whenver an author sits down to write a piece of narrative fiction, one of the first issues he or she must face is the question of who will tell the story, and from what perspective. More than a mere technical detail, the choice of narrative voice and the vision which gives rise to that voice implies an ideological stance on the part of the writer for, as Michel Foucault has taught us, no aspect of the enunciation process can be regarded as an innocent and neutral practice. When an author settles on a given way of seeing and speaking, he or she automatically privileges one set of ideas or one group of people over another. Whether the text seeks to uphold the status quo or subvert it, whether it works within the bounds of an empowered discourse or explores the creative possibilities of marginalized and/or unrecognized discourse, it will ultimately say something to us in favor of or against the "normal" way of seeing and voicing human experience. The notion that there is some kind of universal truth, some absolute knowledge, or some inherently correct way of perceiving the world has come under a good deal of attack in recent decades, both from Foucauldians and feminists, who have, each in their own way, attempted to show how Western society has been dominated by hierarchical modes that privilege a masculine elite. With increasing frequency, women writers have experimented with narrative strategies through which they might appropriate the male gaze and the male voice, transform them into something more authentically feminine in character, and employ them as tools in the creation of a female body of literature. One way in which women have attempted to accomplish this goal is to use the subversive capacity of the fantastic to undermine patriarchal authority and disempower male discourse. Through the fantastic, alternate ways of seeing,

thinking, feeling, and speaking are presented for consideration, and often subtly upheld as viable models for emulation. While these texts seldom address radical feminist concerns in a straightforward manner, they nevertheless can be considered feminist works, for they provide, at least temporarily, the marginalized and the muted members of patriarchal society a voice with which to speak. In this manner, they call attention to the limitations imposed by the rationalizing discourses that have characterized so many of the "Great Works" produced by male writers, and open our field of vision to encompass that which has previously been unspoken, unwritten, and unseen.

Obviously, the fantastic is not a literary mode that is limited to or dominated by women writers; nevertheless, as Rosemary Jackson has observed, women are especially attracted to the fantastic as a way of subverting patriarchal society and the norms of a male-dominated symbolic order. According to Jackson:

The dominant literary forms in Western culture from the eighteenth century onwards have been realistic and mimetic.... There has been no room in such fiction, nor in such a world view, for anything not immediately knowable, for anything invisible, unseen, inexplicable. These areas have been prohibited from mainstream literature just as they have been tabooed by culture at large; a rationalistic, materialistic, scientific, and secular culture has restricted its definition of the "real" to what is familiar and under rational control. This culture is also a patriarchal one, and many of its values and definitions are male-determined. Indeed, some feminist critics have gone so far as to argue that the very history of reason, or rationality, and the materialistic, atheistic philosophy that accompanies it, are inseparable from masculinity and phallogocentric power. Literature has supported and reinforced this dominant position.... To challenge this history of writing by producing texts that are outside the frame of reason, that are anti-reason, unreasonable, unrealistic, is to simultaneously challenge the "reality" that frame contains and upholds — the "real" as defined by a materialistic, masculine, patriarchal culture (xvii)

In this sense, the fantastic, like feminism, can be regarded in Foucault's terms as a "reverse discourse," for both systems challenge the normalizing powers of society's "regime of truth," or the mechanisms through which truth and knowledge are produced and disseminated. Jackson believes that women writers use the fantastic "to provide serious explorations and dramatizations of issues at the heart of human existence. They raise profound questions about the nature of identity, about the limitations surrounding earthly experience, the restrictions of body, mind, space and time, the distinction between life and death — profound philosophical, metaphysical, psychological and spiritual questioning" (xvii). The expression of these concerns is by no means limited to fantastic texts written by women; nevertheless, what does set women's writing apart from similar texts produced by men is an insistence on viewing the events narrated from a distinctly feminine point of view, and on speaking (or writing)

in a way that addresses women's frustration with a system that has for so long worked to exclude them.

The stories to be examined here, "Su demonio privado" by Elvira Orphee, "El duende," "La semana de colores," and "El robo de Tizlla" by Elena Garro, and "El cuaderno," "El goce y la penitencia" and "El vestido de terciopelo" by Silvina Ocampo, employ a number of narrative strategies that lead us to question the authority normally attributed to first-person male narrators and the omniscient narrative voice which speaks from the perspective of a male. At the same time, they show us that for a woman "to speak — or try to speak — is to experience difficulties in finding an appropriate speaking-position in an androcentric mode of discourse which designates men as the enunciators and relegates women to the position of the enounced" (Ruthven, 60). By undermining the telling-power of the male speaker and authorizing that of the female, these women writers create a space for the feminine fantastic, where ambiguity in the text reflects the ambiguous position of women in patriarchal society and the ambiguous nature of language, itself. The question of who speaks and who sees is an essential one for these writers, for as Todorov and others have observed, it is the perception of events rather than the events, themselves, which brings the fantastic into being. John Berger posits that "The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe" (8). Furthermore, he claims, "We see only what we look at. To look is an act of choice" (8). If our gaze as readers is directed and manipulated by a gaze inside the text which focuses our eyes on certain images and away from others, we can scarcely call our perceptions our own; yet, as the stories we have set out to examine here show us, we seldom pause to reflect on the fact that we are looking through someone else's eyes rather than through our own once we are caught up in the thread of a narrative. Only by making us aware of how the process works to exclude marginalized discourses from mainstream literature can women writers of the fantastic call attention to the eye behind the "I" that speaks, and the power it exercises over us in the shaping of our worldview.

"Su demonio privado" and "El goce y la penitencia" provide interesting contrasts to one another, in the sense that both stories are narrated from the first-person point of view, yet the experience of narrating is entirely different for each of the speakers. The male narrator of "Su demonio privado" reveals himself to be incapable of penetrating what he perceives to be the essential "otherness" of the female; his inability to see her clearly, to capture her image visually or verbally, or to make sense of his relationship with her results in a narrative that is fragmented, incoherent, and full of puzzling gaps. It is through these gaps, of course, that the fantastic emerges, but whether it is a consequence of supernatural forces, a manifestation of madness, or a misreading/mistelling of information presented in the text is a question left open to the reader's imagination, since the narrator's confusion about the story he has set out to tell does not permit us to grasp it in any concrete way. "El goce y la penitencia," on

the other hand, is a relatively straightforward narrative; it is told in the first person by the story's female protagonist, who experiences the fantastic (and relates it to the reader) with ease. Tension is created in the text not by her own doubt and uncertainty about the nature of what she relates, but by her refusal to look for explanations or to offer logical conjectures to us as readers. The supernatural poses no threat to her, as it does to the narrator of "Su demonio privado," for it is linked, in her mind, to positive elements (sexual gratification, spiritual communion, motherhood, an escape from a tedious marriage) rather than to negative forces (sexual jealousy, fear, aggression, violence, death) as is the case with Orphee's tortured male speaker. Perhaps for this reason, Ocampo's protagonist sees no need to understand the fantastic or to explain it, but is content, instead, merely to acknowledge its presence in her life. We, as readers, may choose to believe her story or not; we may look for explanations and arrive at our own "logical" conclusion that could negate the fantastic in the tale, but the narrator does not lead us to these actions. The model she provides for us is one of quiet acceptance, flexibility, and openness to things that have no rational basis but which, nevertheless, touch our hearts and minds. By suggesting that there is more than one way to view "reality," and by granting power (albeit temporary) to a marginalized discourse, Ocampo calls attention to the ways in which we, as readers, have been conditioned to respond to male-dominated discursive practices as if they were "normal" and "natural" rather than see them as the ideological constructs they are. "Su demonio privado" carries a similar message, but conveys it in a different way; in Orphee's tale, it is through the breakdown of language and the fragmentation of the speaking subject that the authority of the male voice is decentered. It is the male narrator's inability to find an absolute truth and voice it, his inflexibility when confronted with anything that lies outside rational understanding, and his stubborn adherence to a discursive system that is inadequate for his needs as narrator that ultimately lead him to madness. His refusal to bend when confronted with the impossible demands of "normalcy" points to the rigidity of the system and to its imperfections, thereby undermining the notion that any discursive system can encompass all facets of human experience and speak for all people.

The title of "Su demonio privado" gives a clue as to the narrative strategy that will be used throughout the story, for it is intriguing and encourages us to read on, in hopes that its meaning will become clear, yet even as we read it, we realize that words are beings used and combined in a purposely ambiguous way that may represent an obstacle to us as readers. The possessive pronoun "su" could refer to any number of people, and the odd mixture of the adjective "privado" with the noun "demonio" suggests that we are not dealing with ordinary devils or demons but, perhaps, with something symbolic or metaphorical that plagues some individual in the story that we are about to read. It is not immediately clear, as we turn to the text, who the narrator is, from what perspective the story is going to be told, through whose eyes it will be focalized,

or who the main characters of the story will be. The first paragraph would lead us to believe that we have a third-person omniscient narrator, and that to some degree focalization will be through the eyes of the master painter, but the narrator's unexpected confession that he does not know what the painter is thinking, but can only conjecture about it, effectively undoes our initial impression of the narrative voice that is being used in the story, and presents us with an alternative theory that the narrator may be one of the characters in the story who is witnessing the events he describes. This impression is confirmed immediately when the "yo" reveals itself in the second paragraph, but we still do not have a clear notion of who the narrator is, or what his relationship is to the characters he describes. He appears to be directing himself to a listener or a reader outside the text, but he does little to clarify the story he has set out to tell. Characters are introduced only obliquely and without any indication of their role in the development of the narrative; fragments of their conversation are wedged in between the narrator's commentary about portrait painting, his observations about the scene he is witnessing, and strange non sequiturs that reveal his thoughts about life and art. Although his words are ordinary enough, they are combined in unexpected ways that produce ambiguous, jumbled meaning. For example, he explains that he is not able to paint the young female model who has appeared in the master's studio because she too closely resembles the painting of San Giovanni Battista by Leonardo DaVinci, "aunque esta vez fuera mujer y tuviera cabellos lisos en lugar de abultados" (61). What this young woman has in common with a male saint is never addressed in any direct way; instead, the narrator closes the subject to further speculation by emphatically stating, "Habilidad y reincidencia podrán dar combinaciones premiadas, pero el premio a la recaída en la misma sonrisa se viene prolongando demasiado" (61). While these kinds of enigmatic statements do little to advance the plot or develop characterization, they effectively show us that we are dealing with a story which foregrounds its own enunciation practice; the difficulty we have in grasping the meaning of the narrator's words, in identifying the object of his gaze, or in piecing together the narrative fragments which he appears to offer at random suggests that at least one valid reading of the story's title would permit us to see "su demonio privado" as the narrator's painful struggle to tell his story in a way that makes sense both to himself and to us, as readers. Rather than smooth over the troublesome process of molding language into meaning, Orphee's narrator calls our attention to the gaps that exist between what is perceived and what is said, between what is thought and what is put into words, between what we are told and what we understand those words to mean. By telling a story whose meaning seems to lie continually just beyond our grasp, the narrator of "Su demonio privado" makes us aware of how dependent we are on the voice and the vision that guides us through any text, and how strongly we rely on that voice and vision to help us make sense of what we read.

"El goce y la penitencia" tells a story that is very similar to the one

contained in "Su demonio privado," but it is told from a female point of view and in the words of the story's female protagonist. Here, a young woman visits a painter's studio to have a portrait made of her young son. Over time, the woman and the painter become attracted to one another, first as friends and then as lovers; they take advantage of the portrait sessions to consummate their relationship while the woman's young son is locked away in the attic, happily playing games of his own device. The painter, however, like the narrator of "Su demonio privado," does not seem to be able to capture his subject's image on canvas; he finally produces a painting of a child, but it is a child who in no way resembles the woman's son. As it turns out, this painting, like the photos in "Su demonio privado," reflects something that has not happened yet; it is a portrait of the child the woman is going to have in the future, and shows what he will look like when he is five years old. Not surprisingly, the father of the new child is the painter of the strange portrait; as he was committing the child's image to canvas, it seems, he was simultaneously impregnating the woman with his son-to-be. These "facts" are related by the female in the most open and direct way possible; at no point does she hesitate over the nature of the events she describes, nor does she stop to wonder at the apparent impossibility of what she tells us. She expresses a certain amount of amusement at the joke that has been played on her rather boring husband, and delight in the new child's resemblance to the portrait that was painted of him, but she does not seem to be concerned with the supernatural implications of her tale or feel it necessary to explain to us how the impossible took place. She treats it, instead, as if it were all a coincidence, one that is entertaining and pleasing, but not necessarily important enough to merit speculation or comment. She dismisses it by simply stating, "Nunca sabré si ese retrato que tanto miré formó la imagen de aquel hijo futuro en mi familia o si Armindo pintó esa imagen a semejanza de su hijo, en mí" (215).

Neither explanation is possible in rational terms, yet both are acceptable to her. She does not insist on establishing hierarchies of truth in her story; for her, there are multiple truths, multiple ways of looking at things, and multiple ways of understanding. Her willingness to admit that there are certain things that she "will never know" opens a space in the text for that which lies outside of language, for that which cannot be spoken, seen, or understood, but which nevertheless forms a part of her life experience. Unlike the male narrator of "Su demonio privado," she does not allow herself to be bogged down by the desire to understand or to possess knowledge about things that are, in essence, unknowable. She tells us what she can, skips over what she cannot tell us, and openly admits the shortcomings of language when it fails her: "A veces quisiera reproducir esos diálogos que eran el fruto de mi aburrimiento; no puedo" (212). While the narrator of "Su demonio..." must undergo a rather lengthy and torturous process of mental gymnastics to arrive, finally, at the conclusion that he is dealing with the fantastic, the narrator of "El goce..." appears to accept this possibility at once, without hesitation or doubt. Both narrators ultimately

embrace the fantastic as a "reality," but once the narrator of "Su demonio..." becomes convinced that he is the victim of fantastic forces, he attempts to dominate those forces by giving them a name (el Desconocido), by humanizing them (el Desconocido = a rival for the wife's desire), and by creating a parallel system of topsy-turvy reason which will allow the fantastic to function as a substitute for and a mirror image of the "real" world of the narrator. The rules of el Desconocido's world may be different, but the narrator still understands the game: if only he can penetrate his rival's thoughts and second guess his motivations, then he has a chance of winning the contest. He learns to think like el Desconocido, and to see the world through el Desconocido's eyes, just as a soldier in battle learns to think like his enemy in order to survive. The narrator of "Su demonio..." sees the fantastic as a threat or a challenge which must be dealt with in a decisive, forceful way. In his view, it cannot be allowed to exist in peace, side by side with the "real" world, for patriarchal society has conditioned him to believe that two opposing systems cannot simultaneously occupy the same space: the weaker one must be relegated to a position of less importance, while the dominant one rises to the top. The narrator of "El goce...", on the other hand, appears to be free of such conditioning; in her story, the fantastic does not stand in for the "real" world but, instead, forms a part of it. She does not approach the fantastic with an antagonistic attitude, nor does she attempt to justify its existence. For her, it simply is.

Ocampo's "El vestido de terciopelo" is a more direct attack on patriarchal order, in the sense that it makes us aware of how our vision, as readers, is controlled by the coercive gaze of a narrator, and suggests that the act of seeing, like the act of telling, is never entirely free of bias. Here, the first-person narrator acts as a witness to events portrayed in the text rather than as the story's protagonist. It is through her eyes that the speaking "I" of the tale is focalized and, by stubbornly directing our gaze toward elements in the narrative that do not, to us, seem central to the telling of the tale, she frustrates our desire to see, to know, to understand what lies at the heart of the story. Like the narrator of "El goce y la penitencia," the narrator of "El vestido de terciopelo" is at ease with the art of narration. To her, the story she tells makes perfect sense; it is complete and coherent, and carries the message she has set out to convey. The problem for us, as readers, is that she does not tell us the story we expect to hear — How did the fantastic come about? What possible explanation can there be for the supernatural phenomenon she describes? And, perhaps more importantly, why does she not respond to the supernatural with fear, hesitation, or uncertainty? Her actions, as narrator, go against the grain of what we normally find in fantastic fiction, and it is through this inconsistency that the story achieves its full effect. It reminds us that the fantastic exists only when someone **perceives** that it exists; through the use of a narrator whose vision does not necessarily match our own, "El vestido de terciopelo" leads us to question how our perceptions are shaped, reinforced, or subverted by the "I" who controls our

gaze as the story unfolds before us.

The narrative voice used in "El vestido de terciopelo" is that of an eight year old girl, one which normally lacks authority in mainstream adult fiction. In Ocampo's story, however, it is somewhat more difficult to dismiss her child speaker, for it is apparent that the girl has already joined the ranks of the working class in Buenos Aires, and has seen enough of life to erase some of her childish innocence. She is the assistant to a seamstress named Casilda, whom she accompanies to the home of wealthy clients. Contact with the rich has made her aware of her own poverty; with a jaundiced eye for one so young, she notes the luxurious surroundings in which her clients live, and compares it to her own neighborhood where the streets are marred by "perros rabiosos y quema de basuras" (144). Despite the narrator's youth, she is keenly aware of irony, especially when it involves class differences, and the constant aside of "¡Qué risa!", which she addresses to us throughout the story, invites us to look through her eyes at "la señora" and her wealth, and to see how they appear to an eight-year old girl who is excluded from that kind of life. For example, when the señora asks her, "Cuándo seas grande... te gustará llevar un vestido de terciopelo, ¿no es cierto?," the narrator replies "Sí," but she thinks, "sentí que el terciopelo de ese vestido me estrangulaba el cuello con manos enguantadas. ¡Qué risa!" (146). Apparently, it does not occur to the señora that a poor child will never be able to afford to wear the kind of clothes she makes for her clients. For the child, on the other hand, the weight of that reality is suffocating, as is the need to respond blandly to the señora, keep silent, and let her true feelings go unvoiced. By contrasting the child's thoughts and observations with the insipid commentary of the señora throughout the story, the child emerges as the one who has a better understanding of real life.

What is most disturbing about "El vestido de terciopelo" is the narrator's refusal to show us, or tell us, "what happened" in the story. What she gives us is a story about dressmaking, with the supernatural entering only in the most indirect and coincidental way. It seems strange to those of us who are used to reading fantastic tales that a narrator would not take advantage of the mysterious elements in the story to build tension and create doubt or hesitation in us. The narrator of "El vestido..." like the narrator of "El goce y la penitencia," does not appear to distinguish between the ordinary and the extraordinary; she mentions things that strike us as impossible in the same breath as she describes the most common daily occurrence. While we yearn to know more about this strange dress that may have the ability to kill people, she tells us about the way Casilda pins up the hem of the skirt or smooths out a wrinkle under the arm. Her final dismissal of the woman's death with "¡Qué risa!" strikes us as inadequate; nevertheless, she apparently has no more to say on the subject, for she ends her story with these words. Like the narrator of "El goce y la penitencia," she leaves us to make of the story what we will. It does not appear to concern her that we may find her version of events lacking in detail, or insufficient in terms of

rational explanation. She has shown us, and told us, what she considers to be important and, she implies, if we are not satisfied with her story, it is our problem, rather than hers.

Underlying the lighthearted tone of Ocampo's stories, there is a serious message about power, and about the role it plays in the creation of a work of fiction. Whether we realize it or not, our vision and our perceptions are being guided (and shaped) by a narrator. At times, the narrator hides behind an assumed objectivity and appears to be neutral; but, as these stories show us, what a narrator chooses to see, to voice, and to communicate to us is never the result of a "natural" practice. What a narrator defines as "possible," "normal," or "real" influences the way s/he tells the tale. If the concepts expressed and described mirror the thinking of mainstream society, and if they are conveyed in a way that does not call undue attention to the enunciation process, the end result of the narrative will generally be considered "realistic" or "true." If, on the other hand, they describe an alternative vision of the world, and reflect a different way of perceiving or speaking, if they are communicated in a way that reveals the shortcomings of language or a breakdown in the narrative process, we tend to react to these works as "unrealistic," or "untrue." What we seldom stop to consider, however, is that our perceptions in fiction are not entirely our own; they have been shaped for us, to a large extent, by the culture in which we live, in which rational, patriarchal discourse is upheld as the "normal" or "natural" one, and marginal discursive systems are silenced, ignored, or treated with skepticism. A narrator may speak from within the mainstream, or from the margins, and while we may respond differently depending on the position from which the story is told, we must remember, as we read, that no fiction can be "truer" than another, since both are literary creations and, in this sense, both are equally "unreal."

In Garro's "El duende," "La semana de colores," and "El robo de Tiztla", we are led to believe that we are dealing with a traditional narrative voice that will, ultimately, untangle the supernatural elements in the story and restore logic and reason to a world that has been turned upside down. In contrast to the characters in these stories who, as young girls, appear to be gullible and naive, the omniscient narrator strikes us as mature and worldly. We are led to believe that this narrator, unlike the characters, can distinguish "reality" from "fantasy." The girls may believe in fairies, ghosts, people who speak with the tongue of an animal, and other extraordinary beings but, the narrator suggests, we are not to take them seriously. We who have left our childhood behind can see (like the narrator) that the children are misreading information and arriving at the wrong conclusions; we laugh, along with the narrator, at their childish assertions and beliefs. An air of complicity is thus created in the tale between the narrator and an adult reader, which encourages us to distance ourselves from the characters and view them as incapable of perceiving or understanding "truth." It is as if we were sharing a joke with the one telling the story at the expense of those about

whom the story is being told. We are made to feel superior to the child characters, simply on the basis of our maturity and their lack of it. The narrator speaks with authority, with a voice that inspires trust and confidence. Naturally, we expect it to provide the answers to questions it raises in the text, and that these answers will uphold our traditionally-held beliefs about what is "possible" and "real."

There is, however, a degree of duplicity at work in each of these tales for, all the while the narrator is establishing complicity with us and encouraging us to feel superior to the characters, we are being slowly drawn into their world. The narrator's omniscience allows for the penetration of the children's thoughts and feelings. But this penetration, in effect, causes the focalization to shift, gradually and subtly, so that we are not immediately aware that a change in perspective has taken place. It is only when the story ends that we realize we are no longer looking at the events described in the text through the eyes of an adult narrator, but through the eyes of a narrator who sees the world as a child does. Contrary to our expectations, it is not the mainstream view of reality put forth by patriarchal society that triumphs but, rather, the worldview of the marginalized and disempowered. By supporting the children's point of view rather than our own, and by asserting that the children's perception of events is the correct one, the narrator forces us to re-evaluate the qualities we had attributed initially to the voice guiding us through the tale. It seems possible, after all, to question the reliability of a third person narrator, for the narrators we confront in Garro's stories are not beyond doubt or credulity. We doubt what we are told because it does not conform to our pre-established notions about the nature of the universe we inhabit, and because an empowered discourse has been appropriated by those who normally lack power. In other words, the tale is told in a way which seems "inappropriate" to us and it is, therefore, troublesome, regardless of how we choose to deal with it. If we dismiss this narrator as one who is unreliable, then we can no longer assume that third person narrators always "posit beyond doubt or credulity the characters and situations they create" (Martin, 142). This posture threatens to deconstruct the authority of the omniscient narrator in general, or the foundation on which a large body of our literature rests. If, on the other hand, we respect the narrator's authority and accept without question the truth of the story we are told, we will have to embrace a worldview which, we have been conditioned to believe, is not a valid one in our culture. This stance threatens to decenter patriarchal authority in another way, for it opens the doors to marginalized discourses and grants power to those whom the system has sought to exclude.

On the surface, Garro's stories about children and their special vision of the world offer us a nostalgic, often humorous look at childhood and provide us with some insight into the workings of a child's mind. Beneath the surface, however, they transcend their subject matter and become complex, intricately woven studies of the conflicting ways in which human beings perceive reality.

Garro attempts to redeem and give substance to a vision of the world which stands in opposition to that of mainstream society in order to subvert the notion that there is only one correct way to view reality. In order to realize this goal, a certain degree of duplicity must be used, since we would most likely resist the attempt if it were carried out in a more straightforward way. Instead, we are misled time and time again in Garro's stories and, ultimately, we are left to find our own answers to the questions raised in the text. But, by putting us in a position in which we ask questions about the experience of reading and examine the processes through which we grant authority or deny it to narrators, Garro has taken a step toward turning mainstream, patriarchal discursive practices inside out and creating a reverse discourse which speaks for those who are normally denied a voice.

Ocampo accomplishes a similar feat in her story, "El cuaderno," and uses a similar strategy to call our attention to phallogocentric reading practices, but by casting an adult female in the role played by Garro's child characters, she dramatizes the way in which an omniscient narrative voice can marginalize women and make us turn a blind eye to the ways in which a woman's conception of reality might differ from a man's. Here, as in Garro's tales, tension is created through the juxtaposition of opposing ideas about what is real and possible. The protagonist, a simple, working-class pregnant woman named Ermelina, believes that she can determine the way her baby will look if she stares long enough at a given image. She borrows a notebook from her neighbor's child which contains a picture of a blue-eyed, blond cherub, commits the picture to memory and, then, takes a bus to the hospital, where she promptly gives birth to the child. We are left behind in the apartment to chuckle at the note she leaves her husband, which reads:

El niño está por nacer, me voy a Maternidad, la sopa está lista, no hay más que calentarla para la hora de la comida, la figura que está en la hoja abierta de este cuaderno es igual a nuestro hijo, en cuanto la mires llévale a la señora Lucía que me lo ha prestado (74-75).

Up to this point in the narrative, the pregnant woman has been presented as a childlike, irrational being, and nothing has prepared us to think that the narrator might actually share her point of view. As in Garro's stories, the narrator has maintained a careful distance from the characters and, without clearly stating an opinion, has suggested that the women's ideas have no basis in reality. We imagine her husband's reaction to the note she has left, and we laugh, believing that is impossible for a woman to shape the physical image of her child by looking at a picture. But, the story ends with the narrator confirming that this is, indeed, what happened:

Entre envoltorios de llantos y pañales, Ermelina reconoció la cara rosada pegada contra las lilas del cuaderno. La cara era quizá demasiado colorada, pero ella pensó que tenía el mismo color chillón que tienen los juguetes nuevos, para que no se decoloren de mano en mano (76).

As was the case with Garro's stories, focalization in "El cuaderno" has gradually shifted from the eyes of an outside observer to those of Ermelina, thus making us see "reality" from her perspective and denying us access to any point of view that would contradict her impressions. It has been accomplished by duplicitous means, however, for if the narrator had begun the tale by establishing an obvious solidarity with the marginalized characters, our willingness to trust in the reliability of that narrator would have, no doubt, been diminished. With very little effort, the narrator manages to convince us in the early paragraphs of the text that Ermelina (and the other females in the story) are not to be taken seriously, because the foundation on which their "knowledge" rests is faulty. We, in turn, are quick to dismiss the women's ideas as "female nonsense" simply because their thinking is not based on masculine reason and logic. To reverse this tendency, or to make a space in the text in which Ermelina's perspective can be presented with any degree of authority, can only be done through subversive means. We must first be shown what we want to see, so that we can identify the narrator as one who is reliable and trustworthy. Once we believe that the narrator is going to tell us the truth, we no longer ask questions about the basis of the authority on which the narrative rests. We can, in this way, be led almost anywhere s/he wants to lead us. Only when our expectations are thwarted do we stop to examine how we have been taken in the wrong direction. We look more carefully at the narrator's words and try to see where s/he first began to trick us. If we continue to unravel the story all the way back to its beginning, we will ultimately end up with the question of why we were reluctant to see through Ermelina's eyes from the start. If her version of reality is the one which ultimately triumphs in the tale, why did we automatically suppose that a different vision of reality was more legitimate than hers? This question, and others like it, make us aware of why women must often struggle to be heard, and why so much literature written by women deals, in one way or another, with the need to deconstruct, decenter or subvert the narrative process, itself.

Jackson believes that fantastic fiction written by women has historically "constituted as much of a treat, in its own implicit way, to masculine culture as any explicit militancy against patriarchy's silencing and disempowering of women that these authors may have enacted on a social level. They are intimating a world, a consciousness, a reality, **larger** than the one that man has controlled" (xviii). She also notes that they are "attempting to find a language, a different literature, other than the one forged by men, to articulate senses and experiences which are frequently **beyond** words, beyond social definitions

altogether" (xviii). These observations, while true, cannot be limited exclusively to works written by women; obviously, the fantastic is cultivated by both male and female writers and, regardless of the gender of the author, it is a subversive type of literature that calls attention to the indeterminacy of man's relationship to a universe which he has so systematically attempted to order and bring under control. Whether the fantastic is more threatening when it issues from the pen of a woman is a question open to debate and merits further study. What is clear, however, is that women feel a strong attraction to the fantastic as a mode of expression precisely because it allows them to voice concerns about the way mainstream, patriarchal culture has traditionally limited their access to discursive power.

According to Kathleen B. Jones, "the dominant discourse on authority silences those forms of expression linked metaphorically and symbolically to 'female' speech," since "this discourse is constructed on the basis of a conceptual myopia that normalizes authority as a disciplinary, commanding gaze. Such a discourse secures authority by opposing it to emotive connectedness or compassion. Authority orders existence through rules. Actions and actors are defined by these rules" (120-121). It is perhaps not coincidental, then, that women writers turn to the fantastic in literature as a means of breaking those rules which not only define the basis of authority in our culture but also limit concepts such as "possible," "real," and "true" to that which has traditionally been visualized by men. Jones believes that "Female" hesitancy and other-oriented language patterns, considered as the marks of uncertainty or confusion, are derogated" in our patriarchal society (122), yet it is worth noting that the fantastic as a literary form validates language which gives rise to uncertainty, confusion, and hesitation as the very element which brings the genre into being. As feminists have shown us, "reason has been constructed as a masculine domain that is divorced from and deemed superior to the senses, emotion, and imagination" (Diamond and Quinby, xvi). The fantastic deconstructs this domain and interrogates the limits which have been imposed, not only on the way we think, but on the way we see, the way we use language, and the way we respond to literary texts. Clearly, the bonds between the fantastic, the questioning of patriarchal authority and the process by which it is granted to a speaker, the resistance to imposed order, rules, and limits, as well as the use of language to undermine the illusion that this imposed order is "natural" and "normal," are visible in the works we have examined here. This is not to suggest that women writers of the fantastic literally believe in the fantastic events they describe in their stories, nor should we assume that women, in general, accept the supernatural with the same ease as some of the characters in the narratives we have studied here. There is, in this kind of fiction, a notable desire to challenge the normalizing powers of patriarchal, mainstream literature, but to replace one system with another is merely to reinforce and promote the hierarchical thinking of the discursive system they wish to subvert. As Jackson has observed, the

fantastic is a "fiction dealing with an **extension** of the idea of what is possible or 'true'" (xvi) [emphasis mine]. Women writers who attempt to extend the definitions to include experiences that have traditionally been ignored or overlooked by rational discursive systems do not promote one way of looking at the world over another; instead, like some of the characters and narrators presented here, they explore the possibility that there may be multiple realities, multiple truths, and multiple interpretations of a single event, depending on the position from which one is looking and speaking

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