

## Authoring the Scene, Playing the Role: Mothers and Daughters in Griselda Gambaro's *La malasangre*

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One of the most respected playwrights in Argentina, Griselda Gambaro is perhaps best known for her four early plays: *El desatino*, *Las paredes*, *Los siameses*, and *El campo*, written and staged between 1963 and 1968. As these works indicate, her principal thematic concerns are oppression—political or interpersonal, direct or indirect—and our capacity to victimize others. Indeed, Gambaro maintains that the only two postures available to human beings are those of oppressor or oppressed (Magnarelli, "Interview" 821). She carries this notion further in some of her plays by dramatizing the possibility that one assumes the role of oppressor in response to one's prior experience as the oppressed. Nonetheless, Gambaro's early plays were criticized for her apparent lack of concern with the oppression of women. The playwright has responded, "para hablar de las mujeres no hay nada mejor que hablar de las relaciones entre los hombres" ("¿Es posible?" 21).<sup>1</sup> Significantly, however, her later works evince a higher incidence of female characters, a change that seems motivated by her recognition first, that our sociopolitical structures and their tendency for biological essentialism mark women as more likely victims of oppression, and second, that women rather than men might represent the norm, human beings in general, "everyperson."<sup>2</sup>

Particularly successful in bringing female characters from the wings to center stage are three of her works from the 1980s: *Real envido*, *La malasangre*, and *Antígona furiosa*. Although the immediate, historical referent for each is unquestionably the sociopolitical situation in Argentina during the 1970s, the plays also address the question of oppression in more universal terms.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, if indeed more subtly, all four also probe the position of women in contemporary society and portray the female as an actress. Although not always conscious of it, the woman in these Gambaro's works is inevitably compelled to assume a sociopolitically acceptable role predicated on oppression

and victimization, generally her own.<sup>4</sup> In the coming pages I would like to examine *La malasangre*, written in 1981 and staged in 1982. In it the two female characters serve dual functions. First, they depict "everyperson" and what Gambaro perceives as "everyperson's" alternately subject and object relation to oppression and the abuse of power. At the same time, however, they function as synecdoches, in both the biological *and* the sociopolitical realms, of what are specifically feminine roles, mother and daughter, roles which, as Gambaro demonstrates, are just that in the sociopolitical arena: parts to be played.<sup>5</sup> Gambaro is not to be accused of biological essentialism here, however, for her point is that although biological factors may mark the actor/actress's suitability for a given role, the role itself is still unquestionably superimposed, an assumed mask, created by and dependent on perceptions that have been framed and limited by an often unacknowledged agent (director/author).<sup>6</sup> And while dramatizing the role playing of the female characters, Gambaro subtly underscores the fallibility and fragility of the roles as author(iz)ed by our sociopolitical structures.<sup>7</sup> We find not only that we paradoxically perceive the "mother" role alternately as both the romanticized, perfect madonna (the ideal that Dolores perhaps would become) *and* the Freudian castrating mother (the reality that the mother seems to have become), but that the images themselves are projections, literary creations, author(iz)ed by either fear or wishful thinking. No female is either, yet every female at times assumes each of these antithetical roles.

Set around 1840 at the height of the Rosas's regime in Argentina, *La malasangre* is the dramatization of totalitarian power both inside and outside the family and again portrays the capacity of the victim to convert into victimizer. Although the entire play takes place within the family home (revealingly decorated completely in shades of red),<sup>8</sup> spectators soon learn that the father, ironically named Benigno, the good father/god, rules with an iron fist in both arenas. Outside he beheads "los salvajes, inmundos, asquerosos" (71) who oppose him, and their bloody heads, euphemistically dubbed melons, are paraded through the streets. Inside, with the help of his henchman Fermín, he tyrannizes his wife, daughter, and the latter's tutor. The play opens as Benigno is about to choose a new tutor for his daughter, Dolores. He selects Rafael from among the group of candidates, believing that his hunchback will prevent the wife and daughter from becoming physically attracted to him (as he suspects they were to the last tutor). Dolores's initial antagonism toward Rafael is followed by a series of antithetical gestures (often inherently theatrical) that sometimes would seduce him, sometimes spurn him. She eventually charms him into falling in love with her perhaps because as she had earlier acknowledged, "Basta que [mi padre] me prohíba una fruta para que me tiene comerla" (72). Although Rafael recognizes that she "se apasionó demasiado pronto" (81), he succumbs to the allure of her

plan to escape from the father's realm of influence to an idealized paradise across the river. The mother discovers their plans, reveals them to the father, and Rafael is killed. In the last scene his body is returned to Dolores, for which she is grateful, in a thinly veiled allusion to the disappeared in Argentina. Finally, having reviled the mother for her role in the atrocity, Dolores defies the tyrant himself, screaming that she is no longer afraid and hates him. She is dragged out of the room, and the play ends with the father's reference to the silence that remains after her prolonged scream.

Like *El despojamiento* and *Real envido*, *La malasangre* offers us a spectacle of the female characters in their roles as actresses, in both senses of the word, although in this play, the women's status as *dramatis personae* might be easily overlooked. Since their roles are precisely the ones we expect of women—mother and daughter—, we perceive them as "natural" and tend to forget they are roles. Nonetheless, in *La malasangre* the unnamed mother is a role player so completely absorbed in and by her role as victim, object of both physical and verbal violence and oppression, that she is seldom capable of perceiving the possibility of any other role for either herself or other women, including her daughter, part and potential mirror of herself. Like the young man of *Las paredes*, she would probably serve as her own jailer once the prison doors were opened. But the mother here is ostensibly even more despicable than the victimized protagonists we encounter in other Gambaro plays, for while they help no one, they harm only themselves, or so we might have been inclined to believe. Gambaro proposes here, however, that by passively accepting our role as victim on one stage (in this case in the family drama), we facilitate the continuation of that role either on another stage (the public, the national) or in another person when we readily convert into the oppressor or the oppressor's lackey, deluded into believing that by doing so we derive some of his power. Thus, when the mother of *La malasangre* does act, she betrays her daughter, bars her escape from that tyrannical environment, and perpetuates the system of oppression which also subjugates her.

More important in this work Gambaro dramatizes the link between political oppression outside the home and the oppression of women inside it. Etymologically the term *violence* is related to violation, and it is significant that in *La malasangre* much of the oppression and violence carries sexual, erotic overtones and borders on violation. In fact, the patriarch, the father, specifically employs erotic gestures to reduce his victims (male or female, political or interpersonal) to the (perceived) state of mindless, physical objects. He accomplishes this principally by the (mis)use or (mis)appropriation of ostensibly normal gestures that may not be immediately identifiable as oppressive. For example, laughter, normally a kinesic sign of merriment or delight, indicates both

violence and violation as it is employed here first by the father and later by the daughter. Spasmodic, almost machine-like, and forced, the father's laughter is juxtaposed with physical violence in the opening scene as Fermín brutally mistreats one of the candidates. Each successive time the father laughs, he intends to dehumanize or violate another character, often but not necessarily female. His ever inappropriate laughter functions to underline his own superiority and to objectify others as he converts them into inferior things, mere actors, almost automata on whom he can impose a role and whom he can direct, in the most theatrical sense.<sup>9</sup> Thus, he laughs as he orders his wife, "Traete tu bordado y sentate allí. . . . Pero te autorizo a ausentarte" (66), and later as he observes of her, "¡Es una buena oportunidad para que exista!" (91). Similarly, he laughs when he commands Rafael to disrobe and later when he forces him to dance with Fermín.

Furthermore, I would suggest that Benigno's laughter mirrors his propensity for decapitating his enemies, "los salvajes, inmundos, asquerosos" (71), that is, those he would deny the status of full personhood.<sup>10</sup> In this play, the decapitations literalize the perceived, metaphoric separation of mind and body which has structured Western thought since the time of the ancients and which in many ways parallels that of spirit and flesh (as religious discourse is wont to label it).<sup>11</sup> However we label it, the possession of a mind/spirit is presumed to distinguish the human being from the animal and the latter's implicit inferiority. Thus, on the one hand, the decapitations of the play signal censorship in so far as the tyrant denies the other the use of his/her head both literally and metaphorically. Without a head one cannot think, speak, see, hear. But at the same time, without a head one cannot be intellectual rather than carnal (*puta* as the father labels the mother), that is, have access to what is implicitly a superior category and full human status. In this respect, the father's laughter and statement to the mother that she should bring her embroidery but absent herself reinforce this separation by reminding her (and the spectator) that she is mere flesh, destined for mindless activities (embroidery). Even more revealing, this mindless activity, the embroidery, simultaneously, if indeed metaphorically, beheads her in another way, for it distracts her by keeping her from thinking ("te autorizo a ausentarte") and from seeing (other than her embroidery). In fact, in scene seven her concentration on her needlework prevents her from seeing Juan Pedro's erotic assaults on Dolores. Yet the mother apparently fails to recognize both the ploy and the role in which she is cast, the metaphoric decapitation (do not see, do not think, do not speak other than what the tyrant would have you think, speak, see) that disempowers her. But the metaphoric beheading is bidirectional and effects the other characters (as well as the spectator), for by means of her embroidery (literal or metaphoric) the mother becomes the agent

who perpetuates, albeit unwittingly, both the tyrant's mores and that which he would have others see. As we know, embroidery makes more esthetically pleasing, pretty, what is not. Such is precisely the function of her verbal embroidery when, in reference to the literal beheadings that Benigno frequently orders, she assures Dolores, "Quien te oye puede pensar que corta cabezas todo el día. Es bondadoso. *No le gusta hacerlo*. . . . Se le oponen y no lo dejan elegir" (84, emphasis added).<sup>12</sup> Obviously, her words here, like so many others in this text (melons, among them) fail to encompass reality. On the contrary they distract from, embroider, and cover that reality, for, as Benigno earlier stated, if indeed in another context, "yo ya elegí" (63). He does elect or choose, and what he chooses, metaphorically and literally, is his own head with its implicit superiority over the others whom he defines as mere (inferior) body. And, more specifically what he has overtly chosen here is the tutor, who in turn will act as his agent and presumably oversee, choose, what goes into Dolores's head. Thus, by means of both his laughter and the decapitations, Benigno author(ize)s his version of reality, the official one that affirms his superiority, his possession of a head. Similarly, Benigno metaphorically beheads the candidates in the opening scene. By discussing only their visible, physical attributes, he converts them into or perceives them as bodies separated from minds, and this in spite of the fact that they are potential tutors, not lovers: "Parece agradable"; "buen mozo"; "¡Te gusta la cara!" (60).

The sexual innuendoes and erotic gestures that punctuate the work highlight the similarities among the metaphoric decapitations. Indeed, Benigno emphasizes the affinity among the women and the other potential victims when he notes that Dolores "necesita una mano fuerte. . . . Mano fuerte en guante de seda. Es lo que necesitan las damas. . . . Y no sólo las damas" (89). And this strong hand in a silk glove often controls by means of gestures that eroticize the other, reducing him/her to a body without a mind. Significantly, although the play opens with a scene replete with Christian symbolism, the erotic soon comes to the forefront. Benigno, "enteramente inmóvil," looks out the window when the mother enters with wine, symbol of blood, perhaps hers, and utters the ambiguous words, "Acá está el vino."<sup>13</sup> Does "Acá está el vino"/sacrificial blood refer to the wine decanter or to herself, supplier of that sacrificial blood? His sarcastic response, "¿Por qué dos copas? ¿Quién bebe conmigo?" (59), not only reinforces her servitude and denies her equality with him but also provides the motif that will be kinesically repeated throughout the play as characters are elevated or demeaned in status according to whether they are allowed (almost ritualistically) to partake of wine or drink, suggesting perhaps that only those with heads can drink.<sup>14</sup> Metaphorically, she may be the bearer of the wine/sacrificial blood, but she is not allowed to participate in the ritual by consuming it or receiving its

benefits, for she is perceived as carnal (body/matter) rather than intellectual or spiritual (head/mind).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, his sarcastic question to the mother about who will drink with him is followed by the words, "Mejor que no pienses," as he metaphorically "beheads" her again, perceives her solely as a biological role, flesh. The erotic is further foregrounded with his gesture of physical violation, "*Le toca un seno groseramente*" (60), as he ironically calls her "Mi mujercita sagaz," doubly emphasizing her corporeality and lack of mind or intellect. His fear that she might find one of the candidates attractive leads him to call her a *puta* (60) and decree that she will look only at his face.

Thus, while casting her as mere biological, unthinking presence, he would control not only her actions but also her field of vision; like Natán of *Real envido*, she will see only what the "king" decrees.<sup>16</sup> And what the king decrees is that she see, focus on, only his face, his head, the fact that he has a mind (and by implication the status of full personhood) he would deny her. The motif of fields of vision (perceptions) and their limitation by the despot evokes the overt issue of censorship as well as the more covert issue of how we see or perceive anything, of how perspective or vision (for example, our image of mothers and daughters and their respective roles, again as bodies, physically defined, rather than as minds, philosophically or psychologically defined) is limited, defined, and controlled by sociopolitical institutions (Church, State, educational systems). In her assigned role, *puta*, the mother will say and see only what Benigno deems appropriate. But in fact, the framing, the limitation of perception extends far beyond his immediate control over the mother. When Benigno first calls the mother a *puta* in the opening moments of the play, certainly spectators can see that it is he who behaves lasciviously, not her. Nonetheless, the imputation of the epithet *puta* to her tends to shift the perceptual frame (as it does in real life) and encourage spectators to shift the blame along with it and view her rather than him as licentious and reprehensible. As he states, "Yo dicto la ley" (60). His word is law, the official version; all shall be seen as he dictates.<sup>17</sup> But, the dictation/diction precedes the law; the word precedes the fact. Thus, he encourages all to perceive her according to his terms, that is in strictly erotic terms, without a head.

In this way, the term *puta* here not only leads us to focus on the mother's carnality and guilt, but also calls to mind her capacity to "sell out," to be a willing collaborator with the despot. But what Gambaro dramatizes here is a metonymic inversion, for 1) collaboration has been confused with and projected as the erotic, and 2) at this point, her complete collaboration is still wishful thinking, projection on his part, for while she is subservient and obeys *for the most part*, she does not directly collaborate until the end, and even then as we shall see, not quite completely. Nonetheless, and unlike the male collaborator

Fermín (who is never referred to in erotic terms), the female collaborator is "feminized down to the very bottom [of the ladder of hierarchically ordered positions in relation to the ultimate power], the place of the prostitute" (Kappeler, 155). In *Real envido* (written the year before *La malasangre*) Gambaro has demonstrated that the use of the same term to refer to unrelated signifiers leads us to confuse the two and erroneously impute all the qualities of one to the other.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, one of the problems with metaphors is that we tend to perceive only similarities and lose sight of the differences. Similarly, here Benigno's use of *puta* in reference to her "willing" sell out, carries with it and inflicts on her all the erotic connotations of the word, erotic connotations that are not valid but which serve to degrade her more as they cast the shadow of blame and prurience on her while deflecting attention from his responsibility. As Susanne Kappeler has noted,

the willing victim is termed whore, a name of unambiguous femininity. We use the term prostitution metaphorically to describe collaboration, libertinism, selling out. The different terms in this system of masculine semantics carry different connotations, in particular, connotations of differing degrees of blame. This naming is based on the look at the represented scenario, with the customary focus on the hero and his objectified victims, . . . and so leads to the absurdity of blaming the victim for taking a certain attitude . . . she bears the burden of prostitution because she chooses to collaborate. . . . Responsibility has been hidden in favour of blame. . . . The categories of slave-complement to the master, of the woman-masochist-complement to the male sadist, are the result of conditioning . . . an invention and creation of the master-mind. They may be presumed strategies for survival, but they are engendered by the master plot, with which the responsibility remains. They are not in any proper sense of the word choices. (152)

In this way Benigno casts the mother in the erotic role to degrade her and keep her in her place while metaphorically washing his hands of his responsibility for her degraded position and his role in it as he would lead all to view her role (*puta*, carnality incarnate) as "natural." Thus, again Gambaro highlights what happens when the tyrant imposes (and others accept) metaphors that are only half valid: others are blinded into seeing only half-truths, framed segments of the larger picture, which benefit those in power and elide (remove from the frame) their responsibility in acts of oppression.

Significantly, this pattern of reducing the other to mindless flesh is repeated in scene seven. This time the agent is Juan Pedro and the object, the daughter Dolores (who is soon to be his wife): "*le toca brutalmente un seno*" (91), "*toca a Dolores como alguien que aprovecha burdamente la ocasión*" (94), "*se le tira encima. La toca brutalmente*" (100), "*toma la mano de Dolores y se la aprieta contra el sexo*" (101). The repetition of the kinesic signs emphasizes the similarities between the father and the suitor. Specifically, Benigno has chosen (again note he is always the one who chooses/elecs) the suitor who, with his daughter, will form the future couple, the future mother and father, and who, like Benigno, will decorate his house entirely in red and control every aspect of their shared life. Juan Pedro even assures Dolores that her tutor is "superfluo. Ya sabe lo que una mujer debe saber y el resto . . . se lo enseñaré yo" (101)--that is, her "head" will be controlled by him, now taken out of the father's hands and placed in his. Juan Pedro's lewd, brutally lascivious gestures toward her mirror Benigno's toward the mother and similarly function to reduce her to an erotic object, a toy, each time his "audience" (the mother) looks away and he can drop his mask of ideal suitor. His physical "attacks," like the father's laughter and metaphoric beheadings, function like the internal frame in René Magritte's painting *Les liaisons dangereuses*. In that canvas another painting/mirror within the painting frames the female subject in such a way that only her naked body is visible; her head is "elided," left outside the frame, ostensibly of no relevance.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the "framing gestures" of both men in the Gambaro play would remind mother and daughter alike of their incompleteness, that they are flesh, body not mind, and specifically flesh that is vulnerable to the attacks of the patriarch or patriarch-to-be. As Dolores is repeatedly sexually assailed by Juan Pedro while her mother "absents herself" in her embroidery (also metaphorically leaving her head outside the frame), Gambaro has Dolores respond to Juan Pedro's suspended "No sabía . . ." with "Yo tampoco. Me parecía que todos los hombres eran tontos y serviles. Ahora comprendo. . . . Que nada es tan simple como uno cree. Y nada tampoco tan complicado" (100-101). She indirectly acknowledges that her father is not unique, that his erotic aggression toward her mother epitomizes a pattern that conflates the terms of eroticism and victimization and spills over into the public arena. But like her mother in her role of blindness, Dolores "plays dumb," consciously assumes the role of the mindless fool, already "decapitated": "Rodeada estoy de imbéciles/y simulo que soy tonta/los imbéciles me creen/y me hago la marmota" (89).

Thus, in the society portrayed in which the powerful males are ever willing to oppress others through the instrument of the erotic (a separation of mind and body), to be a female in the private sector (in the family) is to be perceived only in the physical role, as a body without a mind.<sup>20</sup> Whether mother or daughter



(preparing to assume the role of wife and mother), the female is cast into a carnal role, labeled and metaphorically perceived as *puta*. In this manner, Gambaro demonstrates how language is used to violate by imposing metaphoric blindness. The powerful devise linguistic frames that behead both viewer and viewed and encourage us to see the female only as body, the erotic incarnate. Thus violence, aggression, and oppression are camouflaged, veiled under the guise of eroticism. At the same time, Gambaro theorizes that our fields of vision are inexorably controlled as some members of society are "marked" for victimization. As Dolores ironically notes, "Sólo el poder otorga una pureza que nada toca" (99). Notably, the "imperfect," "impure" other is marked by either excess or deficiency, often biological since the biological is the most visible. As females, Dolores and her mother are perceived as biologically lacking (not male) and thus suitable victims of oppression which will manifest itself first in the arena of eroticism and then in more general terms. Similarly, because of his biological excess, his hunchback, Rafael is also marked as a suitable recipient of oppression even though he is male. Thus, Benigno treats Rafael as he does his wife, framing and foregrounding his carnality and imperfection. Their first scene together is punctuated with erotic undertones as Benigno presses Rafael into a role of inferiority, carnality, and submission, demanding, "(. . . *casi lascivo*) Desnúdese" (63). Later the "request" is repeated in similar terms: "(*Vagamente lascivo*) ¿Y . . . y lo que le pedí . . . ? (*Bajo*) Desnúdese" (64). Of course, once his "desire" is fulfilled, that is, once Rafael has submitted to his vaguely erotic request and unveiled his "excess," his hunchback, Benigno assures him, "Me da asco" (65).<sup>21</sup> Lest we fail to recognize the use of ostensibly erotic gestures as means of oppression here, Gambaro underlines the issue of the erotic by having the father hum his refrain, "La madre se me calienta, la hija se me enamora," almost immediately. Later, Benigno casts Rafael in the role of the "female" (mere body, inferior or insignificant) to humiliate him in scene five where he forces him to "dance" with Fermín.

Again, Gambaro portrays this biological essentialism as a form of linguistic and mental framing that encourages us to perceive the other as an object, a body without a head, as in the Magritte painting. Significantly, however, the decapitation is bidirectional. Not only is the victimized other metaphorically beheaded, but the observer is also blinded, made incapable of seeing. Just as the father would limit and control the mother's field of vision as he casts her in the role of *puta*, his epithet shapes our perception of her. Similarly, the father's repetition of the refrain, "La madre se me calienta, la hija se me enamora" (62, 65), comments on the patriarchal perception of female sexuality. The young woman, the daughter, "falls in love," while the older woman, the mother, "becomes sexually aroused." The suggestion is that the patriarch perceives the

two expressions as signifiers of the same responses or emotions, separated only by time. Yet the tune, coupled with his previous jealousy, evokes interesting possibilities. By using *me* in each of the propositions, he places himself as the indirect object, suggesting that the daughter's love and the mother's passion are both somehow related to him, although it is not clear whether he has motivated their responses, will suffer/enjoy the results of those responses, is simply acknowledging his authorship of the respective roles, or some combination of the above. At any rate the juxtaposition of the two erotic propositions posits a close, almost mirror relation between the two female characters, a bond cemented by their individual relations (implicitly erotic) to him. Although we expect a close relation between a mother and a daughter, we do not expect that it will be depicted in terms of sexuality, nor that the fulcrum of that bond will be the father/husband. And yet, how many psychological schools have told us just that as they have expressed the relation between mother and daughter in terms of competition for the paternal phallus?<sup>22</sup>

Gambaro posits a new twist to this concept, however. *La malasangre* acknowledges the competition between the two women as they alternate in their collaboration with the despot, but Gambaro proposes a different basis for that competition and shows that it is not limited to women. The play emphasizes that the competition is merely perceived in sexual terms because the patriarchy ascribes sexual terminology to non-sexual situations, thus framing and controlling perceptual fields in order to reduce the other to the status of inferiority, carnality, potential victim. The play dramatizes, however, that the competition between mother and daughter is not for the "phallus" or sexual favors of the father (which may well be wishful thinking on the part of the patriarchy). Here the spectator finds no Electra complex, penis envy, or desire for the phallus, à la Freud and Lacan. While the competition may seem to manifest itself in these terms because of what we have been taught to perceive (in this case by the patriarch who has set the scene in motion and framed it to his advantage), the competition is in fact based on a desire for some of the power and status he has, luxuries (including a mind and the status of full personhood) that one might acquire by identifying closely with the ruling class. In this respect, the mother parallels the father's henchman, Fermín, the father's ally, ever ready to perform his "dirty work," often conceiving of it even before the father does, for both support the oppressor and perpetuate his oppression on others and, by implication, themselves in the hope (delusion) of acquiring some of his power.<sup>23</sup> Of course, the difference is again one of perception, naming, and framing, for, while Fermín is seen as a henchman or collaborator, the mother is imaged as the more gender specific and erotically defined *puta* that "se me calienta." On the other hand, the daughter, while often equally complicitous, is viewed as "daddy's little girl." She is more easily

controllable, and, since she is not yet fully developed in erotic terms, rather than being sexually aroused, she "falls in love," preferably with someone in daddy's image and chosen by him (as Juan Pedro is). Her acknowledged inferiority and submissiveness to the despot saves her from decapitation and "carnalization" by the father but not by the future husband.<sup>24</sup> Thus early in the play the daughter identifies closely with the father when her "authority" has been challenged by Rafael. In those scenes she openly assumes the role of "daddy's little girl," reverts to childish actions and speech (thus paradoxically marking not only her identification with him but also her submissive position) and attempts to be supported by or vicariously acquire some of his power and authority. When she cannot speak directly from his place, she resorts to the childish, "feminine" charms (theatrical role) she has been taught to "direct" his speech and actions.

In this manner, Gambaro underscores the metonymic inversions on which two (perhaps universal) misconceptions are based. The female characters desire not the father himself (any more than the male characters, Fermín or Rafael, do here) but what he symbolizes: economic security, status (including full personhood), power, and the right to choose. And, by means of this family drama which becomes a national drama, Gambaro demonstrates that some of the actions we have been taught to perceive as erotic are, like rape, aggressive acts of oppression and dominance, intended to demote the other (usually female but not necessarily) to an object (body), marked by either excess or deficiency in comparison to the established, if indeed arbitrary, norm.

Ultimately, the opening scenes, like the scene of the dance where the father controls the rhythm of their movements and their partners, illustrate the relation between the all-powerful father and his subordinates, particularly women, whom he continually objectifies by negating their separate and independent existence as he controls their every move (their bodies) as well as their discourse. As Dolores recognizes, "Pero mi padre odia todo placer que no provenga de él. Como no puede dar placer, da odio. Y lo llama amor. . . . Y lo más curioso es que . . . también [mi madre] llama amor al odio de mi padre. Y a veces . . . hasta yo lo llamo de la misma manera" (95). Her observation reflects the vast range of the father's influence and control as well as the similarities between mother and daughter. In addition, it verbalizes her own ambivalent position as she alternately embraces her father's mores, playing the role of pampered, dutiful daughter, metaphorically dancing to his beat, and defies those mores. In spite of appearances to the contrary, then, Dolores mirrors her mother as well as her father. Like the mother, she too assumes the assigned role in the father's presence and is sometimes complicitous in the oppression (hers and others) and sometimes rebellious. Although the father's label *puta* encourages spectators to think of the mother as despicable and totally under his control and

although she is generally visibly obedient, hesitant, and self-effacing, like daughter, she at times does attack or defy the patriarch. For example, in response to his epithet, *puta*, she hurls, "¡y no me insultes!" (60). When challenged, she softens the imperative to, "Te pedí que no me insultes," but the assertive words have already been spoken and cannot be taken back any more than they can later when Dolores recognizes that Rafael has been beaten because of her words. We witness in both female characters, then, an ambivalence, a fluctuation between two levels of discourse and thus two levels of acting between which "No hay límites claros" (67). By staging this fluctuation, Gambaro subtly destabilizes our perception of the roles and the sociopolitical structures on which they are based as well as our confidence in what (we think) we see, "reality" as framed by the patriarch. Thus the roles as author(iz)ed continually crack, for both female characters are alternately victim and victimizer. Surely, Gambaro's point is to demonstrate how Benigno accomplishes this without seeming to. He would have others perceive their roles (as either victim or victimizer) as inherent or "natural" to them and not author(iz)ed by him, "*como si . . . no tuviera nada que ver con él*" (91-92).

The mother's subsequent utterances continue to allude to her dual role, foreshadow the conclusion of the play, and again evoke the similarities between mother and daughter. Banished from Benigno's presence in the first scene, she pauses at the door to observe softly, "Te odio" (61), words that anticipate Dolores's in the final scene. When confronted by Benigno, she recants with "No quise decirlo," again heralding the final scene when she suggests to Dolores that she did not mean to do what she did: "¡Se me escapó todo de las manos!" (108); similarly, Dolores surely did not mean for Rafael to be killed in the end. When Benigno applies more physical force, the mother recapitulates completely with "Te amo"; that is, she tells him what he wants to hear just as she will in the end. Obviously, the father can and will use his authority, in the form of physical violence if necessary, to control the discourse of others, so that he will hear only what he wants to hear: "Yo tampoco entiendo lo que no me gusta oír" (61), as he will in the final moments of the work when he silences his daughter. But let us not forget that he may be able to silence the women, but, in the process, they have both already spoken the destabilizing words, "Te odio," and, once uttered, those words cannot be erased. The silence that oxymoronically shouts at the conclusion is surely the echo of what the despot did not want to hear, the unwanted element which encroaches into his painstakingly framed world and threatens to undermine it, and which, once articulated, must leave its trace.

Thus, the play suggests that the two antithetical role models for women as scripted by the patriarch and Western civilization, one embodied by the mother (*puta*/castrating mother) and one by the daughter ("daddy's little girl"), may be

less diametrically opposed than might be immediately apparent. In different ways both would (perhaps must) collaborate with the tyrant, assume the role he assigns them. For that reason the mother's entrance is fraught with signifiers of her denigrated and abased position. She appears powerless before the father and, except for the gestures of defiance already noted, generally seems either impotent or unwilling to break out of the role he has assigned her. Dolores's first appearance on stage contrasts sharply with her mother's role of timidity, self-doubt, and self-effacement. She is defiant ("*lo mira desafiante*" 66), outspoken ("Dolores es . . . ' . . . Como soy'"), and intentionally rude to Rafael as she alludes to his servility and his defect: "Es mejor morir de hambre que aceptar lo que no merecemos. . . . O lo que merecemos por taras" (67). The last statement may be equally intended to refer to her mother and her subservient position since her next speech is punctuated with irony and insults for her mother: "Papá es demasiado bondadoso. (*Con una sonrisa torcida*) Ya lo verá usted. Una bondad desbordante como un río . . . (*borra la sonrisa*) que ahoga. Mamá te mandaron a buscar tu bordado. Y todavía estás acá. ¡Vaya, perrito!" (67).<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, Dolores's ostensible dissimilarity from her mother in terms of strength and overt hostility is the result of her comprehension of the differences between the mother and father and her desire to "disidentify" herself from the former. She cannot (or will not) identify with that debased character any more than the spectator can. As a result, Dolores logically identifies more with the father; she may hate what he does and the fact that he cuts off the heads of those who oppose him, silencing them as he silences the women, but his position is still preferable to that of her mother. Her identification with the tyrant may manifest itself as defiance of him and the oppression of others (Rafael, her mother, and at moments even Fermín) but her motivation mirrors her mother's, for both would acquire some of his power, speak from his place, follow his model. Still, their choice of a role model is predicated on no choice.

Thus, we find in Dolores's initial actions a strong tendency to imitate the father even in her early treatment of her mother. Since they are both women—biologically similar—and both victims of the patriarchal despotism—socially similar—one might expect some form of identification between the two, some measure of camaraderie, but the opposite is true since Dolores would step out of the mirror and "disidentify" with her mother and her fate.<sup>26</sup> Thus, her behavior wavers between her defiance and her imitation of the father, his cruelty, lying, and pretense as indicated by the stage directions that refer to her sweet hypocrisy: "*con una dulzura venenosa*" (69), "*con sospechosa dulzura*" (84), "*con fingida dulzura*" (88), "*con una sonrisa almibarada*" (89), "*con dulzura venenosa*" (91). At other times her discourse is punctuated by kinesics designated only by the term, *dulcemente* (73, 80, 83), a sweetness which

directly emulates the father's behavior, also frequently marked by the directions, "*dulcemente*," "*con dulzura*," or "*dulce*" (60, 61, 65, 75, 89, 93), and evokes the sweet "melons," heads severed from bodies. Dolores would cast herself not as his victim but in his role. Again, Gambaro reminds us of the potential for violence, aggression, and cruelty in us all, even those of us who mirror the victim as the daughter mirrors the mother (in spite of the former's refusal of that identity) as well as our potential for misreading the signs of sweetness, perhaps just as we often misread the signs of eroticism. All is often not what it seems; we consistently (mis)recognize our identity with the victim, a (mis)recognition that leads us to (mis)identify with the oppressor.

But stage directions calling attention to Dolores's feigned sweetness diminish as the work progresses, and she seems to become less imitative of her father. At the end of scene two, not irrelevantly, the scene where Fermín presents her with a sweet, bloody melon, Dolores causes Rafael to be beaten. Rafael had rejected her advances and not allowed her to play (in either sense of the word) with him; specifically and not unlike her father, what she wanted to "play" were erotic games. Angry, she assumes the role of indulged child, but her recognition of the consequences of her role playing produces a change in her demeanor from scene three on as her rebellion takes a new tack, and her "sweet hypocrisy" is limited to her interactions with her father or her suitor, Juan Pedro. At the same time her discourse toward Rafael and her mother (before the final scene, of course) becomes less antagonistic. Inversely, her mother's attitude toward her becomes increasingly assertive and finally openly inimical, a change visually, if indeed metaphorically evoked in the action which opens scene four: "*La madre sostiene un vestido entre los brazos, Dolores, en enaguas, tararea. Cuando la madre se acerca con el vestido y lo acomoda para que coloque la cabeza, Dolores se inclina y sale por el otro lado. Da vueltas tarareando*" (83). In this manner, the kinesic indicators evoke the adversarial inclination that informs their relationship and more subtly, more metaphorically, Dolores's interest in keeping her head out of her mother's hands.

The bases for this change are multiple. First, the mother knows that Dolores has caused Rafael to be beaten and openly criticizes her for it, "No debiste hacerlo" (76), even as she recognizes, "hay muchas maneras de golpear." At the same time, the mother may fear Dolores's growing power which has resulted from her (mis)identification with the father and her play acting, fear that this power, which Dolores has already (mis)used against Rafael, may be directed towards herself. At the same time, Dolores may provide a mirror in which she recognizes her own debauched identification with the father. It is at the start of scene three that Dolores's ambivalence towards her mother and vice versa is most apparent, for here, after each insult, Dolores uncharacteristically begs her to stay

rather than ordering her out of the room as she so frequently does. Yet each of these requests is answered with a curt, "No."

It is not until the final scene, however, that the mother overtly adopts Fermín's role as the father's henchman. Yet she answers Dolores's charges that she denounced them with "Pensé que era mejor" (106), words that recall the opening moments of the play and the father's perhaps all too premonitory reprimand to the mother, "Mejor que no pienses." After Dolores assumes the father's role and metaphorically beheads the mother, "Si nunca pensaste nada. ¿'Cuándo' empezaste a pensar? ¿Para qué?" (106), she articulates her perception of the betrayal and the competition: "Envidiosa. Aceptaste todo desde el principio, envidiosa de que los otros vivan. No por cariño. Miedo. Tímida de todo. A mí me hiciste esto. Miedo de vivir hasta a través de mí. Humillada que ama su humillación" (106). Ironically, Dolores, who has repeatedly (mis)treated her mother according to the father's example, nonetheless, expects more from her, expects the protection and camaraderie that she herself has been unwilling to offer. Thus, she emulates the father whose epithet *puta* projects the blame on the other as it absolves the self. Inversely, by having the mother respond with words that echo the father's ("No quiero oírte, no entiendo"), Gambaro again highlights the capacity of both women alternately to be victimized by, yet (mis)identify with, the tyrant, speak from his place. Although Rafael is dead, Dolores's defiance, her rebellion against her father, continues at the conclusion, manifest not only in her words, but also in that fact that it is now she who laughs rather than he as she affirms her right to see and speak (metaphorically she affirms her possession of a head). She now kinesically evokes her sense of superiority and degrades, dehumanizes him. Her laughter is followed by her use of the diminutive, *papito*, used with disrespect, not affection, and by her declaration, "¡En mí y conmigo, nadie ordena nada . . . Ya no tengo miedo! ¡Soy libre!" (109).<sup>27</sup> Tragically, however, the price of her freedom is death, literal or metaphoric, hers or Rafael's, for as the earlier scene with the dead bird suggested, the patriarchy can surround itself only with what is already dead, metaphorically or in fact. At the same time I would again note the similarities, albeit unwitting, between father and daughter. For example, in spite of the mother's rhetorical embroidery to the contrary, when Benigno "chooses," someone dies, someone is beheaded; and someone dies the two times Dolores "chooses" in this play: the former tutor, chosen by Dolores, has "disappeared" from the scene, and Rafael, with whom she "chose" to escape, also dies.

To date critics have read the conclusion of the play with optimism, proposing that Dolores will break the pattern of oppression.<sup>28</sup> They view her, unlike her mother, as having undergone a "spiritual" conversion that will allow her to be free because she is not afraid. Indeed, Gambaro's words on the back

cover of the Ediciones de la Flor edition suggests that she meant for it to be read in that way: "quise contar una historia que transitara esa zona donde el poder omnímmodo fracasa siempre si los vencidos lo enfrentan con coraje y dignidad, si se asumen en el orgullo y en la elección."<sup>29</sup> And although I certainly would agree that in the final moments, after Dolores has realized the tyrant's power to *hurt her* (if indeed in the body of Rafael) rather than someone else, she does manage to "recapitate" herself, get her head back so that she can think, see, speak, I find little in the play to encourage us to believe that she will continue to speak significantly more loudly than her mother whose occasional defiance of the father has accomplished little other than to victimize her more. In fact, the play concludes after Dolores has been dragged out of the room, perhaps to her own death, imprisonment, or "disappearance," and the father/despot remains on stage, alone and unmoving as in the beginning. Little has changed.

Furthermore, I find nothing in the text to suggest that, had Dolores been able to escape to the "paradise" across the river, she would have produced a significantly different structure, for as Peggy Kamuf has argued, "Unlike material conversion, which is the process of transforming one substance into another, spiritual conversion can only be understood as the function of a reevaluation, that is, it is not the terms themselves which are changed but the values or meanings assigned to them: negative value replaces positive value or positive negative" (22-23). I propose, then, to look more closely at Dolores's conversion, read less optimistically. As noted, although early in the play Dolores frequently imitates her father, she later abandons this ploy and attempts to rebel against him with Rafael, who is in every way her father's opposite; his deformed body defies the beauty of classical, symmetrical form, but he is beautiful on the "inside," morally good or so the later scenes of the play would lead us to believe. The two would escape to a place across the river where nothing is painted red, and silence is not imposed (102): "Donde nos sirvan dos tazas de chocolate y podamos beberlas. Donde no griten melones y dejen cabezas. Donde mi padre no exista. Donde por lo menos el nombre del odio sea odio" (96). While we would definitely want to support Dolores's agenda here, we must not be overly simplistic about it. It is not irrelevant that in order to author(ize) her Eden across the river, Dolores would have to assume what had been her father's position at the start of the play—theatrical director—certainly with more benevolent goals, but director nonetheless. As the quotation indicates, she would escape to or create a world where she, rather than her father, would author(ize) actions, speeches, and existence. She would assume not the role he has assigned her but the role he has deemed his own, that of author/director. But with what model or experience would she accomplish this? Mother? Father? Fermín? Rafael? Note too that like her father's mandates, her statements tell less what she will do across the



river than what "they," someone else will do: serve, not shout and leave, not exist. I suggest then that Dolores's lack of role models, her ignorance of how to do otherwise or be different from her father (or for that matter, her mother) would cripple her even if she could reach her paradise across the river.

It cannot be irrelevant that when Dolores first appears on stage, the stage directions refer to her "*fragilidad que vence a fuerza de orgullo, de soberbio desdén*" (66) and describe her as "*desafiante*." At the end we find the following stage directions in reference to her: "*salvaje . . . masculla con un odio contenido y feroz. . . Furiosa. . . Ríe, estertorosa y salvaje. . . Desafiante*" (109-10, emphasis added). Again, little has changed since the opening of the play, and her role here differs little from that of defiance in the beginning, although she has unquestionably graduated from "daddy's little girl." But since Benigno thrives on beheading the salvajes (as she is twice described) who defy him, she certainly is/will be beheaded, metaphorically if not literally: she is silenced and her body (the physical) is dragged off stage as Benigno glances at the body of Rafael and utters the final words, "Qué silencio . . ."—surely one imposed by him with his final metaphoric beheading.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that Dolores has undergone several "mini conversions" throughout the course of the play but always reverts to her former, oppressive behavior. For example, in scene three she is first disparaging toward Rafael in spite of the fact she has caused him to be beaten, then apologetic, then antagonistic again. And although in some of the later scenes she seems to empathize more with her mother, her treatment of her in the last scene surely echoes the father's: she orders her out of the room, demands she stop crying, and hurls the designation "algodón sucio" at her. Like the father's *puta* this epithet suggests collaboration, unchasteness, and guilt (the mother's). To further emphasize that the blame lies with the mother, Dolores accuses, "A mí me hiciste esto" (106). While I certainly concur with Gambaro and her critics that for Dolores to break the silence is a first and crucial step toward significant change, that step is neither easily nor quickly accomplished. On the contrary, it is a difficult, lengthy, and prolonged step (as is the final scream), and more important, only the first of many. Still this first step (like the play itself) is one that calls for a reassessment of the ways we use language and of the extent to which we alternate as its subjects/agents and as its direct or indirect objects.

Furthermore, the relationship between Rafael and Dolores, the potential future family unit, is not to be romanticized. Although toward the end their relationship appears to be of fairy tale dimensions, it has in fact been based on a struggle for dominance and control, just as all the depicted relationships are. Early in the play, Dolores mocks and degrades Rafael, and later he, her. At their first meeting, she is openly hostile to him for no apparent reason other than to

demonstrate her superiority. Although he initially resists her erotic advances (which mirror the father's) as well as her reduction of him to an inferior role or "juguete" (81), he eventually succumbs to her, as he did to the father. In both cases his initial negatives evolve into acquiescence: he repeats the words each wants to hear and performs the acts (perhaps in the most theatrical sense) each wants to see. In this respect, although the roles might be inverted, it seems their relationship would differ little from that between the parents or even between Rafael and Benigno. Indeed, in Rafael's last appearance alive on stage he literally puts his head in Dolores's hand: as the stage directions note, "*Dolores extiende la mano hacia el rostro de Rafael. La deja inmóvil en el aire. Rafael se inclina y apoya su rostro en la mano*" (104, emphasis added). Revealingly this action is preceded by his statement, "no sólo te elijo a vos, elijo cabezas sobre los hombros . . ." (104), a verbatim repetition of Dolores's earlier words, thereby signaling her success at casting him in the desired role. This less ideal aspect of the liaison between Dolores and Rafael is elided or forgotten later in their more idyllic love scenes, as it often is in the world outside the theatre too. We all want to find fairy tale endings even if we have to distort events to engineer them. We want comedy (cf. the father's laughter) even when there is only tragedy. At the same time, although the new couple gives lip service to equality and non-oppression, it seems likely that Dolores would impose her will, assuming the father's role and speaking from his place as she disidentifies with and distances herself from her mother and her role as the oppressed. Even if the gender roles of power could have been inverted in the "paradise" across the river, there seems little reason to conclude that the structure would alter significantly. Dolores perhaps is truly her father's daughter as her laughter at the end may reflect. But how can it be otherwise? From where would she have learned any other behavior? She recognizes the evil of her father's ways (or even her mother's) but has no models by means of which to overcome them effectively.

But even this reading of the play errs by omission and utopian blinders, for it is important to recognize that while Rafael is unequivocally a victim here, like both mother and daughter, he is not incapable of violence and aggression himself, for like them he too lacks positive role models. In scene two he strikes Dolores and in scene three, "*La sujeta con violencia por el hombro para que se siente*" (79). Surely, no character in the world of *La malasangre* is without sin; all are capable of cruelty and violence to the other. All would speak from the father's place, assume his role in both the microcosm of the family and the macrocosm of the larger sociopolitical situation, national or international. Gambaro's world is not divided into "good guys" and "bad guys"; all characters are both, enmeshed in that human inertia which Gambaro has so frequently criticized: "Yo digo que el hombre . . . es un ser muy pasivo a quien le cuesta asumir su responsabilidad

con respecto a los otros y con respecto a sí mismo. . . . Siempre me preocupó eso de encerrarse y no asumir la responsabilidad que tenemos, porque esa actitud nos lleva a la destrucción y a la muerte" (*Teatro* 28). Thus, if there is any conversion on the part of Dolores, it rests in her final assumption of her responsibility in Rafael's death and her recognition that nothing can change until the punishment "belongs" to someone, in some sense to us all as we waver between victim and victimizer, ignorant of any other way to be. As Dolores says in response to her mother's "Se me escapó de las manos," "es lo que pasa, se escapa todo de las manos y el castigo no pertenece a nadie. Entonces, uno finge que no pasó nada. . . . E ignora su propia fealdad" (108). Thus, Gambaro proposes, it is essential to recognize and accept responsibility for the metaphoric beheadings that deprive others of their personhood and not mimic Juan Pedro whose response to his lascivious brutality toward Dolores (his metaphoric beheading of her) is to act "*como si el gesto no hubiera tenido nada que ver con él*" (91-92). Dolores, on the other hand, does seem to assume her responsibility in the end even as she recognizes "No bastaba pegarte, jorobadito. *Pero no fue por tu joroba. Todos debemos vivir de la misma manera. Y quien pretende escapar, muere*" (109, emphasis added). As I earlier posited, the physical, biological mark is just an arbitrary designation of a victim, but one from which the tyrant will let no one escape alive, with personhood intact.

Although both mother and daughter are decidedly victims, products of an oppressive society, created by and for it, Gambaro underscores the ambiguity of women or men who eternally face equally negative alternatives. For example, in spite of the betrayal which leads to Rafael's death and Dolores's despair, the mother is not without some human decency and redeeming value as is evidenced in the final moments when the father raises his hand to strike Dolores, saying, "¡Te moleré a golpes!" (110). At this moment the mother intercedes and receives the blow intended for Dolores, significantly the only blow throughout the work that the father delivers himself. Any grace she might have been afforded by this act of generosity, however, is soon dissipated as she then helps Fermín drag Dolores out of the room, kinesically converting again into the patriarch's confederate.

In *La malasangre* Gambaro uses what contemporary critics might call the "family romance" with its inherent role playing and power plays on the private level to dramatize oppression and less recognized role playing on the public, national level. Or is it the other way around? Throughout the play, Gambaro posits that what has been comprehended as a problem on the familial, personal, or gender level is also a generic problem, a synecdoche of a larger issue or structure on the level of Western society and (inter)national politics. Surely, one of the questions implied in the silence with which the play concludes is, given the

family drama of interpersonal oppression on which society is based, what else can we expect in the larger theatre of sociopolitical structures? All that remains at the end is silence, for there is nothing left to say. We have yet to author(ize) that viable alternative across the river.

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## Notes

1. The dramatist continues, "Y la situación de las mujeres se evidencia por una omisión transparente. En esas obras cuestionadas, el mundo de los hombres era un mundo marcado por la incompreensión, el egoísmo, la injusticia. Es el mundo donde 'viven' las mujeres."

2. As Gambaro herself has noted, "las mujeres aparecen más y más en mi dramaturgia a medida que crece mi propia concientización sobre la situación de la mujer en el mundo" (Magnarelli, "Interview" 820), and "ahora yo he tomado más conciencia de cuál es el mundo de las mujeres y cuál es la situación de las mujeres. La prueba está que en mis últimas obras los protagonistas son mujeres" (Magnarelli, "Griselda Gambaro" 130). In addition, she has declared, "Yo creo que las dificultades de la mujer son las mismas dificultades de los hombres; las mujeres padecen de la misma manera, pero con un plus que es su situación histórica de dependencia y de sumisión" ("Interview" 820).

3. Nonetheless, ever conscious of the possibility of censorship or political reprisal, Gambaro uses narrative frameworks which temporally or spatially distance each play from 1970s Argentina. *La malasangre* is set during the time of the Rosas dictatorship in the 1840s. *Real envido* assumes a fictional, fairytale ambiance as I have discussed in detail in my article on that play. *Antígona*, as the title suggests, returns us to the classical period.

4. Gambaro has assigned the role of actress to these female characters, albeit in varying degrees, for she sees women as continually cast in this role by our social institutions: "[la mujer] está mucho más sometida [que el hombre] . . . está obligada a jugar un rol en la mayoría de los casos. Incluso las que consideramos que hemos accedido a cierto grado de libertad ejecutamos nuestras acciones de libertad dentro de una sociedad que nos dicta otras reglas" (Magnarelli, "Interview" 820).

5. As Ann Dally has argued, "There have always been mothers, but motherhood was invented" (17). For an analysis of other theories of the "origins of motherhood," see Marianne Hirsch's enlightening study (particularly pages 13-14).

6. For example, Othello may have been a Moor (biologically marked as to his race), but his problem was universal rather than a "Moorish" problem.

7. There can be little doubt that the roles of mother and daughter are not only socially determined but also politically, to the extent that in a patriarchal society in which females are defined in relation to males, mothers' and daughters' rights, privileges, and duties are also defined by laws.

8. Red was the official color of the Rosas's regime and those who refused to wear the color were terrorized.

9. Bergson has noted that laughter implies an absence of feeling in that we cannot laugh at that to which we are emotionally tied. He has also noted that it involves a sense of superiority and that "We laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing" (97).

10. Hayden White discusses at length the notion of the savage or wild man as one whose human status is questioned.

11. Indeed Michel Foucault studies this division in the ancients, where the love of the soul is viewed as superior to the love of the body. See Volume Two of *The History of Sexuality*, especially pp. 233-34. In other parts of the same study he implies that it is precisely this division which problematizes sexuality.

12. Of course, earlier Dolores too had figured the father as "bondadoso. . . . Una bondad desbordante como un río . . . que ahoga" (67). The fact that she says it with a twisted smile suggests the irony involved.

13. Revealingly, Benigno is immobile at both the opening and closing of the play in a kinesic gesture that suggests that the powerful need only to set the events in motion, not to act themselves and leads the spectator to view the events as "natural," not motivated by him.

14. This kinesic motif of ritualistic drinking is repeated when the father does offer wine to Rafael after having forced him to undress (65), when Dolores drinks the wine alone (68), when Fermín serves hot chocolate with only one cup to Rafael and Dolores (78-79, 82-83, 96), when Rafael is asked to serve liquors to Juan Pedro and the father and then is served boiling tea by Fermín (89-90), and finally when in the last moment the father suggests the family drink hot chocolate and not talk about Rafael's death. It is probably not irrelevant either that we employ the term heads (in both Spanish and English) to refer to the leaders, chiefs, or superiors of a group. Thus, while the servants in Benigno's house eat the same food as the masters, they are not served wine (67).

15. Significantly, the allusion to Christian symbolism as well as the reduction of the woman to the status of animal are repeated at the end of the play when Benigno images Dolores as a snake ("víbora"), symbol of evil associated with the female and original sin (carnality) and the challenger of the status quo in the Garden.

16. For a more complete discussion of the king's control in *Real envidia*, see Magnarelli, "El espejo en el espejo."

17. It cannot be irrelevant in the context of this play that the term *ley* comes from the Latin *lex*, law, originally religious. But let us not forget that *lexis* is the Greek term for word, and without the word there can be no law.

18. See Magnarelli, "El espejo en el espejo . . .," especially pp. 94-95.

19. Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal discusses this painting and others in the context of José Donoso's work.

20. Diana Taylor also examines the question of the eroticization of violence in Gambaro's works.

21. This scene is poignantly reminiscent of Freud's description of the crucial scene in the development of the little boy's sense of self: the moment when the little boy perceives the mother's (female's) "lack."

22. I think specifically here of the post-Freudian Electra complex and of Lacan's privileging of the paternal phallus as the object of desire par excellence.

23. Here too we find a reference to Argentina's "dirty war" and the willingness of "ordinary citizens" to perpetuate the oppression of a controlling few.

24. Kappeler's book offers an interesting analysis on the willing victim/collaborator as opposed to the unwilling. Positing that the choice of posture and attitude (willing or unwilling) is not a choice of action (willing or not, the victim will be victimized), she demonstrates how this notion of willingness carries over into our perception of sexuality and the virgin-whore dichotomy. "The woman-object consists of body alone, without the dimension of a human will. When it is new, unused, intact, it bears the seal of its 'unwillingness' in its virginity. . . . Once the seal is broken, however, the woman-machine gets going, responding to its use. The presumed unwillingness was

only a state of inexperience. The underlying presupposition concerning women's biology is that the body is insatiable" (157-58).

25. It is probably not irrelevant that Dolores has employed a plural verb here, *mandaron*, for our perception of power leads us either to believe that it is shared by many (but not us) or to perceive the powerful figure as multiple in his power.

26. Hirsch reads the plots of conventional nineteenth-century novels of family romance as controlled by a fantasy, the "desire for the heroine's singularity based on a disidentification from the fate of other women, especially mothers" (10). She also understands the heroine's allegiance to fathers and brothers as protecting them from marriage and maternity (34).

27. Dolores's earlier use of the term *papito* signaled her playing the role of the pampered child.

28. The reader will note that my reading of the play is far more pessimistic than are the fine analyses of the play done by Roster, Cypess, and Boling.

29. In the introduction to their anthology (which came into my hands after the completion of this essay), Andrade and Cramsie also recognize that little changes: "el orden subvertido no cambia sustancialmente" (44). They add, "De allí que el desenlace revele solamente las dificultades inherentes a la ruptura del ideologema represivo de la cultura patriarcal en la conciencia femenina."

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