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## The Man Who Had It All but Her: The Construction and Destruction of the Macho Image in Four Mexican Novels

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The Man Who Had It All but Her:  
The Construction and Destruction of the Macho Image in Four Mexican  
Novels

A Thesis Presented

by

ADRIANA MARMOLEJO SOTO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2019

Comparative Literature

**THE MAN WHO HAD IT ALL BUT HER:  
THE CONSTRUCTION AND DESTRUCTION OF THE MACHO IMAGE IN  
FOUR MEXICAN NOVELS**

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**ADRIANA MARMOLEJO SOTO**

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## DEDICATION

A Luis Adrian, por el amor y la epistemología.

A mis dos familias, la de sangre y la que me acompaña en el camino.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my committee for their patience, commitment, and advice. Each and every one of you made this an amazing learning experience. Jim, Corine, Luis, María, you helped me stay on track and made this possible, and I will always appreciate it.

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ABSTRACT

**THE MAN WHO HAD IT ALL BUT HER:  
THE CONSTRUCTION AND DESTRUCTION OF THE MACHO IMAGE IN  
FOUR MEXICAN NOVELS**

MAY 2019

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The ideas of Mexican Machismo have been crystalized in the image of the Macho, a virile man who represents the ideals of masculinity in a determined time and space. This work aims to examine how four Mexican Novels (Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, Elena Garro's *Los Recuerdos del Porvenir*, Yuri Herrera's *Trabajos del Reino*, and Fernanda Melchor's *Temporada de huracanes*) present their unique macho ideals, and how the male characters fail to fulfill them. Through textual examination of the four novels, this work asks: how is a macho image formed in each pair of novels? And most importantly how do male characters react when they are unable to uphold the masculine values? Chapter one examines Juan Rulfo's and Elena Garro's novels, focusing on the downfall of the machos due to the loss of a loved woman, and the strategies the men use to control their towns. Chapter two analyzes Yuri Herrera's and Fernanda Melchor's novels, explaining how masculinity is tied to a social performance, and how the machos lose the approval of their group. Chapter three deals with the reaffirmation of power through isolation of female characters and the concept of emasculation as a social and psychological phenomenon. Emasculation, this

work strives to prove, is a key element in the four novels, uniting the texts through the social disgrace of a man who does not perform as expected.

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## INTRODUCTION

After its Revolution in the early twentieth century, Mexico faced a dire political situation, with the country struggling to reach social stability. At the end of the war, the caudillos—some of the principal promoters of the revolution—were prosecuted and killed, and the agricultural regions they controlled were left unsupervised. During the second and third decade of the century, a new form of power and economic acquisition arose. The rural leaders, or regional bosses, came to be the dominant figures of the Mexican *campo*, despite the Land Reform of the 1930s, which intended to distribute the land owned by haciendas among workers and agricultural unions. Rural bosses ruled over entire populations, deciding how they worked and whom they served, effectively controlling the lives of those within their region. They also fascinated writers, who relied on their own experiences and knowledge of these social leaders in their novels and short stories. Such literary representations also captured the predominant macho culture as well as the complicated existence of the women romantically involved with the aforementioned rural bosses.

Both Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (1963) depict the rise and fall of a rural boss. Both novels explore the manner in which rural bosses assert their domination over the land they own, over the people who work for them, and over the female characters he is obsessed with. But the boss loses most his power, and even his mind, after the rejection or the death of the woman he desires. The sudden loss of control of the sexual and romantic aspect of the man's life leads him directly to his downfall.

After the 70s, the rural bosses' dominance over the Mexican countryside subsided in Mexico. However, new forms of power appeared towards the end of the century. These

recent figures favor a constant use of violence and display extreme desire for control. Narcos, as drug traffickers are commonly known, are the new figures of power of contemporary Mexico. In their literary representations, I will argue, both narcos and rural bosses create their own prototypes of masculinity and set parameters to perform it.

In the late twentieth century, along with the rest of Latin America, Mexico experienced the rise of the first and most prominent narcos. During the 80s and 90s, drug kingpins like Rafael Caro Quintero, Joaquín Guzmán Loera, or Armando Carrillo Fuentes were the first Mexicans among many to catch the public eye, even though trafficking and smuggling had been a reality for at least six decades, especially within the so-called Golden Triangle. In 2006, mere days after his appointment, President Felipe Calderón declared war on narcotrafficking. This pronouncement, in addition to causing a high number of casualties, also served to bring the narco figures back into prominence. They have stayed in the public eye ever since.

As was the rural boss of an earlier era, the narco figure has been represented by several contemporary writers, especially those who live in states ravaged by the war mentioned beforehand. The prominence of the drug world is a central theme in Yuri Herrera's *Trabajos del reino* (2004) and Fernanda Melchor's *Temporada de huracanes* (2017). Both authors explore the involvement of women in the lives of narcos and the different forms of violence women are subjected to. The novels showcase the important role female characters have regarding the downfall of the narco male prototype, as well as the need a man has to control women and subject them to fulfill the idea of the Mexican macho.

Through a textual examination of *Pedro Páramo*, *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, *Trabajos del reino*, and *Temporada de huracanes*, I will draw connections between the

literary figures of the rural boss in Mexican literature in the 1950s and '60s and the narco in the first decades of this century, focusing on how they evaluate and characterize masculinity and its relationship with power and women. My main focus will be to understand the role masculinity plays in the literary lives of narcos and rural bosses, and how the female characters are the target of violence due to their insubordination vis-à-vis male characters and their masculinity. I will explore the similarities and differences between both male figures through the lens of cultural machismo and the macho figure, and the male need to control the female body in order to be respected and feared. My goal will be to understand the loss of social and economic power rural bosses and narcos suffer when female characters reject them or die, how this affects their macho persona, and how such losses unfold within the sexist environment of the narrative.

It is crucial to acknowledge that both sets of novels are products of national crises and portrait the social environment in which they were written. Therefore, it is necessary to explore, even if only superficially, the historical context behind the novels. That exploration will be relevant when considering the sexist environment that surrounded the authors, and how social and cultural expectations and practices are reflected in said texts. It is also important to notice the fact that none of the authors condone the behavior displayed by the male characters in their books. However, the level of criticism is different within each novel. While Rulfo's and Garro's texts do present a criticism of the misogynist practices they write about, Melchor's and Herrera's books present a more critical approach to the topic, exposing and making the violence that female characters experience more explicit.

My analysis will have several guiding questions. First, how do the rural bosses created by Juan Rulfo and Elena Garro assert their power and become machos? Which role

does the women they love play in said image? How do *Trabajos del reino* and *Temporada de huracanes* present their macho ideals and their female characters? Is it possible to consider female characters a pivotal point of both power and social advantage for rural bosses and narcos? If they are, how does the loss of control over a female character affect the social and economic power the man holds? How is the dominance over female bodies seen and regarded in texts that portrait a macho culture? How do macho ideals affect the narrative demises of the male characters? I will explore the patterns of violence, alienation, and control that both figures use to control female characters and how the macho persona becomes undone in the four texts.

## CHAPTER I

### *AISLAMIENTO. DESERTED TOWNS, CONFINED WOMEN*

The nineteenth century was a time of political revolt in Latin America, and Mexico was no exception. After the Mexican War of Independence, the country suffered several political changes, foreign invasions, and two failed attempts to transform the country into an empire. The constant political tribulations came to an end when Porfirio Díaz rose to power in 1876. The Díaz government, known as *Porfiriato*, had a contradictory economic system, one which modernized large metropolitan areas of the country and strengthened the economy, but isolated rural communities:

Así, la entrada al nuevo siglo está marcada por un considerable descenso de los sueldos en la agricultura (cerca de 20%) y en la industria. En cambio, la producción y las ganancias no dejan de aumentar. De hecho, la modernización tanto de la industria como del campo reduce la necesidad de mano de obra. A ello se suma la ruina del artesanado provocada por la industrialización, así como el aumento del precio de los alimentos, aun cuando se incrementan las exportaciones agrícolas. Campesinos y obreros, empobrecidos, se unen en las grandes ciudades a los ya fuertes contingentes de pelados y demás léperos. El contraste es todavía más violento cuando se compara con el enriquecimiento de algunos grandes terratenientes, especuladores y otras personas cercanas al régimen. (Machillot 1297-1304)<sup>12</sup>

Such is the particular time in history in which Pedro Páramo, the protagonist of Juan Rulfo's novel, rises to power and becomes a rural boss.

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<sup>1</sup> All translations, except those of *Pedro Páramo*, *Los Recuerdos del porvenir* and *Trabajos del reino* are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, the start of the new century is marked by a considerable decrease in agricultural (around 20%) and industrial salaries. Yet production and proceeds were on the rise. In fact, the modernization of the industry and the countryside reduced the required workforce. This happened along with the ruin of craftsmanship and a price hike for food, despite the increase of agricultural exportation. Impoverished farmers and industry workers join the contingents of the foulmouthed [literally, bald] and rude men in all large cities. Their situation presents a stark contrast with the enrichment of important landowners, speculators, and other people close to the political regime.

Mexico's countryside was abandoned, since Díaz's government advocated for a quick industrial development. The president's actions left the people working in rural areas and the agronomy sector in poverty and kept them away from any technological development. Such circumstances resulted in revolts, strikes, and, ultimately, war. Díaz's presidency lasted over thirty years, and it came to an abrupt stop due to the Mexican Revolution:

It was a jumbled combination of several popular uprisings that destroyed a prolonged dictatorship and gave rise to significant political, social, and economic reforms. [...] Many hundreds of thousands of Mexicans took up arms in their country between 1910 and 1920, and more than one million lives were lost to violence, famine, and epidemics. (Benjamin 212)

The Revolution was led by men and their armies, as is true of most other revolutions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Francisco I. Madero was an ideologist of the Revolution who then became president; the caudillos, men from rural zones and personal armies, became an important part of the war and its aftermath. Caudillos were military and political leaders, who, during the Revolution, fought for their own ideals and waged war with one another. People like Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata, the former commanding an army in the northern part of the country and the latter in the south, were representative of an extensive militarization in the country. The war affected the rural parts of Mexico, leaving them with few young men, but did nothing to deter the power of the men who controlled large portions of the countryside.

After Francisco I. Madero was assassinated, the battle to become the next president became more grueling than before. The tense political climate and the instability in the government allowed the rural part of Mexico to remain largely unsupervised. However, the army became a more professional institution and was in charge of controlling several

regions of the country: “[E]l [ejército] se fractura abruptamente en la primera década del siglo XX con la Revolución y, posteriormente, se inicia el proceso de profesionalización (década de los 20’s) consolidándose a partir de fines de los años 30’s y fortaleciéndose de forma institucional desde esos años hasta nuestros días” (Barrón Cruz 5)<sup>3</sup>. Any leader who aspired to become president could not do so without a strong army and its complete support. “Algunos ejemplos del fortalecimiento de las instancias militares son los gobiernos post revolucionarios de los generales, que emergieron con la revolución, Álvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles, Lázaro Cárdenas y Manuel Ávila Camacho. Es decir, durante estos momentos históricos, el poder político del estamento militar se fortaleció [...]” (Barrón Cruz 6).<sup>4</sup>

The army, made relevant during the Mexican Revolution and its subsequent years, still maintained an important social power when Plutarco Elías Calles became president for the first time in 1924. The man found a divided national army, which he restored and forced to be loyal to him. This is the time where Francisco Rosas, protagonist of Elena Garro’s *Los recuerdos del porvenir* came to power. Soon after gaining control over the army, Calles began a personal crusade against religious acts, which was met with public disagreement:

He fought against the two forces that opposed him: the army, which, thanks to General Amaro, he shattered and then rebuilt; and the Church, which he fought with ideological weapons and under the influence of his own personal hallucinations, but above all because he was the re-presentative of the modern state, which was essentially an institution striving to achieve total power. [...] Two institutions confronted each other, the Church and the state; two political groups, the revolutionaries and the political Catholics, were struggling for power; two distinct

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<sup>3</sup> The army was fractured in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century because of the Revolution. During the 1920s, it begins a professionalization process, one which was consolidated during the 1930s and has grown stronger as an institution up until today.

<sup>4</sup> Some examples of the military strengthening are the post-revolutionary presidential periods of rule by revolutionary generals, such as Álvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles, Lázaro Cárdenas, and Manuel Ávila Camacho. This means that, during such periods of time, the political power of the army increased.

worlds confronted each other, the people and its leaders, Old Mexico and the modern elites. (Meyer 17)

Calles' actions against religious liberty resulted in a new war, named the Cristero Rebellion. The Cristero Army, the "army of Christ", fought the Mexican army from 1926 to 1929. The rebellion ended with the restoration of freedom of worship and many severely affected rural areas, where the rebellion was most relevant. Cristero people from rural areas died, many crops were burned, and the army killed massive numbers of people. During this time, the army became a stronghold of Calles's power, used to maintain peace at all costs.

For over half a century, the Mexican countryside was neglected and impoverished, either because of political instability or due to wars and uprisings. Such dereliction meant that several men, who already had some economic power, were able to hoard and control enormous amount of rural land, and with it, the people who lived in it. Pedro Páramo and Francisco Rosas were a literary representation of such people. All the leaders, whether they were local or part of the army, had accumulated considerable richness and were able to dictate the destiny of their land. These men had a firm economic and social grip over a particular region; since they were not directly supervised by the government, they administered their own law. These rural bosses became machos, a desirable adjective as far as they were concerned. The machos were virile men full of bravado and violence, and were considered the ideal of what a male leader should be. They are also exponents of a deeply sexist culture that takes the particular form of Mexican machismo.

The term machismo appeared late in Mexican culture, but when it did, it had a positive connotation. The word was first associated with what were considered the positive aspects of masculinity: virility, bravado, and occasional violence (Machillot Chapter 3). Afterwards, the term was studied, discussed, and analyzed by Mexican scholars, where the



conversation discussed how the term might be thought and applied, also noting that many of its connotations were negative. Nowadays, the term is considered as a particular brand of sexism practiced in Latin America and Mexico:

Se puede definir al machismo como una ideología que defiende y justifica la superioridad y el dominio del hombre sobre la mujer; exalta las cualidades masculinas, como agresividad, independencia y dominancia, mientras estigmatiza las cualidades femeninas, como debilidad, dependencia y sumisión. El machismo tradicionalmente ha estado asociado con la cultura mexicana y latina. Dentro de este contexto cultural, existían como normas consuetudinarias que el hombre ostentara la autoridad en la familia y fuera su proveedor, y que la mujer se subordinara al hombre y se dedicase a su cuidado y a la crianza de su descendencia (Moral and Ramos 39)<sup>5</sup>

The protagonist of machismo is the macho, a man who represents all the qualities of a successful and virile man, especially when demonstrating the worth of his masculinity.

Robert McKee Irwin provides a definition of masculinity that highlights the external process of male recognition; he defines masculinity as: “a collection of behaviors, attitudes, and attributes that men may or may not exhibit (but that, perhaps, they ought to). [...]

Masculinity, then, is not internal; it is determined more by the judgements of others than by an intrinsic quality. Moreover, in this case, it is a status that is a constant risk” (XVII).

Mexican masculinity is considered a quality dictated and judged by a group who, through the lens of machismo determine who is worthy of considering a macho.

A man’s macho status is risked when there are any tribulation or setbacks in their machismo attitudes. Doing anything considered remotely feminine or undergoing losses in

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<sup>5</sup> Machismo can be defined as an ideology which defends and justifies the superiority and dominion of men over women. This celebrates and encourages masculine qualities such as aggressiveness, independence, and dominance, while stigmatizing feminine qualities such as weakness, dependence, and submission. Machismo has been traditionally associated with Mexican and Latin American cultures. Within this cultural context, it is customary that a man is considered the head of the family, and that a woman is to obey him and focus on taking care of him and raising his offspring.

any field, whether social, economic or psychologic, against a woman or a man considered inferior will result in a loss of status and respect of the community:

The hegemonic definition of manhood is a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control. The very definitions of manhood we have developed in our culture maintain the power that some men have over other men and that men have over women. (Kimmel 61)

Machos, then, are obligated to constantly prove their worth. If the men are unable to prove to the group and to themselves that they are the most powerful, they will lose prestige and be considered less of a man.

Throughout time, the definition of the Mexican macho has changed, although the concept maintains virility and masculinity as its pillars and ultimate goals. During the early twentieth century, where both *Los recuerdos del porvenir* and *Pedro Páramo* take place, the macho had to be a virile man, able to exert violence and freely exercise his sexuality (as long as he was heterosexual). Especially relevant for this time, the machos had relationships with women which were characterized by the imposition of power and several forms of violence. The macho was allowed to have several female sexual partners and be applauded for it, and he was also in the right when forcing women to have sexual encounters with him, all disguised under the idea of a man taking what he considers his: “The discourse of power is the calculated language of distortion that converts a rape into “virile love”. The basis for the discourse of power is that the prescriptive aim controls the cognitive phrase in the most direct manner possible” (Valdés 36). Having control over both the bodies and the discourse describing how to control them allows the macho to easily have power over those he wants to.

Although the phenomenon was widespread before, *raptos* became frequent during the first decades. The *rapto*, the seduction and kidnapping of young, virgin women, became a common practice among the numerous armies in the country. This kidnapping practice:

[...] presented men the opportunity to display their virile manhood. [...] When a man spoiled a woman's honor by removing her from her paternal home and then deflowering her, his actions denigrated the honor of her father and family, especially if it became public knowledge. While the seducer's honor and esteem rose in the community, the aggrieved father suffered a blow to his honor and reputation because he had failed to control and protect his female family member. (Sloan 55)

Female virginity and male demonstrations of sexuality, although contradictory, were both encouraged. Men, then, had the right to possess and would be celebrated if they did so, even if it would bring dishonor to a complete family, and if the masculinity of another man, the father, would be compromised.

Juan Rulfo and Elena Garro explored the macho image in their novels and short stories, especially in *Pedro Páramo*, written by the former, and *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, by the latter. Both texts acknowledge and draw inspiration from a specific historical context which helped their male protagonists rise to power and become machos. The novels reflect on the crisis of the country's rural areas and failed governmental strategies to control such areas. As stated before, the Mexican *campo* [countryside] was neglected during the better part of the Porfiriato, the Revolution, and until the first Agrarian Code was published in 1934, years after the Cristero War. Pedro Páramo, Rulfo's protagonist, presented what the Mexican Land Reform, aided by the aforementioned code, tried to abolish:

Pedro has appropriated all the land and has arrogated unto himself absolute, merciless power. He has imprisoned Comala in an economy based on usufruct and the commodification of human beings that mirrors the worst of the conquest. The

novel unequivocally shows that the Mexican Revolution, which purported to undo the colonial past, changed nothing. (Merrim 317)

The protagonist accumulates an enormous amount of land, since there was no federal control over his property. This allows the rural boss to control the livelihood of the people who inhabit the place he controls, and facilitates his unconditional dominion of Comala, his town. This dominion is also made possible by Pedro's transformation into a macho, which comes hand in hand with ruling Comala and will be explored further below.

Francisco Rosas, on the other hand, represents the efforts to control and supervise the land. These efforts were made possible by a combination of the army and the Mexican federal government. The historical circumstances and constant wars are mentioned in the first pages of the novel, before even introducing General Rosas:

Yo supe de otros tiempos: fui fundado, sitiado, conquistado y engalanado para recibir ejércitos. Supe del goce indecible de la guerra, creadora del desorden y la aventura imprevisible. Después me dejaron quieto mucho tiempo. [...] Cuando la Revolución agonizaba, un último ejército, envuelto en la derrota, me dejó abandonado en este lugar sediento. Muchas de mis casas fueron quemadas y sus dueños fusilados antes del incendio. (Garro 1987 9)<sup>6</sup>

The town of Ixtepec has been ravaged by war several times, then forgotten, and once again besieged during the Revolution, which only brings tribulations to its inhabitants. Rosas' presence becomes a form of federal authority, the only one that exists in Ixtepec. As *Los recuerdos del porvenir* describes it, the man used his power to enter, dominate, and remain in the village. Rosales and his men become judges, juries and executors because they are

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<sup>6</sup> I knew of other times: I was founded, besieged, conquered, and decked out to receive armies. I knew the unutterable joy of war, which creates disorder and unforeseen adventures. Then they left me undisturbed for a long time. [...] When the Revolution was in its final agony, a last army, encircled with defeat, left me abandoned in this dry place. Many of my houses were set on fire, after their owners had been shot to death. (Garro 1969 3-4)

bestowed with governmental power. This also aids Rosas to become a macho, since he is the maximum figure of power in the community.

Pedro Páramo and Francisco Rosas are the pinnacles of what a macho must be within their communities. Rosas and Páramo represent to their communities what an exemplary man must be, considering the period of time. As mentioned before, the machos must be virile, dominant, and free to exercise their sexuality, which both Pedro and Francisco do. Pedro has many children, and can have as many women as he pleases, while Francisco parades Julia, his lover, around Ixtepec as an example of his dominion. He has the most beautiful woman and showcases her. Machos also need to be powerful in a social level, which Rosas is and Pedro becomes.

Besides, both machos have established a monopoly over violence and death, where only they can dictate who gets to live and who dies. Pedro kills his enemies and those who killed his father, while Rosas orders men to be hanged around town. Both of them create an image of a competent macho on similar social levels, even though the foundation of their power is shaky due to their fragile masculinity. There are also several differences on how both rural bosses practice their own macho persona. Páramo is not subjected to any organization and becomes the sole leader of Comala, never letting anyone else have any semblance of power over (or similarly to) him. On the other hand, Rosas is part of an organization and has Justo Corona, a Colonel who is his second-in-command. Despite being able to create his own rules, Rosas is still part of a governmental project.

Although several different characters narrate *Pedro Páramo*, Pedro himself tells part of his own story early in the text, first focusing on two aspects: his poverty growing up and his obsession with Susana San Juan when he was younger. During his adolescence he and his family were poor, Pedro recalls. The family struggles with money after the death of his

grandfather, relying on other families to help them. Pedro Páramo, instead of working or participating in his family's everyday life, is constantly thinking of Susana San Juan, an ethereal female figure, although the novel presents her as someone out of his reach, someone who he will never see again. Through these early memories of Pedro, he portrays himself as somewhat disconnected from his reality, hardly resembling the man he was bound to become. Although there is no recollection of Pedro as a teenager, the man's memories serve as a reminder of his past weakness, something that becomes evident when his father dies and he is left to take care of his inherited land.

Páramo's transformation into a ruthless leader begins after his father is murdered and he has to take care of his family's land and businesses. Pedro soon realizes he must take immediate action, since he inherited an important debt and must pay it full. Fulgor Sedano, one of his father's loyal men, encounters the newly orphaned Pedro as a young man, willing to do whatever it takes to keep his land and businesses afloat. This, however, does not negate the fact that Pedro was seen as a weak man, someone who would never become either a macho or a leader:

¿De dónde diablos habrá sacado esas mañas el muchacho? —pensó Fulgor Sedano mientras regresaba a la Media Luna—. Yo no esperaba de él nada. “Es un inútil”, decía de él mi difunto patrón don Lucas. “Un flojo de marca”. Yo le daba la razón. “Cuando me muera váyase buscando otro trabajo, Fulgor”. “Sí, don Lucas”. “Con decirle, Fulgor, que he intentado mandarlo al seminario para ver si al menos eso le da para comer y mantener a su madre cuando yo les falte; pero ni a eso se decide”. “Usted no se merece eso, don Lucas”. “No se cuenta con él para nada, ni para que me sirva de bordón servirá cuando yo esté viejo. Se me malogró, qué quiere usted, Fulgor”. “Es una verdadera lástima, don Lucas”. Y ahora esto. (Rulfo 1981 49 – 50)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I wonder where the hell the boy learned those tricks, Fulgor Sedano thought on his second trip to the Media Luna. I never expected anything from him. “He’s worthless,” my old *patrón* Don Lucas used to say. “A born weakling.” And I couldn’t argue. “When I die, Fulgor, you look for another job.” “I will, Don Lucas.” “I tell you, Fulgor, I tried sending him to the seminary, hoping that at least he would have enough to eat and could look after his mother when I’m no longer here. But he didn’t even stick with that.” “You deserve better, Don

Pedro, at first considered weak and “unfit” heir to his father, decides to salvage his family’s land, but in order to do so, he needs to appear as a capable and ruthless man, to construct his own persona. Despite Pedro’s ability to overcome his early lack of virility and macho characteristics, his masculinity is built upon the doubts about his capability the men around him have had. Later in life, Páramo will be a macho, but the foundation of his macho persona is tainted by the doubts and his inability to have Susana San Juan early in his life.

Contrary to Rosas, who comes into a town and is obeyed from the start, Pedro must construct a persona with sufficient social and economic power. Such persona will allow him to rule Comala, as noted earlier in the chapter. Pedro’s plan is to revitalize his property and repay his father’s debt, which will allow him to become a powerful person and a macho. First, he must avenge the death of Don Lucas, and then he must marry into a wealthy family, one to whom he owes money so he can reap economic benefits.

The first part of the plan, although not legal, will be the key to the power he will then have. Pedro’s father, Don Lucas, died in a shooting during a wedding to which he was invited, and Pedro tracks down most the guests of the party who are still alive and kills them or has one of his subordinates do so:

Pedro Páramo causó tal mortandad después que le mataron a su padre, que se dice casi acabó con los asistentes a la boda en la cual don Lucas Páramo iba a fungir de padrino. Y eso que a don Lucas nomás le tocó de rebote, porque al parecer la cosa era contra el novio. Y como nunca se supo de dónde había salido la bala que le pegó a él, Pedro Páramo arrasó parejo. Esto fue allá en el cerro de Vilmayo, donde estaban unos ranchos de los que ya no queda ni el rastro... (Rulfo 1981 102)<sup>8</sup>

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Lucas.” “Don’t count on him for anything, not even to care for me when I’m old. He’s turned out bad, Fulgor, and that’s that.” “That’s a real shame, Don Lucas.” And now this. (Rulfo 2002 51)

<sup>8</sup> Pedro Páramo slaughtered so many folks after his father was murdered that he killed nearly everybody who attended that wedding. Don Lucas Páramo was supposed to give the bride away. And it was really by accident that he died, because it was the bridegroom someone had a grudge against. And since they never found out who fired the bullet who struck him down, Pedro wiped out the lot. It happened over there on Vilmayo ridge, where there used to be some houses you can’t find any trace of it now... (Rulfo 2002 100)

He also kills Toribio Aldrete, a man he has a dispute with over the limits of their properties, and locks him in a room to let his body rot and be forgotten. Pedro's means are neither legal nor ethical, but he considers himself above the law.

The second part of Páramo's plan involves direct actions regarding the debt his family had collected. In this, Pedro's solution is marrying into the family he owes the most to. This will not only eliminate the debt, but will also grant him more social power and the economic and social capacity the bride's family name has. Thus, Pedro marries Dolores Preciado, a woman he does not love and sees as a mere part of a business transaction, as a dialogue between Pedro and Fulgor reveals:

Empezaremos por las Preciados. ¿Dices que a ellas les debemos más?

—Sí. Y a las que les hemos pagado menos. El padre de usted siempre las pospuso para lo último. Tengo entendido que una de ellas, Matilde, se fue a vivir a la ciudad. No sé si a Guadalajara o a Colima. Y la Lola, quiero decir, doña Dolores, ha quedado como dueña de todo. Usted sabe: el rancho de Enmedio. Y es a ella a la que tenemos que pagar.

—Mañana vas a pedir la mano de la Lola. —Pero cómo quiere usted que me quiera, si ya estoy viejo.

—La pedirás para mí. Después de todo tiene alguna gracia. Le dirás que estoy muy enamorado de ella. Y que si lo tiene a bien. De pasada, dile al padre Rentería que nos arregle el trato. (Rulfo 1981 48)<sup>9</sup>

Dolores Preciado appears as the most obvious “target” to accomplish the plan. She is left alone in a small rural village Pedro plans to dominate, away from her only remaining

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<sup>9</sup> We'll begin with the Preciado women. You say it's them we owe the most?

-Yes, and we've paid them the least. Your father always left the Preciados to the last. I understand that one of the girls, Matilde, went to live in the city. I don't know whether it was Guadalajara or Colima. And that Lola, that is, doña Dolores, has been left in charge of everything. You know, of don Enmedio's ranch. She's the one we have to pay.

-Then tomorrow I want you to go and ask for Lola's hand. – What makes you think she'd have me? I'm an old man.

-You'll ask her for me. After all, she's not without her charms. Tell her I'm very much in love with her. Ask her if she likes the idea. And on the way, ask Father Rentería to make the arrangements (Rulfo 2002 50).



family. The Preciado family, as Fulgor admits, is the one Páramo owes the most and pays the least, revealing a disregard towards his debt, probably due to the fact that the family consists of only two women. Pedro is free, as he considers it, to just marry her under his conditions and as soon as possible. Within a culture that is infused with machismo, Páramo is well within his right to force Preciado into marriage, taking advantage of the social power he already possesses. Dolores, on the other hand, expresses that she is beyond happy to marry the man, even though she is aware that he will most likely hate her afterwards. Aside from the obvious emotional deceit Pedro has planned, Dolores is perceived as a bargaining chip, a simple solution to a problem. Without a burdening debt, and now having the riches of his wife, Pedro can progress into his role as a powerful rural boss, and, of course, a macho. This transformation renders Dolores useless after the wedding and birthing of a child, especially since she married Pedro under community property (*bienes mancomunados*). When Preciado decides to leave, after being treated unfairly (Rulfo 1981 26), Páramo does nothing to stop her, and she leaves Comala to live with her sister and her son, after losing all her wealth, which Pedro keeps. Aside from that, Pedro is continually on the lookout for more women to possess, thus having more abandoned children and cementing his reputation as a macho who is able to have sex with as many women as he pleases, as well as being highly fertile.

Dolores is a key person in Páramo's creation of a macho persona. She provides him with the economic means, reaffirms his power as a masculine figure through her subjection to his will; only in her final moments does she ask her son, Juan Preciado, to claim their lost fortune (Rulfo 1981 1). The macho secures his power through Dolores, partially leaving behind his past fragile masculinity. As we will see, something very similar happens to Francisco Rosas.

When the General arrives to Ixtepec, his lover, Julia Andrade, accompanies him. Julia serves as a power tool to aid Rosas in keeping control over the village, since she too inspires fear, respect, and hate in the citizens of Ixtepec. Having the most beautiful woman by his side socially affirms Francisco; he is not only able to create his own form of law, he also has a woman who serves as companion to his persona.

Julia lives with the “queridas”, the lovers of other military men, in the Hotel Jardín. The hotel is constructed in the novel as not only an “immoral” place, but also a stronghold of the power of Rosas. There, he keeps his most valuable assets. The people of Ixtepec can only guess at the extent of the power the military have inside the hotel. Although no one gets to know them, the lovers are admired and envied. However, the women are treated poorly by the military men; they were kidnapped from their homes in other parts of the country and forced to leave with these men. The “queridas” are, in fact, merely another demonstration of macho power, the men parade them around town to establish dominance and then use them only for pleasure. Most of the women desire to leave, but the confinement and constant surveillance make their escape difficult. In them, the men reaffirm their power, and the women’s desires and needs are neglected and erased.

Despite being involved with Julia, Rosas has a fragile masculinity. This is due to the fact that he fears the woman and is constantly unable to appear as a macho in front of her: “Se encontró frente a ella como un guerrero solitario frente a una ciudad sitiada con sus habitantes invisibles comiendo, fornicando, pensando, recordando, y afuera de los muros que guardaban al mundo que vivía adentro de Julia estaba él. Sus iras, sus asaltos y sus

lágrimas eran vanas, la ciudad seguía intacta” (Garro 1987 78)<sup>10</sup>. Alone with her, the general is aware of how little power he has over the woman, despite constantly projecting to the outside world that his macho persona is strong and flawless. Rosas’ wish is manifested several times, he wants to be the only one Julia thinks of, and ever further, the only one she has had any affective relationship or contact with. However, it is made clear that Julia has been with several men before, and her mind, an unknown territory to Rosas, appears to be indomitable.

Rosas has a public masculinity that contradicts his private life. Contrary to Pedro, who, before his marriage to Susana San Juan, is a firm macho in both his private and public life, Francisco is only masculine when in public. The people of Ixtepec see the man serenading his lover, walking with her in the town square, having her follow him (Garro 1987 93). However, when they enter the Hotel Jardín, the place where they live, the power dynamics shift completely. Rosas is insecure and needs constant reassurance from Julia, begging her to prove that she loves him like he loves her:

—Julia, ¿me quieres?

El general, de pie frente a su querida, con la guerrera abierta y los ojos bajos, lanzaba la pregunta mil veces. La joven volvía hacia él sus ojos melancólicos y sonreía.

—Sí, te quiero mucho...

—Pero no me lo digas así...

—¿Cómo quieres que te lo diga? —preguntaba ella con la misma indiferencia.

—No lo sé, pero no así... (Garro 1987 96 – 97)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “When he was with her he felt like a lonely warrior in the presence of a besieged city with its invisible inhabitants eating, fornicating, thinking, remembering, and he was outside of the walls, that guarded Julia’s inner world. His rages, his fits, and his tears were to no avail: the city remained intact” (Garro 1969 73).

<sup>11</sup> “Do you love me Julia?” Standing by his mistress, with his coat open and his eyes downcast, the general asked the question a thousand times. She turned her melancholic eyes to him and smiled. “Yes, I love you very much.” “But don’t say it like that.” “How do you want me to say it?” She asked with the same indifference. “I don’t know, but not like that” (Garro 1969 91).

Julia does not give Rosas the reassurance he seeks for in her, and the macho, despite being manly and masculine outside his bedroom, is left powerless when he is alone with her. Julia is indifferent and aloof, and she gains power over Rosas, forcing him to ask her about her feelings, despite staying with him. Despite being feared in Ixtepec, Rosas is not respected by Andrade, a state of affairs which endangers his masculinity.

Both Pedro and Francisco construct a macho persona. However, both of them also build their masculine identity on fragile foundations. Pedro must take extreme actions in order to stop being considered weak and incapable to substitute his father after the man's death. So Páramo murders for land control and vengeance, and then marries Dolores Preciado to use her as an economic stepping stone in the name of power. Pedro has both public and private power, over Comala and Dolores. Francisco, on the other hand, has the most beautiful woman he could find and uses her as a mechanism of control. People fear the couple and respect the man; but the woman does not love him or give him any reassurance. This makes Rosas' façade only a public one, useless when facing Julia alone.

Both machos have a woman they desire to own and dominate, but are unable to. Pedro's masculinity and control fade in the presence of Susana San Juan. Susana has been Pedro's personal obsession since he was an adolescent, the woman he dreams about and the only one he truly desires. The woman lived in Comala before the untimely passing of her mother, prompting her father and her to move to another place where he could work in a mine. Susana was married to another man, and his husband passed away before she was forced by her father to return to Comala, their hometown, because of the Revolution. Pedro Páramo forces Susana San Juan to live with him, in a land that he has conquered economically and socially.

San Juan, as Pedro imagines it, is the final piece of the perfect life he has built for himself, the only bit of power that has escaped his grip. “Esperé treinta años a que regresaras, Susana. Esperé a tenerlo todo. No solamente algo, sino todo lo que se pudiera conseguir de modo que no nos quedara ningún deseo, sólo el tuyo, el deseo de ti. ¿Cuántas veces invité a tu padre a que viniera a vivir aquí nuevamente, diciéndole que yo lo necesitaba? Lo hice hasta con engaños” (Rulfo 1981 105)<sup>12</sup>. In his created world of power, one he achieved through lies, deceit and blood, Pedro only needs the idealized woman he had not seen in thirty years. Susana is supposed to be the crowning jewel, the ultimate accomplishment of Pedro’s macho persona, proving he can have it all. Susana also represents a further chance to assert Pedro’s macho persona. The woman is a person from his past, when he was considered as an unfit macho. Having Susana would mean that his former fragility would stay in the past.

Pedro treats Susana similarly to Dolores at first, asking her father, Bartolomé, to hand her over to him, as part of a business deal like many others:

¿Sabes qué me ha pedido Pedro Páramo? Yo ya me imaginaba que esto que nos daba no era gratuito. Y estaba dispuesto a que se cobrara con mi trabajo, ya que teníamos que pagar de algún modo. Le detallé todo lo referente a La Andrómeda y le hice ver que aquello tenía posibilidades, trabajándola con método. ¿Y sabes qué me contestó? “No me interesa su mina, Bartolomé San Juan. Lo único que quiero de usted es a su hija. Ése ha sido su mejor trabajo”. (Rulfo 1981 107)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “I waited thirty years for you to return, Susana. I wanted to have it all. Not just part of it, but everything there was to have, to the point that there would be nothing left for us to want, no desire but your wishes. How many times did I ask your father to come back here to live, telling him I needed him? I even tried deceit. (Rulfo 2002 102)

<sup>13</sup> Do you know what Pedro Páramo wants? I never imagined that he was giving us all this for nothing. I was ready to give him the benefit of my toil, since we had to repay him somehow. I gave him all the details about La Andromeda, and convinced him that the mine had promise if we worked it methodically. You know what he said? ‘I’m not interested in your mine, Bartolomé San Juan. The only thing I want is your daughter. She’s your crowning achievement’ (Rulfo 2002 103 – 105).

Eventually, the woman marries Pedro, and moves to La Media Luna to live with him. Pedro Susana San Juan, however, manages to escape Pedro's grip despite his efforts. Although the woman ends up living in his property, she is not mentally present, and is quickly ruled insane by the town and those who serve Pedro. Although Páramo is in love with the woman, he is unable to reach out to her, and she appears to see and hear the dead and live in a nightmarish state. Susana uses her mind and madness to keep Páramo away. Pedro remains always unable to enter her reality, and never forces her to sleep with him. Pedro is certain of his social and economic power and only cares about Susana, even if the threat of the Revolution looms over Comala. The man is certain of his economic and social dominion, so he only cares about Susana (Rulfo 1981 122).

Despite Pedro's longing and supposed love, Susana does not even think of him. San Juan, in fact, thinks of her late husband, and she does so in an erotic way, remembering the encounters they had. "Dice que él le mordía los pies diciéndole que eran como pan dorado en el horno. Que dormía acurrucada, metiéndose dentro de él, perdida en la nada al sentir que se quebraba su carne, que se abría como un surco abierto por un clavo ardoroso, luego tibio, luego dulce, dando golpes duros contra su carne blanda; sumiéndose, sumiéndose más, hasta el gemido. Pero que le había dolido más su muerte" (Rulfo 1981 127)<sup>14</sup>. Susana has a sexual drive, though it was never demonstrated to Páramo, making her harder to reach and more difficult to dominate. Susana becomes a puzzling reality for Pedro, since he is unable to fully possess Susana as he wants to do, even though she is there and legally married to him. Despite that, she is "insane", locked in her own world, one that Pedro does

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<sup>14</sup> "She says he nibbled her feet, saying they were like golden loaves from the oven. And that she slept cuddled close to him, inside his skin, lost in nothingness as she felt her flesh part like a furrow turned by a plow, first burning, then warm and gentle, thrusting against her soft flesh, deeper, deeper, until she cried out. But she says his death hurt her so much more." (Rulfo 2002 127).

not get to see. He never has real power over her, even if she stays in his house until her demise, even if he is certain he bought her from her father. Susana, in fact, belongs to none of them.

Susana escapes both through her madness and her death. Even if she is isolated in La Media Luna, she keeps Páramo far from her, wanting to possess only her, even when he is with other women. This carries on until Susana dies. After Susana's death, Pedro is portrayed as powerless in the sense that he could not keep her with him: "Fue la última vez que te vi. Pasaste rozando con tu cuerpo las ramas del paraíso que está en la vereda y te llevaste con tu aire sus últimas hojas. Luego desapareciste. Te dije: '¡Regresa, Susana!'" (Rulfo 1981 151)<sup>15</sup>. Páramo remembers the scene, old and sick, still feeling incapable. Pedro was, as always, unable to retain her during her passing. The man's macho image is shattered to all, even to himself. Susana shakes the foundation of his power, and demonstrates the fragility of his persona, reminding him of the time when he was not a macho and did not get everything he wanted.

The macho image depends not only on the ability of being the best, and the smartest, even the most ruthless; the possession of the female body (and her will) complement this image. The downfall of Pedro Páramo begins when Susana San Juan arrives to his house and refuses, through madness, to be his.

When Susana dies, she is buried with minimal attention by the town, and the constant toll of the bells makes the people of Comala believe there is a party. Pedro has the bells tolling constantly but the sound only confuses people and prompts them to throw a

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<sup>15</sup> "That was the last time I saw you. As you want by, you brushed the branches of the Paradise tree beside the path, sweeping away its last leaves with your passing. Then you disappeared. I called after you, 'Come back, Susana!'" (Rulfo 2002 152).

party. In the middle of mourning Susana, Pedro realizes the memory of the late woman is being disrespected, and so is his authority, so he seeks revenge. Comala punishes Páramo with the party and their happiness after Susana's death, even if it means condemning the village and its inhabitants to death. Pedro's revenge destroys his town and what was left of his power, in an act of complete self-harm. Pedro chooses to die, blaming the people of Comala for it.

On the other hand, Francisco Rosas is always aware of how his macho persona is failing. Julia's indifference becomes threatening to Rosas when Felipe Hurtado, one of her former lovers, arrives to Ixtepec. Rosas actively seeks to isolate Julia, in an attempt to control her. Although Rosas attempts to confine Andrade permanently, his strategy appears to be ineffective in controlling Julia herself. However, alone with her, the general is aware of how little power he had over the woman. Julia, like San Juan, seeks refuge in her own mind, but unlike Susana, she stays sane and impassive. Julia, as the General thinks, seeks refuge in her former lovers, in the memory of other men, which he is unable to control (Garro 1987 79). The macho persona the general attempts to construct is contradicted by the inability to make Julia love him and respect him.

The need to control all memories, and the obsession with being the only lover of a woman fits within the ideas of the macho. Although he is permitted to have several partners and affairs, the woman he chooses as a permanent partner is forced to be virginal and never have any sexual expressions beyond the man that has "claimed" her: "[T]he characterization of women throughout Mexican literature has been profoundly influenced by two archetypes present in the Mexican psyche: that of the woman who has kept her virginity and that of the one who has lost it" (Boschetto 2). Julia does not fit the virginal model, unlike Antonia, the lover of another military man. Julia, therefore, is considered



“tainted”, and therefore uncontrollable by Rosas. Like Susana San Juan, Andrade has her own sexual drive and desire, and what she wants is different what Rosas thinks she should want.

The power of Francisco Rosas crumbles in front of, and away from, Julia. Although the general has unconditional power over Ixtepec and a loyal army of men, his lover frightens him more than any possible violent action from the rebels or the indigenous population. Rosas commands Don Pepe, owner of the hotel, to not let Julia open the balcony doors, her direct window to the world, or let her outside. Julia accepts the confinement and the physical assaults, knowing that Rosas, as he admits it, will never fully control her mind and thoughts. Julia’s final act of defiance is her escape with a former lover, who traveled to Ixtepec to run away with her. Felipe Hurtado, the lover, acts as an easy way for Julia to escape the village and Rosas’ attempts to dominate her.

The Cristero rebellion in Ixtepec and the immediate loss of authority of Rosas are both tied to Julia’s departure. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the Cristero rebellion brought an important number of uprisings in extremely Catholic areas of Mexico. Ixtepec is no exception, and soon people begin to disobey the authority of Rosas regarding the federal mandate of not celebrating any religious act anymore. None of the people in the village are willing to compromise their religious freedom, especially not after Francisco Rosas was abandoned by Julia.

Julia and Felipe’s escape takes a great toll on the perceived power of General Rosas, but also on the whole town. As the novel describes, the place is lackluster without the presence of Julia, and the macho image of Rosas begins to diminish. Julia was a necessary piece to his image of ruthless rural boss, both to the people and to himself. He goes out and drinks significantly more, true to the tradition of machos who seek comfort in alcoholic

drinks instead of emotional outlets<sup>16</sup>. Rosas is seen several times, drunk and looking for Julia, inspiring both pity and disgust. This apparent lack of control allows the people from Ixtepec to plan an important revolt.

Although the uprising results in several arrests and executions of the rebels, the people of Ixtepec stop being afraid of Francisco Rosas and his men. Even when Isabel Moncada, part of the rebellion, becomes Rosas' new lover, he has little to no power over her and is still constantly reminded of Julia and is unable to reject Isabel:

La presencia de Isabel volvía intolerable la ausencia de Julia. Su sombra ligera se esfumaba, expulsada por la voz y el cuerpo de su nueva querida. Por las noches, antes de entrar a su cuarto, se prometía: “Ahora le digo que se vaya”. Luego, frente a ella, una especie de piedad avergonzada le impedía echarla a la calle y enfurecido con lo que él llamaba “su debilidad” apagaba la luz de mal talante y se metía en la cama sin dirigirle la palabra. (Garro 1987 251)<sup>17</sup>

The presence of Isabel and the stern contrast with Julia drive Rosas to the point of madness, when he is no longer able to maintain the shaky control he once had over Ixtepec. The comparison Rosas makes between Julia and Isabel is centered around the latter being harsh and stubborn; Rosas likes women who are soft and delicate, perhaps because they appear easier to subdue and more socially acceptable. After being defied by the community during the uprising, Rosas once again is challenged and defeated by Nicolás, Isabel's brother. Isabel begs for his forgiveness and the general grants it, but Nicolás insists on being executed like the rest of the people. Rosas, unable to fulfill the promise he made to Isabel,

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<sup>16</sup> It is important to point out that, although *Los recuerdos del porvenir* only contains musical references to popular songs, several musicians and songs refer to men who drink due to failed relationships. *Ella* and *En el último trago*, both sung by José Alfredo Jiménez, are a good summary of the “drunk because of love” theme.

<sup>17</sup> Isabel's presence made Julia's absence intolerable. Her airy shadow vanished, driven away by the voice and the body of his new mistress. At night, before he entered his room, Rosas promised himself, “Now I'll tell her to go.” Then, in her presence, a kind of embarrassed pity kept him from putting her out in the street. Infuriated by what he called his “weakness”, he reluctantly blew out the light and got into bed without speaking to her (Garro 1969 244 – 245).

is left completely powerless. The macho image is destroyed and both the town and the man know it.

At the end, Francisco Rosas is taken away from Ixtepec, after losing his macho image and the respect of a town. His failed attempt to save Isabel's brother, and Nicolás's will to die for his actions, causes him to lose the respect of his men. Without Julia and Isabel, stripped of his social power and his army of men, his destiny matters very little to everyone. In the process of trying to control all Ixtepec, he lost everything. It is fitting that he only fades away (Garro 1987 294).

It is important to mention that, before their downfalls, both Pedro and Francisco are part of towns that become complicit in their violence against Dolores, Susana, Julia, and the "queridas". Comala is a town that condones the violence that Pedro exerts over the people, be it economic, social or sexual. Páramo has plenty of children, even if he hardly takes care of any of them (Rulfo 1981 11). Despite already being married to Susana, Pedro keeps looking for women to have sex with, most of them being young and helpless. Damiana Cisneros, a woman who served Pedro until his final days, helps Pedro by coaxing the women she knows to sleep with him: "-¡Ah, qué don Pedro! -dijo Damiana-. No se le quita lo gatero. Lo que no entiendo es por qué le gusta hacer las cosas tan a escondidas; con hábirmelo avisado, yo le hubiera dicho a la Margarita que el patrón la necesita para esta noche, y él no hubiera tenido ni la molestia de levantarse de su cama" (Rulfo 1987 134).<sup>18</sup> Damiana sees Pedro seeking women as something natural, and even tries to make his chase easier for him. The woman perpetuates a machismo system, one where the man demands

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<sup>18</sup> "Oh, that don Pedro!" said Damiana. "He never gets over chasing the girls. What I don't understand is why he insist on doing things on the sly. If he'd just let me know, I would have told Margarita that the patrón needed her tonight, and he wouldn't even have the bother of leaving his bed" (Rulfo 2002 134).

women as a tribute, and no one is allowed to say no. In fact, people make it easier for the macho to continue a misogynist system. This happens with Dorotea and Miguel Páramo, Pedro's favorite son. The woman buys women for the young man, and even investigates when they are alone so he can rape them (Rulfo 1987 95). Fulgor and other men of Comala are also complicit in Pedro and Miguel's activities; it was Sedano who convinced Dolores to marry Pedro.

Something similar happens in Ixtepec, especially regarding the "queridas" and Julia. Although the people of the village know that the women who live in the hotel were kidnapped, and the town does nothing but judge them (Garro 1987 40). Julia, on the other hand, is blamed when Rosas has a violent outburst and kills someone. The people of Ixtepec relate her not being docile and nice to Rosas to the man's violence, and whenever some dies they say it's Julia's fault:

-Dicen que lo está volviendo loco... - dijo la viuda, y enrojeció ligeramente al llevar ligeramente al llevar la conversación a Julia. Ella era la verdadera culpable. Las criadas del Hotel Jardín dejaban los chismes en las cocinas y de allí pasaban a las mesas y a las reuniones. Sus amigos la miraron con aprobación, incitándola a que dijera lo que sabía sobre la responsabilidad de Julia en la muerte de Ignacio. (Garro 1981 88)<sup>19</sup>

Julia, then, is considered a danger to both Rosas and Ixtepec, even if she is not physically murdering people, which Rosas does. Some people go as far as taking delight in imagining Francisco killing Julia in one of his violent outbursts, since she is considered to be guilty of his crimes (Garro 1987 75).

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<sup>19</sup> "They say that she is driving him crazy," the widow said, and she blushed slightly as she changed the subject to Julia, who was the real culprit. The maids at the Hotel Jardín left their gossip in the kitchen and from there it moved on to tables and gatherings. Her friends looked at her with approval, encouraging to tell what she knew about Julia's responsibility in the death of Ignacio.

Comala and Ixtepec display questionable attitudes towards the women the machos desire and abuse. This is done out of fear, respect and even because there is a rooted misogyny within the town. There is a deep machismo running through both Comala and Ixtepec, a collective mindset that values the male leaders and disapproves of female agency. After all, machismo was accepted and celebrated until recently in most rural communities in Mexico. When Julia or Susana decide to escape from the grip of their captors (and lovers), they are bound to be blamed or judged by the people of their towns for the actions of the men.

It is not the disobedience of women that ends Comala and desolates Ixtepec, although the blame is placed on Susana and Julia. Both macho's attitudes are pinned on the women, despite the fact that it is the men who do the destruction. The people of both towns justify the men's vengeful ways by saying the women's actions (and death) made them destructive, neglecting to acknowledge the pattern of violence the men already had. Comala dies after Susana does, but only because Pedro's inaction led to the town's downfall. Ixtepec has a surge of violence after Julia and Francisco fight, but because Rosas seeks an outlet for his frustration and anger.

Pedro decides to let Comala die after Susana is not mourned properly, since he sees it as a fitting punishment, a death for a death. The few people left in town resent both Susana and Pedro because of it, despite her having been forced to be his wife and having no active role in such destruction. Francisco Rosas hangs indigenous men after fighting with Julia and displays them around town for the people to see. Whenever Ixtepec knows a fight between the man and woman broke out, the community prepares itself for another death and decides that Julia is guilty because she disrespected Rosas. Ixtepec lives in fear of Julia's attitudes, not focusing on Rosas' behavior and violent desires.

The key to the preservation of Ixtepec and the death of Comala lies in the extent of the power both men had before being abandoned by the women they were obsessed with. Pedro became the only leader of Comala after marrying Dolores and killing his enemies. This allowed him to dictate every aspect of his town. Páramo's power, as macho and as a leader, goes unquestioned for over three decades, which gives him the ability to end Comala. Aside from that, the rural town, isolated and far from everything, has no governmental intervention and only sees rural armies. On the other hand, it is implied that Ixtepec had a form of government before Rosas arrives to rule the place. Rosas is part of the military and has his subordinates with him, which places him on top of a chain of command and makes him replaceable. Aside from not wanting to destroy the town, Francisco is unable to make Ixtepec disappear. The man's dominion over the place only allows him to kill and hurt, but not erase and destroy it completely, because his power over Ixtepec is only partial.

## CHAPTER II

### IN A WAR-TORN COUNTRY: TALES OF DESIRE

The Mexican countryside, underdeveloped during the first three decades of the twentieth century, experienced even further neglect after the Land Reform mentioned in Chapter I. Despite the efforts to effectively distribute land among agrarian workers and to modernize the existing infrastructure, the Land Reform failed: "During the Cárdenas administration (1934 – 1939) large amounts of good land were distributed. In the following period (1940 – 1947), little land was distributed, and what little was granted was of poor quality" (Walsh 95). This trend continued throughout the twentieth century, leaving most rural communities in ruin and with little federal support. This neglect translated into increased poverty in such communities and inequity on most levels of these societies (Valencia Chapter 3).

Mexico's drug production is a byproduct of the neglect that the countryside suffered after the Revolution. After the Cristero war, Mexico experienced several decades of economic development, which led to the so-called Mexican Miracle. However, soon afterwards, the country suffered monetary crises and a sudden rise in the production of drugs, especially in the northwestern part of the country. The Golden Triangle—a region that spans parts of Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Durango—began producing more and more illicit substances, due to higher demand.

Drug trafficking between Mexico and the United States became a common practice during the 1950s (Astorga *El Siglo* 93-98). Both young men and seasoned smugglers were soon being detained by law officers from both countries. Men and women smuggled marijuana, opium, and heroin across the border, and the substances became more expensive each year. Trafficking and drug production increased in several areas of the country, and,

during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the U.S. government pressured its Mexican counterpart to take swift action against smuggling:

La colaboración entre México y Estados Unidos se extendió a todos los niveles de mando en los gobiernos de ambos lados de la frontera. Un ejemplo es que, en marzo de 1974, el senador Vane Hartke escribió a José Juan de Olloqui que estaba preocupado por el intenso tránsito de drogas de México a Estados Unidos, por lo que solicitaba información sobre los planes del gobierno mexicano para combatirlo, y ofreció su colaboración para apoyarlos.

Es conveniente aclarar que Estados Unidos no quitó nunca el dedo del renglón y, aunque con matices, no abandonó la idea de empujar un régimen global de prohibición de las drogas. (Enciso 606)<sup>20</sup>

The U.S. had a strict policy on drugs, and attempted to enforce it in Mexico, particularly at the border. The constant pressure from the United States and a steep increment in drug usage led to an operation to fight circulation and consumption: “A mediados de enero de 1977 dio oficialmente comienzo «la más gigantesca batida contra el tráfico de drogas que se haya realizado en México, con la participación de diez mil soldados». La medida se denominó Operación Cóndor<sup>21</sup>” (Astorga *El Siglo* 115)<sup>22</sup>.

However, the operation did not do much, aside from prompting attacks towards the men who ordered it, and the journalists who were covering the case.

During the following decades, the drug business became one of the most notorious features of life in Mexico. Some of the first narcos (short for narcotraficante), the men who controlled criminal organizations within their regions, became visible public figures and

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<sup>20</sup> The collaboration between Mexico and the United States was extended to all levels of command in both governments. For example, in March 1974, Senator Vane Hartke wrote to José Juan de Olloqui that he was concerned about the intense trafficking from Mexico to the United States. Hartke requested information about the Mexican government's plans to fight drug smuggling, and he offered his collaboration to support such plans. It is important to clarify that the United States constantly insisted about it and did not abandon the idea of pushing a global regime of prohibition against drugs (Enciso 606).

<sup>21</sup> Despite its shared name, this operation has no relationship with the Operation Condor, an anti-communist military operation that organized several coup d'états in Latin America.

<sup>22</sup> In mid-January 1977, “the biggest raid against drug trafficking in Mexico officially began, with the participation of ten thousand soldiers”. The measure was called *Operación Condor* (Astorga *El Siglo* 115).



even started doing legitimate business with respected entrepreneurs and investors. However, such visibility also attracted the attention of law-enforcement agencies such as the DEA and led to the first high-profile case against a narco. The “Caso Camarena” involved Rafael Caro Quintero and Miguel Ángel Gallardo Félix, leaders of the prominent Guadalajara cartel, and Enrique Camarena Salazar, an undercover DEA agent (*Astorga El Siglo* 133 – 145). In 1985, Camarena was kidnapped and murdered after becoming close to the members of the Guadalajara cartel. The agent’s execution prompted an international investigation and led to the arrest of Caro Quintero. The case also uncovered a web of interpersonal relationships of both Quintero and Gallardo and stained the reputation of politicians and businessmen involved with them.

Several other important narcos rose to power during the nineties. Joaquín Guzmán Loera, known as El Chapo, Ismael Zambada, alias El Mayo, and Amado Carillo Fuentes, known as El Señor de los Cielos were some of the narcos who became well known during the last decade of the twentieth century. The general public began to have a growing sense of distrust of the Mexican government, and the drug-related crimes increased exponentially in states like Sinaloa. Despite their popular support, Guzmán Loera was captured in Guatemala in 1993, Carillo Fuentes died in the middle of a plastic surgery in 1997, and Zambada has rarely been seen in the last forty years. During the late 1990s, a new generation of narcos arose from the Golden Triangle.

Mexico became a neoliberal country during Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s presidency (1988 – 1994), which led the country on the inevitable path of globalization. Entering the global panorama (and agreements such as NAFTA), however, did not diminish drug-related illegal activity in Mexico. On the contrary, trafficking became more extended, and areas of illegal activity such as the Golden Triangle became hotspots for the government and

narcos: “En este sentido, la conformación de territorios ilegales se explica por la reforma neoliberal de los Estados-nación, los procesos globales de reducción de gasto público y las políticas de ajuste estructural. La transnacionalización de la economía mundial ha sido el mejor instrumento de la globalización del narcotráfico” (Maldonado 439).<sup>23</sup>

During 2006, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa became president. One of Calderón's first official orders was to enact a plan called Operativo Conjunto Michoacán (Operation Michoacán for the rest of the world). This program had a clear goal: it was meant to be the first step towards capturing all narcos and stopping organized crime in Mexico. However, the military operation failed, due to the fact that the Mexican state had already been weakened by its interconnections with trafficking and its extensive corruption:

We could say that ever since the end of the 1970s, the Mexican state cannot be thought of as a state *per se*, but rather as a web of political corruption that has followed the orders of drug traffickers in the management of the country (Resa, 1999). This fusion of drug trafficking and politics has become even more extreme in the last decade, locking the government and organized crime in a constant battle for power. (Valencia 47)

The war on drugs waged by Calderón (and the U.S. as well) has had important social and economic costs for the country. The war displaced numerous people, and even today many still look for those who disappeared or were kidnapped by either the military or the cartels. Numerous narcos and *sicarios*, a term used to describe the henchmen of the cartel, have been arrested or killed. Among those are José Manuel Torres Félix and his brother Javier Torres Félix, who worked for “El Mayo” and “El Chapo”. José Rodrigo Aréchiga Gamboa, known as “El Chino Ántrax” became famous due to his lavish lifestyle, which led to his

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<sup>23</sup> In that sense, the creation of illegal territories can be explained due to the nation-states’ neoliberal reforms, the global reduction of public expenditure and the policies of structural adjustment. The transnationalization of the world economy has been the best instrument for the globalization of drug trafficking (Maldonado 439).

arrest. The Beltrán Leyva family became a cartel, and several of its members died in military operations or were arrested. Although there are not many female narcos, notable female figures include Enedina Arellano Félix, leader of the Tijuana cartel, and Sandra Ávila Beltrán, known as “La Reina del Pacífico”.

Narcos are one of the most relevant touchstones of Mexican contemporary culture, since they are known and discussed constantly. The drug lords plague the pages of the newspapers and are constantly talked about in *corridos*, popular songs, and even in television shows. Most of the popular narcos are particularly well known within their region, becoming high-profile celebrities, and

[...] hasta las personas menos informada ha escuchado nombres de quién es quién en el mundo del tráfico de drogas. Las medianamente informadas saben incluso dónde y cómo viven, y hasta pueden haber asistido en alguna ocasión a una de sus fiestas o a las de sus descendientes. Y entre las mejor informadas algunas ya han desaparecido, otros prefieren no hablar por razones que van desde el temor (comprensible) hasta un escepticismo científico o moral, otras más porque el silencio les permite seguir haciendo negocios. [...] Hay que agregar a este esquema los hechos, y fortuna atribuidos a personajes sinaloenses sentenciados por tráfico de drogas y el homicidio de un agente antidrogas estadounidense. (Astorga *Mitología* 71)<sup>24</sup>

The narcos are feared, respected, and sometimes even considered benefactors. The result of all this attention has been the creation of a new narcoculture, one where these men are protagonists. The men—since they are mostly male—also create their own personal brand of masculinity, one that appears constantly, even within those who are not in the drug trafficking world.

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<sup>24</sup> [...] even those who are less informed know who is who in the world of drug trafficking. The moderately informed know where and how they live, and may have even attended to their or their offspring’s parties. Some of the most informed have already disappeared, others prefer not to speak for reasons ranging from fear (understandable) to a scientific or moral skepticism, others because silence allows them to continue their businesses. [...] This is related to the fortune attributed to Sinaloan men sentenced for drug trafficking and the murder of an American anti-drug agent. (Astorga *Mitología* 71)

In short, a new form of the macho also arises as a consequence of the growing popularity of the narco. The men's lifestyle is lavish and promising, which attracts many:

La narcocultura se caracteriza por exaltar un estilo de vida marcado por el derroche, la trasgresión, corrupción e impunidad en un contexto circunscrito por la violencia, drogas y armas. En el imaginario social, estos elementos se combinan con lujos excéntricos como enormes mansiones, fajos de billetes, fiestas exorbitantes, carros y celulares de lujo, alhajas llamativas y el consumo desenfrenado de alcohol y otras drogas. La promesa para quien ingresa a este mundo es la obtención de placeres rápidos, momentáneos, a base de poco esfuerzo, a sabiendas de que la expectativa de vida se reduce en forma drástica. (Jiménez 107)<sup>25</sup>

However, not everybody can have access to such a lifestyle, and the men who can aspire to achieve it must fulfill several roles and represent a particular brand of a macho. Just like the rural boss, the macho in the narco era must be a virile man, one with all the desirable characteristics listed before: control over female bodies, economic resources, and power over the rest of the men, who are considered inferior. Despite the fact that they share other characteristics, the macho from the rural boss era did not focus on having a lavish lifestyle, and drug consumption was rare. The narco machos' objective is to obtain money and luxurious items to prove their economic power, in contrast to the rural macho, who appropriated regions and land.

Globalization and the increased use of social media has allowed a quick expansion of the macho ideal that accompanies the narco, even reaching men who are outside of the drug trafficking world. Men want to dress, act, and live like narcos because being (or appearing to be) a narco makes them machos by default. The macho image that a narco

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<sup>25</sup> The narcoculture exalts a lifestyle that is built upon transgression, corruption, and impunity in a context circumscribed by violence, drugs and weapons. In the social imaginary, these elements are combined with eccentric luxuries such as huge mansions, wads of bills, exorbitant parties, luxury cars and phones, eye-catching jewelry and unbridled consumption of alcohol and drugs. The promise for those who enter this world is to obtain fast, momentary pleasures with little effort, knowing that life expectancy is drastically reduced. (Jiménez 107)

projects attracts young men, not only because it grants social recognition and is usually accompanied by a wealthy lifestyle, but also because it upholds the machismo values of its time and promises control over the female body (Valencia chapters 3 – 4). This new form of masculinity is widely practiced and respected in many communities.

The macho ideal manifests itself as a form of hierarchy, ruling over both men and women. This hierarchy is only achieved through a constant exertion of power over others: those who are weaker or must be subdued. “El machismo se distingue por la exacerbación de la sexualidad, la competencia entre pares y la voluntad de dominio sobre las mujeres, lo que constituye hombres viriles, violentos y arbitrarios (Fuller, 2012). El macho tiene un conjunto actitudes como ser aprovechado, tosco, agresivo, voraz, violento o patán” (Núñez-González 114).<sup>26</sup>

As mentioned above, an absolute control over feminine and effeminate bodies is vital to the macho. Women, to them, must be attractive, desirable, and always ready for their pleasure, since they are little more than simple sexual objects. Women are to be “used”, taken advantage of, and men must feel free to impose themselves over them. In a struggle for power, women are grouped together with those men who are not considered superior or worthy of being deemed a macho:

Es como una cadena en donde las frustraciones se descargan contra la persona que se encuentra abajo en la escala jerárquica, la que tiene menos posibilidades de defenderse y a quien se percibe como más débil, además contra quien se puede ejercer un daño con total impunidad, debido a la creencia de que les pertenece por derecho natural. En el mundo del narco se justifica, desde esta óptica, la

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<sup>26</sup> “Machismo is characterized by an exacerbation of sexuality, competition between peers and the will to dominate women, thus creating virile, violent, and arbitrary men (Fuller, 2012). The man takes advantage of everyone, and is rough, aggressive, voracious, violent or boorish (Núñez-González 114).”

subordinación de los hombres en una escala jerárquica inferior y del colectivo de las mujeres. (Jiménez 108)<sup>27</sup>

Failing to achieve such dominance over the “lesser” other results in humiliation and loss of status in the hierarchy formed within a group of men.

Another predominant trait of the macho, tied with the fear of not being able to dominate those considered inferior, is homophobia. The image of virility and masculinity that a macho needs to transmit must never be “tainted” with anything that expresses homosexual desires, despite the fact that some machos may engage in sexual encounters with other men:

What we call masculinity is often a hedge against being revealed as a fraud, an exaggerated set of activities that keep others from seeing through us, and a frenzied effort to keep at bay those fears within ourselves. Our real fear is not fear of women but of being ashamed or humiliated in front of other men, or being dominated by stronger men. [...] Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. (Kimmel 65)

Men who participate in homosexual practices must do so from a domination standpoint, and only if the group they belong to approves. The macho can penetrate, but never be penetrated, since the latter is considered weak and “disgusting”. Therefore, machos who engage in sexual encounters with other men (or queer people) must do so from a dominant perspective, and never have any romantic motivations for doing so. Such ideas about the sexual domination of queer bodies are practiced by the macho in the narco era, whereas the rural boss macho steers away from all queer sexual contact.

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<sup>27</sup> It is like a chain where frustrations are discharged against the person who is down the hierarchical ladder, the one who is less likely to defend himself and who is perceived as weaker, as well as the one against whom harm can be done with total impunity, because they believe it's their right. In the narco world, the subordination of men on a lower hierarchical scale and of women's collective is justified. (Jiménez 108)

Yuri Herrera and Fernanda Melchor explore the ideas of masculinity and machismo in the context of narcoculture. In *Trabajos del reino*, by Herrera, and *Temporada de huracanes*, by Melchor, the authors both delve in the implications of narcoculture and the impact its particular brand of masculinity have in a given society. The novels show two different sides of a culture of violence, exacerbated masculinity, and longings for social and economic power. *Trabajos del reino* reflects the luxurious lifestyle of a narco and his protégés, explaining the ideas of male hierarchy through a criminal organization. The main narco, a man known as *El Rey*, The King, is a famous criminal lord, someone who is respected in his organization and community. People go on pilgrimages to his house to ask for favors and protection, which he gives. The man is admired and feared due to his power. The narco's palace represents an oasis in a rural community desolated and neglected by the government.

Melchor's novel also presents a desolated landscape, full of violence and misery. The men and women of La Matosa, the town portrayed in *Temporada de huracanes*, live in poverty. The land has suffered several natural disasters, and has little to no governmental support or vigilance in its police department. The living conditions affect the characters and leave them wanting economic stability and a better lifestyle. The young men from Las Matosas want to have money with little effort, in order to obtain drugs and alcohol. The adolescents are trapped in the ideas of the narco lifestyle, despite not being able to afford or enter such a luxurious way of life. People like Brando and Luismi want the pleasures of living like a narco macho, despite not being one, and they do everything to achieve their goal.

Both novels share some ideas about class mobility within impoverished communities, a theme which connects with the portraits of narcoculture they share. In Herrera's story, *El Artista*, The Artist, a man who writes songs about *El Rey*, is homeless before the narco welcomes him into his lavish life. The people who live in the narco's palace have economic security because they join the narco dynamic, thus achieving a lifestyle otherwise unreachable to them. On the other hand, the people of La Matosa desire to participate in such narco logic in order to improve their living condition. However, there is only one person they believe offers them such opportunity: *La Bruja*, The Witch. *La Bruja*, an important member of the community, is surrounded by legends of her fortune. People desire to rob her in order to obtain her riches. Class mobility, in such rural communities, can only be achieved through illegal means.

As mentioned before, the model of masculinity created in communities influenced by narcoculture is different to that of Chapter I. The rural boss's masculinity relied on land dominion, and on the unwavering obedience of entire towns. Narco machos do not depend on land control, but instead on concrete economic power, on having money and other resources. Monetary power grants them the ability to purchase everything: drugs, alcohol, and even women. The narco macho is a man who has lived through globalization and is aware of why money is needed.

*El Rey* is one of *Trabajos del reino*'s main characters. The man is a declared narco, one that everyone knows and respects in his city. The narrator of the story, a young man known as *El Artista*, also known as *Lobo*, a poor man who dreams of riches and economic stability, spots the narco among the crowd in the bar where he sings. The young man is fascinated by what the narco represents, and is even envious of his power. *El Artista* wants to be part of that life, to achieve some class mobility, one which takes him off the streets.



The best way to do so is through his craft, his ability to compose corridos about the feats of great narcos. So the young man becomes a minstrel in a court that heavily relies in appearances and careful performativity.

The key to understanding *El Rey*'s power is understanding how he performs his role both as a narco and as a macho. When talking about performativity, it is necessary to review Judith Butler's ideas. Butler defines performativity in terms of gender construction and body presentation (and dramatization), a characterization which clearly intersects with the macho and his representation among his peers:

The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well. (Butler 521)

Butler understands gender and body presentation as a something that is constructed and in continuous change. Similarly, each macho materializes and presents himself in a different fashion, one that is advantageous for him and allows him to participate in the machismo system.

*El Rey* presents himself as a wealthy man in every opportunity he has to do so. In his very first appearance, when he meets *El Artista*, the man fashions himself and behaves as an imposing macho and a strong leader, as those around him are able to tell:

Conocía la manera de tentarse, la mirada alta, el brillo. Observó las joyas que le ceñían y entonces supo: era un Rey. La única vez que Lobo fue al cine vio una película donde aparecía otro hombre así: fuerte, suntuoso, con poder sobre las cosas del mundo. Era un rey, y a su alrededor todo cobraba sentido. Los hombres luchaban por él, las mujeres parían para él; él protegía y regalaba, y cada cual, en el

reino, tenía por su gracia un lugar preciso. Pero los que acompañaban a este Rey no eran simples vasallos. Eran la Corte. (Herrera 2008 4 – 5)<sup>28</sup>

*El Rey* performs both his narco masculinity and his social role as a narco in different ways, all related to each other. He wears expensive jewelry and surrounds himself with those who follow him and make him powerful, the *Corte*, actions which function as a reaffirmation of his narco persona. But he is also haughty, strong, and dominant, all characteristics of a macho. *El Artista* can tell he is a macho, and an important one, since both men and women obey him, following the hierarchical order among narco organizations and the macho system that stems from it.

The possibilities of fashioning oneself are not limited to physical representation: public image and social presentation are fundamental as well. After the singer performs for *El Rey*, the narco decides to keep *El Artista* with him, as part of his royal court, since the constant praise does nothing but enhance the narco's macho persona. *El Rey* has steady control over the community he leads, and having *El Artista* with him cements his authority through the songs that praise him. The young man introduces *El Rey* in all his songs, whether they are about him or about one of his men, as a reminder that the narco is not only the boss, but also the one with the best macho persona, the person who got to the top: “No hubo cortesano a quien negara sus dones, pero el Artista contaba la hazaña de cada cual sin olvidarse de quién la hacía posible. Sí, eres chilo, porque te lo permite el Rey. Sí, qué

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<sup>28</sup> He recognized the way the man sat, the lofty look, the glimmer. Then he saw the jewels that graced him and he knew: he was a King. The one time Lobo had gone to the pictures he saw a movie with a man like this. Strong, sumptuous, dominating the things of the world. He was a King, and around him everything became meaningful. Men gave their lives for him, women gave birth for him; he protected and bestowed, and in the kingdom through his grace, each and every subject had a precise place. But those accompanying the King were more than his vessels. This was his Court. (Herrera 2017 7 – 8)

valiente eres, porque te inspira el Rey” (Herrera 2008 33).<sup>29</sup> *El Artista*’s role in the organization is to praise and to improve the narco’s performance as a macho.

Yet there is something that calls *El Rey*’s masculinity performance into question. *El Rey* is perceived by those around him as sick, in need of being cured of an ailment that prevents him from properly performing as a macho. After the narco’s first encounter with *El Artista*, a man insinuates that he knows a rumor about *El Rey*, one that everyone knows, although no one confronts the narco about it. Later in the novel, it is revealed that he is infertile and has been unable to procreate with his lover, a woman known as *La Cualquiera*.<sup>30</sup> This woman is the daughter of *La Bruja*, the narco’s spiritual healer and part of his close circle. *La Bruja*, whose character will be further discussed later in the chapter, is a woman who provides the narco with help that cannot be provided by western medicine. *La Bruja* confirms the infertility rumor when she tells her daughter that she is making an effort to “cure” the narco in order to achieve her purpose: “Aquí vas a tenerlo todo, nomás que componga a ese hombre. Espera un poquito más. Cuando la sangre rica que le doy arregle su semilla, tú también tienes que estar lista. Aún si maldito pájaro no sirve voy a encontrar la manera de regalarte todo esto” (Herrera 2008 76 – 77)<sup>31</sup>.

When *La Cualquiera* runs away with *El Artista*, *La Bruja* sees the encounter as a possible pregnancy and salvation of the narco’s reputation and their futures. However, the man does not impregnate *La Cualquiera*, therefore he fails to save his macho image of the

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<sup>29</sup> “To no courtier he denied his talents, but the Artist recounted the feats of each man without forgetting who made it all possible. Sure, you’re down because the King allows it. Sure, you’re brave, because the King inspires you” (Herrera 2017 27).

<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that her name can be translated both as “whomever” or as slang for prostitute—the word is also translated as “commoner” in Lisa Dillman’s English version of the text. All three translations reveal the conflicts inherent in translating her name and her persona.

<sup>31</sup> “Here, it’s all going to be yours, soon as I fix that man. Sit tight a little longer. When the rich blood I give him puts his seed to rights, you’ve got to be ready too. Even if his damn peacock doesn’t work I’m going to find a way to leave all of this to you.” (Herrera 2017 63).

narco. *El Artista* also writes a dubious corrido about his boss, revealing his secrets. The *El Rey*'s loyal man, the one that elevates and helps his performance as a macho, tells everyone through the corrido that *El Rey* is unable to procreate, the narco loses even more credibility. This song condemns *El Rey* to his downfall, since his performance as a macho declines. The man can no longer be considered as a great man and leader if his sexual performance is called into question by his subordinate. The narco's performance, despite being careful in most aspects, cannot stop the rumors that will call it into question.

*El Rey*'s final act in the novel is a desperate attempt to improve his macho image and improve his performance. The man loses control over his lover, over other women and, finally, over his loyal men. *El Rey*'s arrest is possible because he lost credibility due to his infertility, his lack of control over female bodies. This weakness translated into the narco being discredited among other machos. Without a strong community of machos who worked for him and with him, *El Rey* lost everything. Therefore, it is clear why the narco's arranged arrest had to specify that he was captured in an orgy with several women; it was the only way to save the last remnant of his macho image. When *El Rey* is captured by the army, he appears in several newspapers looking proud for being recognized as a good sexual partner, since he was supposedly discovered while "pleasuring" three women. Although the reality is quite different, in the end the man fashions himself as a mighty lover, something the public can praise. The narco controls the narrative of his arrest, therefore giving him power to appear macho once again, despite having his reputation and image destroyed within his empire.

Brando, one of the men who live in La Matosa, the town where *Temporada de huracanes* takes place, also heavily relies on his ability to perform as a macho among his friends. Contrary *El Rey*, Brando does not have a kingdom or richness, but he is a

participant in the ideals of the narco macho. The novel, although not specifically about narcos, delves into narcoculture and the ideals it poses to young men. There is no singular narco who has his own kingdom in the story, but the ideas of bravado, virility, and machismo that inspire people like *El Rey* are present and ingrained in the men who commit murder and would do almost anything to live like one. Men like Brando and his friend Luismi seek recognition from their peers; they wish to be considered virile and masculine, and to have control over their lives in an intoxicating and drug-filled environment. They also desire a comfortable and lavish lifestyle, one that provides them with a lot of money after little effort on their part. A combination of earning money quickly and receiving pleasure happens when the young men get paid for having sex with homosexual men. Also, the desire to have expensive items (even if they are not the golden jewelry that many narcos possess) that demonstrate economic power is important to the young men in La Matosa. For example, Brando enjoys being seen with his expensive new sneakers. The young men live a wasteful life, one that they can brag about, just as narcos do. As we will see, *La Bruja* is the key for them to achieve their desired lifestyle.

*La Bruja* is the protagonist of Melchor's book, and she is presented as a powerful and mysterious woman, someone whose life and fortune are discussed everywhere in La Matosa. The woman is an important member of her rural community, respected and even feared. Among the young men, she becomes the provider of drugs and alcohol which are exchanged for sexual favors. Her character, whose life and death are further discussed below, become an essential part of how masculinity is constructed in La Matosa, and how Brando relates to his own performativity as a macho. It is also necessary to comment on the fact that *La Bruja* is female-identifying and female-assuming, despite being assigned male gender at birth. This woman was socialized and known all her life as female, and dressed

accordingly, always in black. Her gender performativity becomes particularly important when it is revealed that she has been mocked, called homophobic slurs, and presented as male in Brando's memories (Melchor 158).

Brando is the man who orchestrates *La Bruja's* murder; he reveals his plan in the final chapter of the novel. Brando recounts, from his perspective, his struggles to become a virile man, a true macho in the company of the other adolescents from town, which leads to *La Bruja's* murder. During his early adolescence, Brando started forming a definite image of how he should behave and perform in order to be considered a macho, inspired by narcoculture and the macho image created by narcos. Despite being educated in an extremely religious environment, the man quickly rid himself of the fear of sin and lust and embraced the beliefs and practices of his group of friends. The friend group, older than him, sets clear goals and rules for their own performativity as machos, and those who are part of the group must follow in order to be respected.

Brando is initially mocked for not having any sexual experiences at a young age, so he is then taught what is considered correct within the group. The rest of the young men relate their own sexual experiences with teachers, girls, and homosexuals, and in this way urge Brando to perform sexually within those limits. Everything is allowed and encouraged, as long as the men are the ones demonstrating their superiority through penetration, especially regarding other males. Any contact, therefore, is considered a feat worth bragging about, even when it is rape:

Estaba bien chico cuando lo desquintamos, pero es que ya estábamos hasta la madre de andarle viendo las nalgas, enfermos de jaria, y un día lo llevamos allá por los rumbos de las vías y entre todos le metimos la pitiza de su vida, ¿te acuerdas, loco? El chotito hasta lloraba de alegría, ¡no sabía ni qué hacer con tanta verga! ¿De

verdad nunca se la has metido a nadie, pinche Brando? ¡Chale! ¿Ni siquiera a un putito? (Melchor 162)<sup>32</sup>

Having sexual encounters with homosexuals defines the boundary of masculinity for the group of adolescents. Definitive control is fundamental in such cases, and the men feel like they have complete control over their desire and encounters with *La Bruja*. The group of young men perceive their activities with the woman as a perfectly acceptable scenario for getting alcohol and drugs, while still keeping their masculinity intact. This desire to be a complete macho is encouraged by the rest of the group, and they maintain a strong belief that their activities are not homosexual or branded as non-masculine. The group, then, decides who is within the restricted role of the macho and who is not, and all of them must perform according to the group's rules.

The greatest lingering fear of the group of young machos is to suffer, to some extent, what they do to the people they rape, penetrate, and sodomize, including *La Bruja*. For a macho, being raped means not only having lost the prestige of his virile persona, but also being closer to one of "them", the discriminated and violated others. Brando fears that he will become one of their friends' sexual partners, and end up being penetrated, which only furthers his drug-induced paranoia: "se ponía bien paranoico y se le figuraba que todos los que estaban ahí reunidos querían ponerlo bien loco para aprovecharse de él, para violarlo, si acaso llegaba a cerrar los ojos o a quedarse dormido" (Melchor 179)<sup>33</sup>. Brando,

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<sup>32</sup> He was very young when we took advantage of him, but it was because we were sick of just staring at his ass, sick with lust, and one day we took him to the train tracks and we all fucked him, you remember right? The faggot was squealing with joy, he had no idea what to do with all of our dicks! Are you sure you've never screwed anyone, Brando? Not even a faggot?

<sup>33</sup> He was paranoid, he thought that everyone there wanted to drug him so they could take advantage of him, to rape him, if he ever closed his eyes or fell asleep.

already insecure about his sexuality, must protect this instance of masculinity, especially being around *La Bruja* and the people who frequent her.

Brando is always doubtful of how masculinity is conceptualized and performed in La Matosa, since it reveals his homosexual desires. In killing *La Bruja*, the man seeks revenge, and feels entitled to do so. Brando knows that Luismi, his friend, freely engages in what he considers homosexual activities with *La Bruja* and other men, straying away from what the accepted idea of masculinity is:

[...] porque una cosa era dejarse querer por los putos, dejarse invitar unos tragos y una chela y ganarse un quinientón por soportar sus puterías, o incluso por cogérselos un rato por el culo o por la boca, y otra cosa era ser un puerco asqueroso como el pinche Luismi cuando se besuqueaba y se fajaba con la Bruja. Quién sabe por qué le daba tanta tirria a Brando ver eso; ni siquiera el espectáculo del marrano cacarizo del Mutante culeándose a la loca le parecía tan espantoso. Tal vez porque en el fondo todo eso de besarse con los gansos le parecía algo asqueroso, un atentado innoble a su hombría, y cómo era posible que el Luismi se atreviera a besar a la loca esa frente a todos, si Brando siempre había pensado que Luismi era un bato bien derecho, bien machín y bien chido [...] (Melchor 181)<sup>34</sup>

This comes into play when Brando realizes he is jealous of what Luismi does with others. Brando, in fact, knows he is attracted to Luismi, and everything he does to perform as a macho, like his friends want him to, causes him to be scared of his own homosexual desires. *La Bruja*'s murder is a revenge and a part of Brando's performance as a macho and an attempt to become rich and leave his old life behind (Melchor 201). Brando must murder the woman and Luismi, take her riches and run away from the life he is leading, in order to

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<sup>34</sup> [...] because it was one thing to be desired by the gays, to let them buy you a beer and to earn some money after letting them please you, or even fucking their asses or mouths, and another thing was to be a filthy pig like Luismi when he smooched and fucked *La Bruja*. Who knows why Brando was so mad when he saw that; not even the spectacle of the Mutante fucking that madwoman seemed so frightful to him. Maybe because deep down the whole thing about kissing with the faggots seemed disgusting to him, an attack on his manhood, and how was it possible that Luismi dared to kiss the crazy woman in front of everyone, if Brando always thought that Luismi was a good man, a macho, a great dude [...].



leave behind his homosexuality. But the plot fails, since the woman's fortune is nonexistent, and both Luismi and Brando are arrested.

The machos in *Trabajos del reino* and *Temporada de huracanes* fail to perform, but they are unable to fulfill their social roles due to different reasons. Brando cannot perform as a macho because he is unable to continue a performance that endangers his beliefs and demonstrates that he is not actually macho, but instead latently homosexual. *El Rey*, despite being willing to continue to perform as a macho, is unable to do so, because his inability to have offspring. Both machos cannot continue their performance, one because he is scared of his own sexual desires, the other because he is physically unable to fulfill his role.

Three female characters are fundamental to the macho's ability (and inability) to perform. *La Cualquiera* and both *Brujas* help the men and support the macho system in different ways, but they also contribute to the destruction of the men's images, all in different forms. *La Cualquiera* is a young woman, the lover of the narco, whose role in the macho system is similar to Susana San Juan's and Julia Andrade's. The *Brujas*, on the other hand, understand and participate in the dynamics of the system, and willingly participate in it.

*La Cualquiera* is presented as a forbidden woman, by *La Niña* (The Girl), a young prostitute exploited by *El Rey*, since *La Cualquiera* has been claimed by the narco. The rest of the young women who live in the man's house are ordered to pleasure and serve the many men that go through the palace. The girls become tokens of power, and are passed around as gifts and object pleasures that only exist for male delight. On the other hand, *La Cualquiera* is treated differently, because she is a key part of *El Rey*'s image. Although she is considered less vital than the men of the *Corte*, the woman is given special consideration,

not because she is an important person, but because she “belongs” to the macho. She is to be respected, and very few even dare to look at her.

*La Cualquiera*, on the other hand, is not happy with her place in the macho system. She is given to *El Rey* by his mother, *La Bruja*, in order to fulfill the mother’s desire for economic stability and an improved lifestyle. The older woman wants her daughter to be the queen of the kingdom, and actively seeks for a solution to *El Rey*’s infertility in order to secure the family’s future. But *La Cualquiera* does not desire to be with him. In fact, she attempts to run away several times, and she establishes a relationship with *El Artista*. The woman’s relationship severely affects the narco’s status, not because she does not want him, but because he is betraying him with a man lower in the hierarchy of power, a man meant to sing praises about his boss. Despite the fact that, according to machismo, a macho can have many sexual partners, but a woman must remain faithful to a single macho, like Pedro Páramo and Susana.

*El Artista* is aware of his position within the organization, and he understands that he must not touch what “belongs” to the narco. This self-restriction comes both from him being loyal to his superior, and from him recognizing the superiority of *El Rey* in all senses, acknowledging him as the macho to follow and to respect. Therefore, at first, *El Artista* is unable to touch the woman because: “para tocar a la Cualquiera no tenía permiso; a ella no se la había entregado el Rey, y sin su palabra las cosas no podían moverse. Se había acercado a la Cualquiera porque creyó a la Niña cuando le dijo que eso era, una entre el montón. ¿Y ahora qué hacía, ahora que no sólo ansiaba acariciarla sino estar con ella, compartir su soledad?” (Herrera 2008 55)<sup>35</sup>. The man sees her as forbidden, not because the

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<sup>35</sup> “Because he realized that he had no permission to touch The Commoner: The King had not consented, and without his say-so, things could never move forward. He had gotten close to the Commoner because he took

woman does not want to be with him, but because she is “owned” by the macho within that cultural system and such property must be respected by those who are “inferior”.

However, *La Cualquiera* escapes the palace, accompanied by *El Artista*. In the city, both enter a hotel and have sex. It is important to acknowledge that the woman is the one who initiates the relationship; she encourages *El Artista* to forget his ideas about the women belonging to the narco. The man hired to sing the narco’s praises is able to break the rules because *La Cualquiera* wants him to do so. The woman’s permission and willing participation determine the fact that *El Rey* loses his lover and part of his macho persona. The woman, then, is the one who decides who to be with, since both men are willing to have a relationship with her. Thus, she has agency and knows she is more than just a pleasure object. Like Susana and Julia, *La Cualquiera* finds mechanisms to run away and escape the grip of both her mother and her lover. The young woman is meant to be the crowning jewel of the narco’s kingdom, and provide him with an heir. The young woman is meant to fulfill the same role that Susana has in Pedro’s life, and Julia in Rosas’. *La Cualquiera* is meant to complete the image of the macho and to become another demonstration of his power. But all three refuse to do so, leaving the men powerless over them.

The *Brujas* in both texts are not only part of the machismo system, they also encourage it in order to reap the benefits from it. They become complicit with the machos, and even uphold the machismo ideals because it is convenient to them. Before analyzing the roles each woman plays, it is important to mention the role *brujería* and women who practice such witchcraft have in Mexico. Contemporary *brujería* “es una mezcla que lleva

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the Girl at her word when she said that that was what she was: one of many. And now what was he doing? Not only longing to touch her, but to be with her, to share her solitude” (Herrera 2017 45).

dentro de sí el manejo de hierbas medicinales, algunos elementos de las creencias y el ritual prehispánico, ciertas tendencias de la brujería occidental, a lo que se añaden creencias y prácticas de la religión católica reelaboradas” (Scheffler 19)<sup>36</sup>. *Brujas* and *Brujos* are well regarded in their communities and praised as the people who can align supernatural forces with or against the rest of the people. This high regard has been manifested by narcos as well<sup>37</sup>.

Generally speaking, both *brujas* practice their craft to cure ailments that contemporary medicine would tackle in a different form. For example, Melchor’s *Bruja* performs abortions by making young women drink concoctions made with plants and flowers, and the other woman helps the narco to cure his infertility. Such practices are considered traditional medicine and, even today, that particular form of knowledge is widely practiced and well-regarded throughout Mexico. However, the prevalence of that form of medicine is usually tied to impoverished communities and superstitious people:

La pervivencia y reproducción de la medicina popular se encuentran en su articulación con las relaciones sociales y en las condiciones de reproducción de la realidad social, especialmente en aquellas sociedades que están sujetas a instancias de dominación y relaciones de explotación que las sumen en la pobreza. En estas condiciones, el complejo salud-enfermedad crea una dimensión que se inscribe dentro de las necesidades básicas para la reproducción del grupo social y del individuo. (Vargas Montero 132)<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “[...] is a mixture of traditional herbal medicine, some elements of prehispanic beliefs and rituals, some ideas of Western witchcraft and transformed catholic practices.”

<sup>37</sup> It is known that several narcos have practiced syncretic religious rituals and follow a combination of a cult to Death (Santa Muerte), santería and catholic celebrations. Carlos Montiel published *La fe de los sicarios*, a book which explores such beliefs from a catholic point of view. The most famous narco to practice syncretic rituals was Adolfo Constanzo, “El Narco satánico de Matamoros”, who, with the help of Sara Aldrete, performed santería and palo mayombe rituals along with their other criminal activities.

<sup>38</sup> The survival and reproduction of popular medicine are found in its relationship with social relations and in the reproduction of a certain social reality, especially in those societies that are subject to instances of domination and exploitative relationships that immerse them in poverty.

Under these conditions, the health-disease complex creates a dimension that fits within the basic needs for the reproduction of the social group and the individual.

The people who believe in and practice this type of witchcraft are usually part of impoverished communities, like La Matosa. The others seek in them a solution to a problem, one no one else is able to solve, in a complex health – illness dichotomy that only those who believe participate in.

*La Bruja*, despite being female, is not considered a mere object, like the rest of the women who live in the palace. Her apparent consideration inside the court is given because she is the mother of *El Rey*'s favorite and his spiritual helper: “—Ella lo alivia de un demonio —dijo. Y le contó cómo hacía mucho, cuando no era quien ya era, el Rey le había pedido a su madre que le ayudara y ellas habían abandonado al padre, que era un hombre bueno y por lo tanto inútil, y ahora un hombre solo.”<sup>39</sup> (Herrera 2008 54). The woman's capacities and presence are needed within the palace, granting her a place among men, since no one has her set of abilities. It is also worth noting that *La Bruja*'s husband, although considered a good man, is not a macho and is considered useless, probably due to his inability to provide the lavish lifestyle narcos have. The woman is willing to leave her former life, and to hand away her daughter, in order to achieve what she desires.

*La Bruja* in *Trabajos del reino* performs as an important piece of the social organization in the court. The woman has power and abilities the rest of the men do not have, and she fills functions that they cannot provide to *El Rey*. She is the one who provides the narco with her own daughter, *La Cualquiera*, thus giving him someone to have children with. *La Bruja* acts like a facilitator for the macho to perform sexually, since she provides him with both a partner and a solution for his infertility. When *La Bruja* is murdered at the

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<sup>39</sup> “She frees him of a demon,” said the Commoner. And she told him how, long ago, when he was not yet who he would become, the King had asked her mother for help, and the two of them had left her father, a good man who was therefore a useless man, and now a lonely man” (Herrera 2017 45)

end of the novel, it is because she no longer has any place in the kingdom. *La Cualquiera* had already escaped from her grip, and *El Rey* would not need *La Bruja* to solve his fertility issues, since he himself found another way to appear as a macho. *La Bruja* loses her power, and therefore is considered useless for *El Heredero*, The Heir, the man who inherits the criminal organization. The woman's execution is the final way she is stripped of the power she has.

*La Bruja* in Melchor's book also upholds the machismo system she lives in, but because she reaps much more direct benefits, since she constantly receives sexual favors for her participation in the macho ideas. *La Bruja* is powerful both economically and socially, perhaps having more control of La Matosa through fear than the known narcos in town do. Her gender performativity becomes important when it is revealed that she is mocked, called homophobic slurs, and presented as male in Brando's memories (Melchor 158). However, her female gender is not questioned by the rest of the people of La Matosa, only by the young men who she partied with, who were both ashamed and eager to have sexual encounters with her. *La Bruja* is regarded as female until any form of sexual contact with her comes into play. Yet, the men who approach the woman do so despite being branded as *maricones* (a slur similar to fag), because she provides them with drugs, alcohol, and money. Despite the sexist environment and the taboo surrounding homosexuality, *La Bruja* maintains control over the people who seek her out.

*La Bruja* organizes parties, filled with sex, drugs, and alcohol. There, she receives the sexual pleasure she seeks, while also providing the young men who attend her with what they look for. *La Bruja* takes advantage of the ideas of domination and sexual freedom that the group of males has, and she enjoys her advantageous place in the system. This appears obvious to Brando, who believes she takes advantage of the power she has

over the men. *La Bruja* represents a challenge to the masculinity the group of men create, but a thinly veiled one. *La Bruja*, by herself, defies the role imposed upon her as someone simply to be taken advantage of, to penetrate. The men who go to her parties, according to Brando, are “degenerate” and have surrendered themselves to the control of one of the others, someone who is not a macho. In Brando’s eyes, *La Bruja* has triumphed over the local ideas of masculinity and perverted the machos, therefore, she must die. Aside from that, they suspect that the woman has a hidden fortune, which puts her both economically and socially above the men who go to her, only furthering her control over them.

It is important to note that both *Brujas* are characters that are complicit with the system, but in a much more active way than the people of Comala and Ixtepec are. The *Bruja* in *Trabajos del reino* helps her boss because she desires to further his dominion through her daughter and a possible grandchild. If *El Rey* has a cemented masculinity that allows him to stay in power, he is sure to provide for his child, his lover, and the lover’s family. *La Bruja* benefits directly from helping the man, and from upholding his macho image in order to secure her economic future. When the man who supports her is captured, and she loses the daughter she uses as a tool, *La Bruja* no longer has a place in the new kingdom and must be killed.

In *Temporada de huracanes*, *La Bruja* also decides to immerse herself in the macho world and participate in the machismo system to benefit from it. The young men from La Matosa base their ideas of masculinity on both sexual pleasure and drug consumption, and *La Bruja* provides them with both. She allows the men to think they have control over her body, that she is another nameless person they can penetrate. However, she is the person who benefits most from this arrangement. *La Bruja* obtains pleasure from whomever she wants and does not have to leave her house, since the men come to her. Like

her counterpart in *Trabajos del reino*, she plays the system in such a way that she provides something (drugs and alcohol) and receives in exchange what she wants (pleasure). When Brando questions both his masculinity and the role the woman plays when constructing it on a social level, he believes she is to be blamed for his shortcomings, despite the fact that she only participates in and encourages the system. Brando kills the woman in a vain attempt to change the macho ideals that have shattered his masculinity.

Unlike Susana, Julia and *La Cualquiera*, who do nothing to encourage the macho ideals, both witches desire to participate in the macho system in order to exploit it for their own benefit. San Juan, Andrade and *La Cualquiera* escape the macho system they live in, although they could have lived in it being only tokens of masculinity. Had they decided to participate in the macho mechanics, they would have been safe, but also remained voiceless and void of agency.

On the other hand, *Las Brujas* know they can insert themselves in the macho-dominated system and play an important role in it. Although *La Bruja* in *Trabajos del reino* is not the macho's sexual partner, she gives away her daughter to fulfill the role. In *Temporada de huracanes*, *La Bruja* is the sexual partner of many and enjoys filling that role. The women keep the machos happy in order to perpetuate everyone's places in the system. When the women become bothersome, or simply useless, they must be discarded, because they are no longer of service to the macho system.



## CHAPTER III

### (DIS)ILLUSIONS OF POWER. A MAN STRIPPED OF HIS FAÇADE

The definition of what masculine is, and who can be considered sufficiently masculine shifts and undergoes transformations across time and space. The Mexican ideas of what a manly man must be have been translated into a particular mode of masculinity: the macho. Though the definition of a macho may itself change to some extent, several of its characteristics remain the same. As examined in previous chapters, a macho must be a virile man, strong, violent, able to conquer women, socially and economically powerful, and he must fit within the particular social norms that other men dictate. Fertility, sexual expertise, and the ability to dominate others are also valued. A man who aspires to be a macho must fit these criteria and be deemed so by the society.

Although written in different time periods and with distinctive characters, *Pedro Páramo*, *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, *Trabajos del reino*, and *Temporada de huracanes* all have the figure of the macho in common. The four literary works depict men who desire to fit within the social conventions of what manly and virile is, while at the same time having power over themselves and those deemed inferior. The machos, all powerful at some point during the novels, resort to any possible means to keep their dominance over other men and all women. The men do so through a variety of actions, which include “the acquisition of property, the granting of surrogate license to authorize subordinates to rape and murder, personal sexual gratification, and terror” (Valdés 37). Terror, in this context, would be closely related to fear of physical retaliation and violence.

The macho persona of both the rural bosses and the narcos is tainted by the violence which they exert on those around them. The machos in *Pedro Páramo*, *Los recuerdos del*

*porvenir*, *Trabajos del reino*, and *Temporada de huracanes* are aggressive towards those who defy them, and those who they wish to silence or disappear. In all four novels, the men are capable of killing and ordering the death of enemies and insubordinates.

Although all of the machos are open about their physical violence towards men, the violence they exert on women is different, done in private and condoned and even approved by their societies. This apparent contradiction comes from the fact that the women who are involved with the macho are not publicly beaten, like the men who were hanged publicly in Ixtepec or in the execution of Toribio Aldrete. The physical violence Rosas exerts Julia is done behind closed doors, in the privacy of their room in the Hotel Jardín. Societies dominated by the machos expect such violence to happen, and they justify it by finding the women at fault. Ixtepec believes Julia should be abused because she dared to look at a man who was not her lover, and Brando thinks *La Bruja* must die because she is a *maricón*.

Different forms of violence work as control mechanisms for women, in a system perpetuated by misogynistic attitudes. Without a support system, such violence would not prevail. For example, Miguel Páramo, the only beloved son of Pedro, finds an accomplice in Damiana Cisneros. The woman procures for him young and virginal women, knowing they only serve to “calm” Miguel’s sexual appetite and will be forgotten soon after. The women in *Trabajos del reino* are forced to be prostitutes and given no say in who their sexual partners are; in addition, their appeal lies in their status as commodities, objects of consumption and easy disposal. The four novels show a pattern that allows men to perpetuate their power: “The use of force to maintain privilege is a significant characteristic of male behavior in patriarchal societies. It contributes to the development of elaborate systems of economic and social inequality within and across gender. [...] Over time, overt and covert forms of violence come to characterize ‘normal’ gender relations, institutionally

and interpersonally” (Schiffman 6–7). Ixtepec blames Julia and berates the rest of the women, who live in captivity because they are considered sinful, thus perpetuating the misogynistic system that brought the *queridas* there.

The women suffer domestic intimate violence insofar as they are trapped in the homes of the machos or secluded from their communities. The women are also often subjected to intimate terrorism by the machos, an attempt to control them fully:

The most important distinctions among types of intimate partner violence have to do with the role of coercive control as a context for violence. Two of the three major types of intimate partner violence involve general power and control issues. Intimate terrorism is an attempt to take general control over one’s partner; violent resistance is the use of violence in response to such an attempt. Situational couple violence, the third type of intimate partner violence, does not involve an attempt to take general control on the part of either partner. (Johnson 257 in Schiffman et al.)

In the books, intimate terrorism is the most common strategy of macho control. Intimate terrorism, in the case of the four novels, becomes relevant inside the shared spaces. La Media Luna, the hotel, the palace and the house in La Matosa become spaces where machos attempt to control and dictate the life and desires of women. Every macho has their own mechanisms, and each has a particular form of control, despite the fact that all exert the same type of violence.

*Pedro Páramo* has a protagonist who controls all social aspects of life in Comala. Therefore, it is expected that Pedro, the macho, decides how and when to isolate and lock up the women he wants. After he becomes a powerful man, Pedro must take extreme measurements, both against his enemies, like Aldrete, and the women he desires, like Susana and Dolores. Dolores is used for her money and left without any options when she is asked to marry Pedro. In fact, Preciado knows from the beginning, even before the wedding, that the man she is about to marry does not love her, even if she wants him to.

Soon after getting married and having Pedro's son, Dolores is subjected to constant humiliation and constant labor for Pedro. The woman grows tired of her husband, who has nothing for harsh words for her, in a subtle form of domestic abuse. "¿Cuántas veces oyó tu madre aquel llamado? "Doña Doloritas, esto está frío. Esto no sirve". ¿Cuántas veces? Y aunque estaba acostumbrada a pasar lo peor, sus ojos humildes se endurecieron" (Rulfo 1981 26)<sup>42</sup>. Even if it is only implied, Pedro is psychologically violent throughout his first marriage, since he establishes himself as a "king in his castle". The man's wife is then forced to do all domestic labor, despite having several servants, probably to reinforce the idea that she is now also property of Pedro and must do what he says to do. Thus, Dolores becomes locked with her abuser. This gives Páramo the opportunity to berate and hurt, making Dolores know she is not appreciated and emotionally manipulating her to think she is useless. When Preciado decides to leave her husband and visit her sister, Dolores and her son are left to fend themselves:

Yo le pregunté muchos meses después a Pedro Páramo por ella.  
—Quería más a su hermana que a mí. Allá debe estar a gusto. Además, ya me tenía enfadado. No pienso inquirir por ella, si es eso lo que te preocupa.  
—¿Pero de qué vivirán?  
—Que Dios los asista. (Rulfo 1981 27)<sup>43</sup>

Pedro feels no obligation towards them, since he has no emotional attachment to either of them, unlike the bonds he has with Susana San Juan and Miguel Páramo. By saying he was already tired of her, Pedro appropriates Dolores' escape, making it seem as if he orchestrated the event and thereby denying Preciado any agency in the narrative.

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<sup>42</sup> "I wonder how many times your mother heard that call. 'Doña Doloritas, this is cold. It won't do.' How many times? And even if she was used to the worst of times, those shy eyes grew hard." (Rulfo 2002 30).

<sup>43</sup> "Some months later, I asked Pedro Páramo about her. "She loved her sister more than she did me. I guess she's happy there. Besides I was getting fed up with her. I have no intention of asking about her, if that's what's worrying you. "But how will they get along?" "Let God look after them"" (Rulfo 2002 32)

On the other hand, the arrival of Susana San Juan to La Media Luna, Pedro's home, is filled with violence, both towards her and her father. Susana resides in La Media Luna, but she is never intimate nor has any romantic involvement with Pedro. Susana appears to be insane and sick; she communicates with the dead and has prolonged periods of feverish behavior, something incomprehensible for those around her:

La noche anterior se la había pasado en pie, recostado en la pared, observando a través de la pálida luz de la veladora el cuerpo en movimiento de Susana; la cara sudorosa, las manos agitando las sábanas, estrujando la almohada hasta el desmorecimiento. Desde que la había traído a vivir aquí no sabía de otras noches pasadas a su lado, sino de estas noches doloridas, de interminable inquietud. Y se preguntaba hasta cuándo terminaría aquello. (Rulfo 121)<sup>44</sup>

Pedro, despite being able to go and sleep with any other woman he pleases, stays near Susana, so he can keep an eye on her. This is not done out of selflessness, but to make sure Pedro is there to finally take control of the woman. Páramo is disappointed because, even if Susana lives with him, and has no escape since he is always at her side, she manages not to be dominated. Susana loses control of her mind, therefore making sure Páramo is not able to have any intimacy with her. The woman's body could be raped and restrained, but not entirely dominated. Susana refuses to give Pedro the opportunity to achieve his final goal by becoming unavailable, unable to be physically possessed. Pedro's triumph in marrying her and locking her in a room mean nothing compared to her refusal to aid his macho persona.

Elena Garro's macho, Francisco Rosas, like Pedro Páramo, decides to maintain the woman he desires in a constant cycle of intimate violence. But both men's methods differ

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<sup>44</sup> He had spent the whole night in her room, standing against the wall, and observing her in the wan candlelight: sweaty face, hands fidgeting with the sheets and tugging at her pillow until it was in shreds. Ever since he had brought her to live with him, every night had been like this, nights spent watching her suffering her endless agitation. He asked himself how long it'd go. (

slightly. The general in *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, also traps his lover and attempts to keep her away from the world. The macho's subordinates use the same technique, keeping the women they kidnapped (*rapto*) locked inside a hotel. Despite the fact that the men and women of Ixtepec knew the women were locked up, no one would go against the authority of Rosas and help them escape. The community also participates in the violence by having misogynistic attitudes towards them:

-Dicen que lo está volviendo loco... dijo la viuda, y enrojeció ligeramente al llevar ligeramente al llevar la conversación a Julia. Ella era la verdadera culpable. Las criadas del Hotel Jardín dejaban los chismes en las cocinas y de allí pasaban a las mesas y a las reuniones. Sus amigos la miraron con aprobación, incitándola a que dijera lo que sabía sobre la responsabilidad de Julia en la muerte de Ignacio. (Garro 1981 88)<sup>45</sup>

The town frowns upon the women who are captive in the hotel because they accompany the machos, and they disapprove of them more than they disapprove of the men themselves. The people of Ixtepec seem to simply accept the violent nature of the army men and even justify their behavior, while they condemn the women simply for being kidnaped and not doing anything about it.

Julia, Rosas' lover, is kept under constant surveillance; she is watched by the owner of the hotel, the military men guarding the gates, and the other women locked up with her. Since her first encounter with Felipe, Andrade has even more restrictions regarding what she can do and where she can go. Closing down on Andrade's world makes the macho feel safe, since she is locked up and no one from the outside world can get to her. Yet the man is constantly tormented anyway. Even if Julia's curtains and doors remain closed, she does

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<sup>45</sup> "They say that she is driving him crazy," the widow said, and she blushed slightly as she changed the subject to Julia, who was the real culprit. The maids at the Hotel Jardín left their gossip in the kitchen and from there it moved on to tables and gatherings. Her friends looked at her with approval, encouraging to tell what she knew about Julia's responsibility in the death of Ignacio.

not let Rosas practice intimate terrorism; she responds to the attacks and denies Francisco the full control over the relationship.

The woman's past and previous lovers "taint" her for the macho, since he is not her first love and she is not a virgin, both requirements within a sexist culture: "Controlling women's sexuality and reproduction through violence or threats of violence in the family supports family structures based on the power of the male head. Ideas about women's sexual modesty and virtue legitimate patriarchal control of women and violent retaliation for lapses" (Merry 380). Rosas is left powerless when it comes to the woman and must physically retaliate when his pride is hurt by Julia. But even if the macho can still beat Julia and lock her in the hotel, he will not control what she did and what she thinks about.

The key motivation for isolating both Julia and Susana lies in the fact that the men can keep them in a confined space where the women are forced to do what the machos say. But confinement is only physical, and the barriers imposed around Andrade and San Juan only work in a tangible reality. If even the most minimal fragment of the women slips through the cracks of physical confinement, they overcome it. Yet even if a body is possessed and locked, there is never real assurance that the men own Susana and Julia's minds. Thus confinement fails to achieve complete control.

On the other hand, Yuri Herrera's protagonist, a narco, does not need to personally keep his lover controlled, since he has several men who can do it for him. *El Rey* has built an empire for himself, complete with a palace where he keeps those he wants near him. The macho resorts to women as a tool for pleasure, another commodity in his lifestyle. Subdued, watched over, and obedient women are important to the narco's empire, reinforcing his virility. The man has constant vigilance around his house, both to prevent attacks and to monitor who enters and who leaves the place. This control assures the narco

that nothing happens unless he or one of his high-ranking officers allow it, granting him control of all social relationships inside his dominion.

However, *La Cualquiera* becomes confined by both *El Rey* and her mother. The young woman is, in the beginning, a negotiation tool between *La Bruja* and *El Rey*, who struggle to force her to do their wills. To secure the negotiation between her mother and her lover, *La Cualquiera* must remain locked up, untouched and unseen, while she fulfills her purpose: to give the narco a child. She goes as far as dressing in men's clothes to keep any prying looks away. Nonetheless, this woman is not happy in her place and refuses to be locked inside the home, because of both *El Rey* and *La Bruja*, so she tries to escape in several occasions. The surveillance team stops *La Cualquiera* before she can escape and returns her to her mother:

—¿Dónde?, ¿dónde? —Apareció la Bruja por un extremo, con un radio pegado a una oreja. Del otro extremo, justo debajo de donde él estaba, salió un guardia arrastrando a la Cualquiera.

—La agarramos cuando pedía raite a un torton —dijo el guardia, evidentemente orgulloso. [...]

Luego la Cualquiera dijo: —Estos perros no tienen por qué andarme diciendo si puedo o no puedo salir. (Herrera 2008 75 – 76)<sup>46</sup>

*La Bruja* needs her locked up as much as *El Rey* does, because without her, the old woman's plans to become rich go to waste. *El Rey* needs her under control in order to maintain his macho image. *La Cualquiera* eventually escapes her captivity, thus going against her role within *El Rey*'s empire and her mother's wishes. Captivity did not work for the narco, because *La Cualquiera* managed to escape from his grip.

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<sup>46</sup> "Where? Where?" The Witch appeared from one end, a walkie-talkie at one ear. From the other, just beneath him, emerged a guard, dragging the Commoner.

"Picked her up as she was tricking to hitch a ride on a semi," said the guard, clearly overconfident. [...] Then the Commoner said: "Those dogs can't go telling me whether I can leave." (Herrera 2017 62 – 63)



The key difference between the three machos who isolate and lock up their lovers is their level of involvement in the act. Pedro stays by Susana's bedside constantly, and he is the one who personally watches over her, along with people like Damiana and Justina. On the other hand, Rosas has Don Pepe, the owner of the hotel, to keep Julia isolated, even though the macho does come and oversees said surveillance. *El Rey*, however, is not personally involved in keeping *La Cualquiera* locked up in his house, because he has a team of men specifically designed to both keep enemies out and the subservient in. However, the three of them are able to decide how and who gets to watch over the women.

Although all three women—*La Cualquiera*, Julia, and Susana—escape their partners and captors, only two of them do it physically. San Juan dies in *La Media Luna*, and even uses her confinement against Pedro, who cannot penetrate her world. Julia and *La Cualquiera* run away because they are able to do so. Even if the two women have their mind and memories to fend off the men, they seize the opportunity to escape physical confinement. Machismo plays an important role in their captivity, since the cultural system allows the men to lock them up in order to keep them away from the rest of the world. Confinement works on a social and psychological level in the three novels. The constant surveillance is meant to discourage the women from running away and also to remind them of the power the men have, in an attempt to make them surrender themselves to the will of the men. Confinement becomes a form of intimate terrorism that symbolically and physically locks the doors; the men believe this treatment will work, since the women have nowhere to go. Pedro locks Susana in her house, the owner of the hotel locks up Julia, and the narco's men watch over *La Cualquiera*. This also demonstrates that men find accomplices in the rest of the people who surround them. Either because of fear or loyalty,

people who aid the machos become complicit with their violence against women. Any social system that allows it silently approves of this form of violence.

*Temporada de huracanes* presents a different form of woman locked up. In Melchor's book, a woman is the one who refuses to exit her house, since she sees the old home in La Matosa as a safe space. Inside of her home, *La Bruja* is able to exercise both her gender and her sexuality freely, without being judged by those outside of her house. *La Bruja* transforms the violence of confinement that happened in the previous novels into a tool of her own. Being locked up gives this woman freedom and allows her to set the rules for those who approach her. Inside her house, *La Bruja* is able to perform her gender identity freely, fashioning herself as she sees fit, similarly to what Judith Butler exposes:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (Butler 519)

The woman performs her gender through the repetition of dressing and presenting herself as female, first to the people who come to her house for help, then to the rest of the people in La Matosa. Besides, most of the people of her village already consider her gender identity as female, since her mother presented her as such.

When the woman ventures outside, she is met with constant criticism, with mocking and even threats. The women who go to her seeking help respect her and treat her as female, but men refuse to do so, not wanting to have any contact with queer people:

hasta entonces nadie le había dicho que la tal Bruja era en realidad un hombre, un señor como de cuarenta o cuarenta y cinco años de edad en aquel entonces, vestido con ropas negras de mujer, y las uñas bien largas y pintadas también de negro, espantosas, y aunque llevaba puesta una cosa como velo que le tapaba la cara nomás

con escucharle la voz y verle las manos uno se daba cuenta de que se trataba de un homosexual y le dijo a Chabela que siempre ya no quería la limpia, que había cambiado de opinión, porque le daba grima que el choto ese le pusiera las manos encima (Melchor 92)<sup>47</sup>

While the women in La Matosa respect who *La Bruja* is, the men are the probable reason why she chooses to remain locked up. This means that if someone is to approach the woman's house, they must do it according to her desires. Confinement is no longer a punishment, but an advantage.

*La Bruja* throws parties for the young men in her small community, where she invites them to consume drugs and alcohol before sexually engaging with her. Brando, despite knowing it is socially acceptable attend the parties, refuses to do so after a while. In *La Bruja*'s space, where she is safe and comfortable, is where Brando is the most uncomfortable. There, he deals with his own fear of being homosexual and insecure, and he rejects the sexual boundaries of masculinity the rest of his social group has. The man's macho persona shatters inside himself, and he panics, since he is unable to continually perform in *La Bruja*'s space.

Thus Brando must enter the woman's safe space and murder her there, where she both freely exists and throws her infamous reunions. The man profanes the place, but does not find what he looked for: money and reassurance. He desires money to run away, and assurance that he is a macho, despite feeling like a "depraved" homosexual. Although he is able to murder *La Bruja*, Brando is left without her fortune and he ends up in jail, never completely avenging his loss of masculinity.

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<sup>47</sup> until then no one had told him that the Witch was really a man, a man about forty or forty-five years old at the time, dressed in women's dark clothes, with long, black, horrifying nails, and even though she was wearing a veil that covered her face, just by listening to her voice and seeing her hands one could see that she was a homosexual, so he told Chabela that he didn't want the cleansing ritual anymore, that he changed his mind, because he didn't want that faggot laying her hands on him (Melchor 92)

The first three machos (Páramo, Rosas, and *El Rey*) use a similar strategy to keep the women they desire under control, a strategy which ultimately fails. In the case of *La Bruja*, despite being murdered where she had voluntarily secluded herself, the woman remains triumphant over the would-be machos who kill her. Brando is unable to gain his masculinity back; similarly, Páramo, Rosas, and *El Rey* lose their masculine dominance after being unable to control the women they love. So what happens to the machos when the women escape and their masculinity is lost?

The downfall of the machos does not happen only because of the actions of the women they love or obsess over. Their falls from power are also due to how they and their social group conceptualize masculinity. As stated previously, machos tend to run away from any demonstration of what is considered “feminine,” because anything related to femininity is also supposedly related to weakness, and they must be strong at all times. Therefore, any sign of weakness is read as failure, a shameful occurrence, both by the macho and the people who surround him. Being abandoned or defeated are ignominious in the eyes of both the macho and his social group.

Masculinity, as Michael Kimmel proposes, is a performance, enacted by a man in front of other males, who become the social judges of the act: “We are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men’s approval. It is the other men who evaluate the performance” (Kimmel 2009 63). It is important to note that while power and masculinity are exercised in front of and over women, their opinion about the macho is not relevant unless it turns into mockery or some other adverse reaction to the man’s failure to perform as a macho. Such mockery puts the man down in the scale of power, furthering

his disgrace. Thus, women's opinions are irrelevant unless they diminish the man's pride and ego, but women disappear in the sexist system if they are neutral or do not praise the men.

When a macho fails the continuous testing of his masculinity, both he and the rest of the men are aware. The failing man has a wounded persona; one he must struggle to recover. Yet the wounded macho suffers an important psychological impact deriving from such a blow to his masculinity. In the four novels discussed here this blow is delivered by women escaping, refusing to participate in their performance, and even in denying the men their revenge. However, rejection is not the single factor that causes their downfall, even if it rushes it. A failed performance is what condemns the macho.

Being unable to keep a façade after being overpowered by a "lesser" man or woman causes a complex damage: it harms the reputation and the psyche of the man. The social damage is apparent to the men who evaluate him and ultimately deem him unfit to continue in his role of macho. However, the psychological damage the man suffers is key to understanding the downfalls in *Pedro Páramo*, *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, *Trabajos del reino*, and *Temporada de huracanes*. Although social status is relevant, the psychological aspect plays the most important role, since the men realize they have been emasculated.

Emasculation in this context is not a physical removal of a body part, but a mental, psychological, and social loss of power related to a loss of masculinity. Emasculation can be defined as an act of denial of masculinity: "To emasculate an individual means to make a man feel less masculine; to deprive a man of his strength; to make something weaker or less effective; to castrate" (Kpohoue 21). Emasculated men are deemed as such by society, but most importantly by themselves. The macho who has lost his masculinity is aware of his shortcomings, and he struggles to regain his previous status, sometimes to no avail.

The emasculation process of the macho begins with the public loss of a woman, or the inability to perform as a member of a male group. From there, the process is both internal and external. The macho has a shattered self-confidence, one that forces him to be even more masculine than before in order to regain the respect of his peers. If the man fails to do so, his confidence declines even further, rendering him powerless. The process occurs on a social level as well, since the macho image must be performed and approved by others. When the approval of the male group disappears, so does the control the macho has over them and other social groups.

Despite feeling powerful when being approved of by the rest of their peers, the macho depends on his self-affirmation as well as that of the men who surround him. Without his social group, the man is lost and powerless, especially if he is not expected to regain his macho status. *El Rey*, for example, needs the approval of his close subordinate men to reaffirm him. When he loses it and his confidence is shattered, he must turn himself in to the army. Emasculation is born out of social rejection and the powerlessness of a man alone. Despite wanting, needing, and feeling entitled to power, if a man loses his confidence and the support of his group, he becomes lost, and quickly realizes the illusion of power he had is not as effective as he thought:

Men's feelings are not the feelings of the powerful but of those who see themselves as powerless. These are the feelings that come inevitably from the discontinuity between the social and the psychological, between the aggregate analysis that reveals how men are in power as a group and the psychological fact that they do not feel powerful as individuals. They are the feelings of men who were raised to believe themselves entitled to feel that power, but do not feel it. (Kimmel 2009 69)

The men in the novels feel entitled to have unconditional power because, until their failure regarding women, they have performed properly and have been recognized as machos.

Pedro kills and appropriates the land, Rosas is a military man who has no problem with

killing his enemies, *El Rey* thinks highly of himself inside his court, and Brando can perform as his group of friends asks him to. However, the men are left powerless when facing women they are unable to dominate, and they are stripped of their earlier power. This stark contrast begins the process of emasculation.

Each novel has a different type of emasculation process, and even the steps that lead to it are different. In Rulfo's novel, Pedro Páramo loses Susana for the first time early on in his life. After her mother passes away, the woman leaves with her father, and Pedro spends over three decades obsessing over her. After closely following the woman and her father, Pedro kills the father and forces Susana to marry him. Until that point in his life, he keeps his ability to control and manipulate, and he is confident of his macho persona when doing so:

—Ella tiene que quedarse huérfana. Estamos obligados a amparar a alguien. ¿No crees tú?  
—No lo veo difícil.  
—Entonces andando, Fulgor, andando.  
—¿Y si ella lo llega a saber?  
—¿Quién se lo dirá? A ver, dime, aquí entre nosotros dos, ¿quién se lo dirá?  
—Estoy seguro que nadie.  
—Quítale el “estoy seguro que”. Quítaselo desde ahorita y ya verás como todo sale bien. (Rulfo 1981 109)<sup>48</sup>

In his social group, Páramo is seen as a powerful and respected macho because he owns the land and is capable of killing whoever opposes him. He is the master of Comala and

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<sup>48</sup> “She must be left without a family. We are called onto look after those in need. You agree with that, don't you?”

“I don't see any difficulty with that.”

“Then go about it, Fulgor. Get on with it.”

“And what if she finds out?”

“Who's going to tell her? Let's see, tell me. Just between the two of us, who's going to tell her?”

“No one, I guess.”

“Forget the ‘I guess’. Forget that as of now, and everything'll work out fine.” (Rulfo 2002 106)

therefore no one disobeys him. Pedro knows his people are loyal and no one will betray him by revealing the secret of the father's death, because he is still regarded as the most important macho. Yet that confidence diminishes after marrying Susana.

Soon after taking her into La Media Luna, Pedro realizes that Susana will never love him back or be intimate with him in any form. Pedro's emasculation begins on a mental level, with him being unable to have sex with Susana or even enjoy any form of marital life. Although the macho still has sexual encounters and rapes other women, the person he truly desires will never be with him. Those who live inside La Media Luna do nothing to stop Pedro because they either see nothing wrong with his actions or are afraid to be reprimanded. The rest of Comala turns a blind eye to the situation, never quite knowing what happens between the married couple.

The man is emasculated after both losing the woman he wanted and being mocked by the people who attend a party after Susana's funeral. Pedro grows angry against the people who are celebrating while he mourns. Páramo, despite the challenges to his masculinity, still has enough social and economic power to exert revenge on the town he mercilessly ruled during several decades. Comala, the town he proudly dominated, becomes deserted and ghostly in an act of harm to others and to himself. Pedro knows he has been emasculated and has very little to lose, so he decides to perish with his town. The town also has many sins to atone for, mainly insofar as they have allowed Pedro to do what he wanted to do whenever he pleased. The town accepted the misogynistic system that allowed Pedro to prevail, so perhaps Comala dies because its inhabitants were all Pedro's silent accomplices.

Pedro's downfall starts and ends with Susana. After his emasculation and the destruction of Comala, he does nothing but think about the woman who died. The people



who stay in the town before the man dies recall how he was barely able to do anything, having lost his wealth, masculinity, and the woman he loved: “Él la quería. Estoy por decir que nunca quiso a ninguna mujer como a ésta. Ya se la entregaron sufrida y quizá loca. Tan la quiso, que se pasó el resto de sus años aplastado en un equipal, mirando el camino por donde se la habían llevado al camposanto. Le perdió interés a todo. Desalojó sus tierras y mandó quemar los enseres” (Rulfo 1981 103)<sup>49</sup>. The emasculated macho is unable to carry on with his life, responsibilities and anything related to his former power. Everything that Pedro was is lost after Susana dies, and he is unknowingly mocked by Comala.

Pedro is not the only one mocked by an entire town. In *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, Francisco Rosas is emasculated more than once, and both times his disgrace comes from women. Julia, the lover he brings to Ixtepec, is beautiful yet cold, never making any statements of love directed toward Rosas. The man grows desperate and afraid of Julia, afraid of not being loved by her, of being cheated on, even inside of her mind.

The constant fear is the first sign of Rosas’ emasculation; despite controlling the military men and the town, he is unable to get what he wants from Julia. The man is insecure, constantly interrogating her only to receive half-hearted responses and no signs of love. Rosas engages in a battle for power with Julia, one he loses when he feels unmanly and cowardly in front of her:

Su voz cambiaba delante de la mujer. Le hablaba en voz muy baja pues su presencia le ahogaba las fuerzas en la garganta. La miraba a los ojos, quería saber que era lo que ella tenía detrás de los parpados, más allá de ella misma. Su querida se escondía de su mirada, ladeaba la cabeza sonriente, se miraba los hombros desnudos y se recogía en un mundo lejano, sin ruido, como los fantasmas.

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<sup>49</sup> “He loved her. I’m here to tell you that he never loved a woman like he loved that one. By the time they brought her to him, she was suffering – maybe crazy. He loved her so much that after she died he spent the rest of his days slumped in a chair, staring down the road where they’d carried her to holy ground. He lost interest in everything. He let his land lie fallow, and he gave orders for the tools that worked it to be destroyed.” (Rulfo 2002 101)

—¡Vente, Julia! —suplicaba vencido el general y ella, a medio vestir y siempre risueña, montaba en el mismo caballo de su amante. (Garro 1987 42)<sup>50</sup>

He must drink before having to face the woman, since he is unable to do so without feeling nervous or restless.

Julia, on the other hand, actively does nothing to destroy Rosas' perception of himself. However, Andrade's passive nature, her silences and even what the General considers lies play against him. The man is unable to forget that Julia, possibly a prostitute before beginning her relationship with Rosas, has had other lovers and men before him:

Su frente era un muro altísimo que la separaba de él. “Detrás está engañándome”, se dijo, y la vio galopando en paisajes desconocidos, bailando en oscuros salones de pueblo, entrando en camas enormes acompañada de hombres sin cara.

—Julia, ¿hay algún pedacito de tu cuerpo que no lo haya besado alguien? — preguntó sin volverse y asustado de sus palabras. La joven se acercó más a él y permaneció silenciosa.

—Julia, yo solo te he besado a ti —suplicó humilde.

—También yo —y su mentira le rozó la nuca. (Garro 1987 79)<sup>51</sup>

One of the many macho ideals is seeing virginity as female virtue that the macho can take away, thus cherishing being a woman's first sexual partner not because of sentimental reasons, but because he took away something that no one else can replace. The man knows he was not there to claim Julia's virginity as his own prize, and he becomes paranoid. Even

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<sup>50</sup> His voice changed when he was with her. He spoke very softly because her presence sapped his strength. He gazed into her eyes, tried to find what she was hiding behind her eyelids, beyond herself. His mistress evaded his eyes, tilted her head, and smiled, looked down at her naked shoulders, and withdrew into a distant world, noiseless, ghost-like.

“Come, Julia!” the general begged, vanquished, and she, half dressed, and still smiling, mounted her lover's horse. (Garro 1969 38)

<sup>51</sup> Francisco Rosas felt the approach of the vast world concealed by her forehead, which was high like a high wall that separated her from him. “In her inner mind, she is deceiving me,” he said to himself, and saw her galloping in dark small-town saloons, entering enormous beds accompanied by faceless men.

“Julia, is there a part of your body that no one has kissed?” he asked without turning around, surprised by his words, the girl drew closer to him and remained silent. “Julia, I've never kissed anyone but you” he said humbly. “Neither have I,” and her lie grazed the back of his neck. (Garro 1969 74)

if in Rosas' mind his macho persona is nonexistent in front of Julia, he still keeps a façade in front of both the group of military men he commands and the town he rules.

However, this socially based macho image crumbles too, when Julia and Felipe run away. Felipe, who goes to Ixtepec to find Julia, helps her escape, but in the minds of Rosas and the town this translates into Felipe being a better, more masculine man than Francisco, socially emasculating him, striping Julia of a lot of agency:

Y mirábamos al general pensando que Hurtado tenía más poder que él. Francisco Rosas sentía que lo mirábamos y se alejaba como los tigres antes de saltar. —¡Pobre hombre! [...] Iba ahora con la camisola militar abierta y los ojos cerrados sobre sí mismo. ¡Míralo, Isabel, ahí va! ¡El solo se castigó! (Garro 1987 152)<sup>52</sup>.

Instead of instilling fear, Rosas is pitied by the people of Ixtepec, who see him as a man who lost Julia and then the respect of the town. The people of Ixtepec believe his punishment is the loss he inflicted upon himself by letting Julia run away. Also, the town does not allow Julia to seem victorious, still perpetuating the misogyny they display against the *queridas*. Felipe is the only one to appear responsible for the escape, despite Julia having to break out of the hotel to do so.

Ixtepec plans an uprising against Rosas, now perceiving him as weak. Despite being able to stop the uprising with the help of his men, Francisco's macho image diminishes. When Isabel Moncada becomes the man's lover and asks him to save her brother, Rosas is unable to stick to his orders and asks his men to save Nicolás. Francisco, then, loses the approval of his men because he is both unable to mandate the execution and because Nicolás decides to die. Nicolás dies as a martyr and a hero, being more powerful than Rosas

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<sup>52</sup> “And we looked at the General, thinking that Hurtado had more power than he did. Francisco Rosas could feel us looking at him, and he moved away as a tiger does before it pounces. “That poor man!” He went about with the shirt of his uniform unbuttoned and his eyes looking inward. “Look Isabel, there he goes! He’s punishing himself!” (Garro 1969 146)

because he sticks to his desires and principles, unlike the General. In the end, the general leaves Ixtepec completely emasculated.

The emasculation in Herrera's novel is not centered in a town per se, but in a closed community who must fear and respect the man who becomes emasculated. Herrera's protagonist, *El Rey*, has a simple approach to his own masculinity: appear to be the best, be *el más cabrón*. Such appearance helps the macho control his empire, and seem powerful to those around him, including other narcos who are as powerful and macho as he is. But *Trabajos del reino* depicts a slow fall, a crescendo of circumstances that take away the man's masculinity and leave him unable to direct his crime organization.

Part of *El Rey*'s loss of masculinity is due to being unable to keep a woman under his control. Despite having *La Bruja*, the woman's mother, as an ally, *El Rey* is unable to keep *La Cualquiera* close and faithful to him. *La Cualquiera* wishes to escape the life inside the criminal organization and manages to do so, taking *El Artista* with her. Knowing the woman escaped with someone considered a "lesser" man is only a part of *El Rey*'s emasculation, yet most of that loss stems from his infertility and from being deemed unfit by part of his organization.

It is expected and normalized that the macho has children (like Pedro Páramo), but fertility is not a cornerstone of the macho masculinity. However, the incapability to procreate is considered abnormal and completely frowned upon. The infertile man is considered unmanly because he is unable to perform sexually according to social standards. *El Rey* was expected to those close to him to reproduce with *La Cualquiera*, or any other woman he pleased, and having more than one child would have been applauded. Yet, not having any offspring, despite his numerous attempts, calls into question all the aspects of his sexual life and his capacity to perform as a macho.

During his first encounter with *El Artista*, the narco kills a man who hints at his inability to procreate, and this weakness becomes a taboo topic in both his and other narco organizations. The macho does not want people to know about it, and does everything he can to keep it a secret, including getting home remedies made by *La Bruja*. At first, *El Rey* manages to control most of the social repercussions of his infertility; he is only self-conscious and his macho image is damaged, but he is not emasculated yet.

This state of affairs abruptly changes after *El Artista* writes another song, mentioning “the illness” *El Rey* is suffering. This prompts *El Rey* to react violently towards his employee, since no one dared to publicly address the matter:

—Así que soy bien poquita cosa, ¿no? Eso dices. Que no puedo... Calló. La frase callada y que le hablara de tú sugerían, sí, un nuevo lazo entre ellos, pero no el que el Artista había esperado. —Para estar donde yo estoy no sólo basta ser un chingón, eh, hay que serlo y hay que parecerlo. Y yo lo soy, a güevo que lo soy —hizo una pausa, el Artista sintió cómo la voz del Rey se balanceaba entre un sollozo y un arrebato de ira—, pero necesito que mi gente lo crea, y ese, pendejito, ese era tu trabajo. No andar pregonando que yo... (Herrera 2008 108)<sup>53</sup>

*El Rey* still sees himself as *un chingón*<sup>54</sup>, a great man, but with the new song he is partially emasculated. The man no longer is, or appears to be, the great macho he was in the beginning, and is aware that his people’s opinion will follow suit, emasculating him even further. This reaction is tightly connected with the ideas of performativity explored in the

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<sup>53</sup> “So I’m a no-account fool? That’s what you say? That I can’t...” He fell silent. The unfinished sentence and the fact that for the first time he’d addressed him not as *usted* but as *tú* suggested, yes, that there was some new bond between them, but not the one the Artist had hoped for. “To get where I am, it’s not enough to be a badass, right. You have to be one and you have to look like one. And I am, fuck knows I am,” he paused, the Artist felt the King’s voice teeter between wracking sob and fit of rage, “but I need my people to believe it, and that, you little shit, is your job. Not turning around claiming that I...” (Herrera 2017 87)

<sup>54</sup> There is an inherently sexual idea behind the word *chingón*. As Octavio Paz explains in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, the idea of *chingar* is related to penetration, being the one who fucks, instead of the one being fucked. Those who are *chingones* are both capable of great feats and not seen as weak, since they are not the ones being penetrated. *El Rey*, then, perceives himself as a dominant male, which changes with his infertility.

previous chapter, where one fashions oneself to what one desires to be. What *El Artista* sings about influences the narco's performance, in this case negatively.

A betrayal inside of *El Rey*'s organization is an additional emasculating phenomena. During the first part of the narrative, one of the narco's loyal men is murdered, stabbed to death with a knife owned by one of those who also lived there. The use of violence and a spectacular death send a powerful message from inside the empire. The man who did it aspires to occupy *El Rey*'s place, and killing an ally was his first step in doing so. By killing *El Poch*<sup>55</sup>, the traitor helped with the process of emasculation, exhibiting how the narco was unable to stop him, rendering *El Rey* less capable of holding his position of power.

The killing of allies continues, and it pairs up with the rumors about *El Rey* being unable to have children, staining his reputation. The man is not only emasculated because of his sexual performance, but also for his weak public image. Another of his men, *El Heredero* (The Heir), quickly fashions himself as a potential leader when *El Rey* fails. Naming a man from outside his family an heir would mean that the narco was aware of his own fertility issues and needed a successor. This admission, aside from predicting the narco's demise or capture, completes the emasculation of the man, since the male group no longer approves of his crumbling macho persona. Without the full support of his court, *El Rey* is easily chased down by the police and army, and his macho façade is too weak to help him fight back:

El Rey estaba inclinado sobre la mesa de madera, con las palmas apoyadas sobre varios periódicos abiertos. No parecía leer ninguno, los miraba como si los midiera o les buscara un detalle. Al Artista le dio la impresión de que al Rey sólo en los

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<sup>55</sup> The man's name indicates his citizenship. *Poch*, in Mexico, refers to a person born in the United States to Mexican parents. It is also used to refer to Mexican Americans who are unable to speak Spanish fluently. In Dillman's version, the term is translated as *Gringo*.

brazos le quedaba fuerza, y que el resto del cuerpo buscaba el suelo con gravedad propia. Leyó de revés el titular de uno de los diarios. “Se estrecha el cerco”, decía, junto a una foto del Rey. (Herrera 2008 78)<sup>56</sup>

In the end, *El Rey* is left without a group to approve his performance, and cannot combat the fertility rumors. The man accepts his defeat on both levels, knowing he is emasculated, and agrees to be arrested by the military men, with whom he has made a deal. In doing so, *El Rey* seizes a final opportunity to regain part of his lost masculinity, even if he does not regain his macho status. *El Rey* is well aware that his reputation is stained forever, and he allows the army to capture him, so long as he can control the narrative around how he was detained. By publicizing that the narco was caught while in bed with three women allows him to fit partially into the ideals of the macho and distracts people from his infertility. Such is *El Rey*'s attempt to mend the damage done by the emasculation inside the organization and himself, to appear as masculine as possible in front of a large audience, even if it is only a bit of theater.

The final form of emasculation, depicted in *Temporada de huracanes*, is key to understand the performativity of Brando and the rest of the machos. Herrera's novel bears witness to Brando's complex relationship with his sexuality. The man's mother insists that he must remain pure and abide by all religious rules. During his early adolescence, Brando finds himself desperately attempting to fit in a male group that does not see him as an equal. In fact, the group constantly makes fun of him, but Brando disregards that in order to stay in the circle and gain approval:

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<sup>56</sup> The King was bent over the wooden table, palms on several outspread papers. He appeared not to be reading any of them, looked at them as searching for something specific, or measuring them. It seemed to the Artist as if his arms were the only still-strong thing about the King. As if the rest of his body were sinking into the floor with the force of its own gravity. The Artist upside-down read one of the paper's headlines. “The Net Tightens”, it said, with a photo of the King. (Herrera 2017 86 – 87)

Y Brando, chiveado, rodeado de muchachos que fumaban y bebían, algunos de los cuales le doblaban la edad, les respondía: a huevo que se me para, pregúntale a tu jefa, y los vagos se cagaban de la risa y Brando se sentía orgulloso de ser admitido en ese círculo que se reunía en la banca más alejada del parque, aunque los pendejos se la pasaran burlándose de él, de su nombre fresa y mayate, de la seguramente microscópica verga que tenía, y sobre todo, del hecho de que Brando, a sus doce años, jamás le hubiera echado los mocos adentro a nadie. (Melchor 161)<sup>57</sup>

Brando is insecure about his physiognomy, his performance, and his personality, and being near other men provides him with some comfort he does not find at home or when he is on his own. So the young man joins them and decides to transform himself into what the group wants him to be. This group relationship is based on shared drugs and sexual experiences, so it is logical that they define who is a macho based on those criteria. The macho is expected to be sexually active and knowledgeable, thus rendering Brando unfit when he first joins the group.

Thus, Brando's transformation must take place. Just like *La Bruja's* gender shift, on a social level Brando must undergo an identity transformation in order to become a macho. Through the imitation of the acts of his friends, Brando expects to become a manly man and to be fully accepted into his group of friends. Such masculinity is constructed via rape and homosexual encounters. Brando must also start drinking and doing drugs, following what the older men do to improve his masculine persona and demonstrate his macho self. Yet this proves hard, since the man feels emasculated due to the constant comparisons he and the group make about him and his sexual performance. Brando equates penis size with

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<sup>57</sup> And Brando, shy, surrounded by boys who smoked and drank, some of whom were twice his age, answered them: of course I can get it up, ask your mom, and the bums laughed hysterically. Brando was proud to be admitted into the circle that met in the last bench of the park, although those assholes would constantly mock him, and make fun of his low-class name, his surely microscopic penis, and above all, of the fact that Brando, twelve years old, had never come inside anyone. (Melchor 161)



virility, and therefore feels unmanly, knowing his member is not as big as the others'. This causes fear and anxiety, leaving Brando powerless:

[...] a Brando sí le preocupaba algo el tamaño de su verga, o más bien el ancho; él sentía que su pito era demasiado flaco, demasiado prieto, tirando casi a morado en la base, y bueno, la verdad es que también le parecía pequeño, sobre todo si lo comparaba con los pinches trancos que tenían los batos que salían en las películas porno que le compraba al Willy, cuando las viejas en bikini de las revistas de chismes de su madre le aburrieron. (Melchor 163)<sup>58</sup>

Brando's actions are not macho enough to the group, who tease and disapprove of him and his "unfit" anatomy. The men, although not too obsessed with penis size, still judge their friends according to this criterion. Brando must also engage in all sexual acts the group considers permitted and is pressured to have encounters with gay men. According to the group's logic, they are not engaging in homosexual activities, since they are the ones penetrating or being pleased. The men consider themselves as heterosexual, given that they control the encounter. Brando gains recognition when he finally agrees to experiment with a gay man; he is finally approved of by the others and even himself. The man finally becomes a macho, but his fears of homosexuality keep him close to emasculation.

*La Bruja* is both complicit in the construction of the masculinity in *La Matosa*, and a challenge to those who hesitate in following the macho path. The woman takes advantage of the men's beliefs and desires and exploits them to her own benefit, both reinforcing the machos and further emasculating those who are insecure. If the men participate in her parties, they are still considered machos, but if they refuse, they are signaled as cowards, and emasculated.

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<sup>58</sup> Brando did care about the size of his cock, or rather the width; he felt that his dick was too thin, too dark, almost purple at the base, and well, to be honest, he also thought it was too small, especially if compared to the huge penises that the men had in those porn movies he bought from Willy, when the women wearing bikinis in his mother's gossip magazines bored him. (Melchor 163)

Brando decides to maintain his macho status by going to the parties. There, he forces himself to feel no desire whatsoever, towards *La Bruja* or towards his friend, Luismi. However, Brando does realize that he has intimate feelings for the other man and is unable to face him or return to *La Bruja*'s house. Luismi, on the other hand, is more open about his homosexual practices, causing Brando to both reject him and be attracted to him. The latent homosexual desires Brando has, combined with his fear of having a small penis, affects the macho greatly, since he believes both that homosexuality is wrong and that his biology determines how well he can perform as a macho. Brando feels emasculated by what he wants and what his physiognomy represents in a macho culture.

Although he feels emasculated once again because of his homosexual desire, Brando ends up raping Luismi in the middle of the night, excusing himself by saying he was unable to contain himself. After Brando's outburst, his biggest fear is not retaliation, but public embarrassment: "[Tenía] miedo a reunirse con sus amigos y que estos, enterados con lujo de detalle de lo que había pasado entre él y Luismi, lo castraran frente al pueblo entero llamándolo choto, puto, maricón, carajo" (Melchor 189)<sup>59</sup>. The worst thing to be considered by the group is a homosexual, because this renders the man as a socially castrated individual and, probably, an easy target to rape. Although he is the one who penetrated, not the one being penetrated, Brando is concerned that his emotions and real desires will come to the surface if his rape of Luismi is known. Brando's humiliation does not come from the act itself, but from the possibility of being "outed" in front of everyone, of no longer being *machín*. Even if no one found out and he is still considered a macho, in

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<sup>59</sup> "He was afraid to meet with his friends and that they would know, in great detail, what had happened between him and Luismi, he feared they would castrate him in front of the whole town calling him faggot, gay, queer, fuck."

his mind Brando has been permanently emasculated. The man's own desires forbid him from being a macho again, he no longer fits the group's criteria.

*La Bruja's* murder is a revenge plot. The woman is branded a pervert, and Brando considers her partially at fault for his homosexual desires, since it was in her house that he discovers them. Brando plans to murder both *La Bruja* and Luismi after the two men rob her, thus eliminating the challenges to his masculinity. *La Bruja* would no longer have a stream of young man in her parties, or be able to reap the benefits of their sexual practices. On the other hand, Brando would no longer have to see Luismi and be reminded of his homosexuality, allowing him to become a macho again. However, the plot fails since there is nothing to rob, and Luismi and Brando are captured by the police. Brando is left in jail, powerless and psychologically emasculated, and far away from the group of friends who reassured him so much.

Since masculinity is a social performance done to achieve recognition from other men, machos need both self-assurance and a group to approve them. The man's own confidence allows him to carry through the performance and execute it properly, and the group's support is what deems him a macho. Without these supports, the macho persona that a man constructs is bound to fail, as happened to Pedro Páramo, Francisco Rosas, *El Rey*, and Brando. These four men construct themselves as machos, through the standards of their time and social group, and all of them lose their self-assurance or the support of other men, sometimes even both. A macho cannot exist unless he and a part of society believes he is the epitome of manliness. This is made possible by a society that dwells in machismo and allows the rise of machos as power holders.

The figure of the macho, with its particular traits, is a cornerstone of a sexist system in *Pedro Páramo*, *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, *Trabajos del reino*, and *Temporada de*

*huracanes*. This system enables the reproduction of the macho phenomenon and allows the machos to stay in power as long as they perform correctly. However, each novel explores what happens to a system that loses a macho.

Rulfo's novel showcases the decadence of a society that never recovered after losing its figure of power. Comala dies with Pedro, despite him being considered a sad, weak man. Someone who is no longer a macho. There is no replacement for Páramo, since Miguel, the son that followed his footsteps, dies suddenly, and none of his sons are powerful enough to take control over Comala. Pedro made sure he is the only man who is able to dominate and rule over his town, and he became the master and owner of the sexist system that prevails. Comala lives in fear of the macho and meekly accepts the misogynistic system the man controls, doing little to stop him out of fear. Since Pedro was the cornerstone of the system, the town, the system and the man die together.

Garro's and Herrera's novels do see a replacement of the macho, both perpetuating the system. Rosas leaves, but another group of army men replaces him, ready to command as he did before failing to perform as a macho. This has social and historical implications, since it demonstrates that the system in *Los recuerdos del porvenir* can be perpetuated by any man who is given enough authority and can perform as a macho. Rosas is not the cornerstone of a sexist system, since he is part of a bigger group, the military. This means that when Rosas fails, many more can replace him and perpetuate a violent society just as Francisco's successors did.

*El Rey*, on the other hand, knows he is emasculated and considered unfit to control the organization any further. *El Rey* allows *El Heredero* to take over the empire, perpetuating both the cartel and the macho system. In this case, both the people who surround *El Rey* and the man himself make sure that their system and their way of living

can prevail if anything goes awry. *El Rey* recognizes that it is time to allow someone else to reign, and it is made apparent that any man can become a macho leader if they know how to run a cartel and are prepared to do so. Pedro leaves no heir and the system dies, Rosas belongs to an organization that replaces him, and *El Rey* names a man fit to continue the criminal organization, thus allowing both of the systems to prevail, but with different machos. This prevalence demonstrates that the system is usually bigger than simply the man himself.

Brando's case is different, since he is not the most important man of the macho system in La Matosa. However, the man decides to confront this system, since he is uncomfortable and insecure fulfilling the social role of the macho. Brando fails to destroy a rooted system, despite killing the woman who participated and encouraged the ideas of what a macho should be. The rest of the machos, even the ones who belong to cartels and the police department, continue to perpetuate this particular system, and Brando barely damage it at all. The undoing of a particular macho figure does not necessarily undo a system, since there are inevitably others who can and will uphold it.

## CONCLUSION

*Pedro Páramo*, *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, *Trabajos del reino*, and *Temporada de huracanes* are distinct novels which, throughout their pages, create different realities, similarly inspired by Mexican social phenomena. Despite being written in different periods of time and having diverse themes, however, the four novels also have a central theme in common: the construction and destruction of a macho. Not the macho as a figure of power and as a representative of machismo culture, but the destruction of a single man who has been unable to meet this sanctioned social definition of masculinity. The four novels concentrate on how men construct their masculine images, both for themselves and for a social group, and how they fail to uphold their own macho values. The literary machos thus similarly suffer a process of emasculation that unravels as the narrative progresses. To emasculate a macho means to strip power from him, prompting him to appear less manly to the group he is performing his masculinity for. This causes the group to disapprove of him and takes a psychological toll on the man, making him feel less secure. The process happens both mentally and socially, and it is bound to shatter the macho persona of a single man.

All of the novels can be understood through a lens of performativity, which reveals key aspects of both gender construction and image creation. Performativity, understood as the series of actions and typical comportment used in order to fashion oneself, is present in different forms in all the machos. The men follow a pattern of behavior that they know will help them become masculine and everything that such form of life entails. Continuous acts such as murder, violent outbursts, and the objectification of women allow the men to truly become machos in the eyes of their groups and of themselves.

Machos without violence cannot be considered macho, since they rely on being able to impose themselves over others. The social systems in all novels are inherently violent towards those who are considered weak or unfit, and this extends to those who the men deem unworthy of consideration. The macho persona is constructed around violence, against lesser men, queer people, and all women. The machos focus on controlling those who are below them in a hierarchy, knowing that repetition and success in performing such actions will grant them an important place in a sexist society. Pedro Páramo, Francisco Rosas, *El Rey* and Brando live in societies (whether created by them or not) that place value in the perpetuation of the idea of a macho performing as he is meant to.

Each novel explores the path of a man who faces severe challenges to his masculinity and is unable to sort out all of his obstacles. Juan Rulfo's and Elena Garro's novels create a particular form to characterize masculinity, one that can be called the macho ideal for rural bosses. The machos in these two novels are men who control vast extensions of land, create their own law, possess the female bodies they desire, and are able to kidnap women and be praised for it. Pedro Páramo becomes a macho and a rural boss through becoming a ruthless leader of Comala, and he performs as a masculine man through most of his reign. However, being unable to possess the woman he loves and being unknowingly mocked by his town cause him to realize he is unable to keep his macho image up. Thus, Pedro elects to let the town die, and he dies with it, harming both Comala and himself in an act of vengeance. In the end, Pedro finds himself emasculated and has no one to perform his macho persona for.

Francisco Rosas, on the other hand, already has a fragile masculinity. Despite appearing as a macho in front of Ixtepec, Rosas considers himself unable to control his lover, Julia. Rosas loses control of Ixtepec when Julia leaves, and he then loses the respect

of his men when he tries to please Isabel, his new lover, and fails. Francisco was already a weak man, and being confronted with this reality diminishes his macho persona. The machos in the rural boss era become accustomed to rule and direct, and when they are unable to do so, their persona crumbles. The emasculation Rosas suffers begins as psychological phenomena and spreads to all social levels, since both of his social groups – Ixtepec and the military – disapprove of his failed persona.

Yuri Herrera and Fernanda Melchor also create their own brand of machos, inspired by narcoculture. The machos in the narco era follow a code of conduct that is similar to the rural boss machos, but they have different methods for displaying masculinity. The narco machos also desire to possess the female body and to gain economic and social power, but they display the extent of their dominion publicly and in an ostentatious way. The men wear expensive clothes and show how much money they have whenever they can. Also, drugs and alcohol become predominant in their culture, where most of the society consume them. *El Rey* is a macho with fertility problems, which in the macho system means that he cannot sexually perform. The man further loses the respect of his social group because his lover escapes. *El Rey*, deemed unfit to continue being both the narco and the macho in charge, decides to step down and portrait himself in the media as a capable lover. The emasculation of this “King” is done based on the premise that he cannot control both his fertility issues and the people he commands, rendering him a deficient leader and macho.

Brando, on the other hand, is incapable of performing as a macho for his social group because he doubts his own sexuality. This uncertainty leads the man to blame the woman who throws parties in order to gain favors from young men. Brando kills *La Bruja* to prove she should not control and manipulate how masculinity is perceived, and he ends



up in jail. This character's emasculation is a result of his inability to perform like the group asks him to, added to his own doubts about both the system and his sexuality.

It is helpful to consider *Temporada de huracanes* as the text that digs deepest into performativity and unmask the mechanisms behind the macho. Both Brando and *La Bruja* perform constantly and on different social levels, but both of them have the same objective, to have their performance validated, to be accepted as what they fashion themselves to be. Brando's transformation reveals the journey that must be followed in order to become a macho, and it all starts and ends with perception. Others must see him as a macho, like the group of friends in La Matosa, the people in Comala or Ixtepec, or those that live in *la Corte*. The four novels show machos performing properly, being praised for the persona they achieve.

However, the mechanisms of the fall of the macho are also performative, as Brando demonstrates. Doubting the system that supports the macho and not fulfilling the social role that the men have occupied cause the machos to perform in a way that is considered unacceptable by those who deemed them masculine men. Brando doubts the standards set for his performance, and he does not desire to continue upholding them. This reveals that Brando, and the machos, are unable to perform, both because they are physically or emotionally unable to do so. Brando, on the contrary to the rest of the machos, has seen the results of the system and refuses to perpetuate them. The rest of the machos desire to continue the system that supports them, but they cannot maintain the social structure.

The four novels demonstrate the highs and lows of keeping up a macho performance in different circumstances and with different criteria to meet. The texts focus on single men, but they also reveal the system and social groups that support and evaluate the macho persona and deem it acceptable or not. If the man is not an acceptable macho, his downfall

from power is imminent and his masculinity is at risk. Whenever a man is emasculated and stops being a macho, the system either replaces him or makes him an outcast, as in Garro's, Herrera's, and Melchor's novels. However, if there is no one to perpetuate the system, the macho is not replaced and he disappears, along with the social system, as in Rulfo's novel. Although some machos and other people rebel against the particular macho system that surrounds them, there are other systems that can potentially replace them and new ideals that can be set. The novels do not embark on a journey to dismantle a social structure, but instead showcase how it can be disrupted when one of its key pieces stops performing like it should. This does not mean, however, that either the authors or the texts condone a sexist social structure; they simply acknowledge that it is bigger than them. A single emasculation will not overthrow a system that is rooted in a culture.

The four novels also discuss female agency within a sexist system. It is probable that none of the machos expects to be disobeyed by women, since the men expect their partners and those who surround them to be quiet and cooperative. The fact that women dare escape or to take advantage of the system comes as an unexpected development, insofar as female agency affects how the social organization works and how the machos are perceived. Susana, Julia, *La Cualquiera* and both *Brujas* have agency and do not act as simple pawns in a male power game. When the women do not follow the machos' plans for them, they become threatening to the masculine ideals, since they are no longer obedient and serve male purposes. Female agency becomes a problem in the macho system because it means that the machos lose control, shattering their images.

Femininity is also performative, as revealed by *La Bruja* in *Temporada de huracanes*. The woman presents herself as such, despite being considered male by most of the men in La Matosa. *La Bruja* must perform in the terms of femininity that are imposed

by a society, even if she is deemed “monstrous” by doing so. Gender performativity extends to women; it determines how they must be and behave in order to have a place in the machismo system, especially if their designated role is “lover”. However, the women of the novels never fully perform as ideal female, whether they want to or not. Susana is deemed crazy, Julia is not virginal, *La Cualquiera* runs away with other man, and *La Bruja* was assigned male gender identity at birth. The four women create difficulties in their society in their own form. In their attempts to create, or follow, the ideas of femaleness, the women challenge the ideas of the macho, hindering the male performance. Although the women can create their own brand of performativity, thus achieving agency, they will not be considered socially acceptable.

It is also important to reflect on the gender of the authors and consider how authorial identity might correlate to their representations of violence and machismo. Both Elena Garro and Fernanda Melchor represent a system that is openly misogynistic and present it as a common occurrence. Both *Ixtepec* and *La Matosa* – one made up and one real – contain a troublingly violent system towards women, one where violence is not just part of the macho ideal, but as a constant reality. People like Nancy, repeatedly raped by his stepfather, or like Antonia, who was barely an adolescent when she was kidnaped by a military man, reveal the understanding both authors have of their own realities and how the machismo system lives and is perpetuated beyond what their books can reveal. Rulfo and Herrera focus heavily on the rise and fall of a man, showing women as collateral damage. Dolores is another of Pedro’s victims, and *La Niña* is just another prostitute that can be replaced quickly, since *El Rey* is powerful. Although the sexism is clear in all texts, the female authors portray this social system as pervasive, unavoidable, and violent beyond

intimate terrorism. The four authors reflect their own historical realities, but perhaps they read them differently through the lens of their own gender.

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