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Kim M. Hanley

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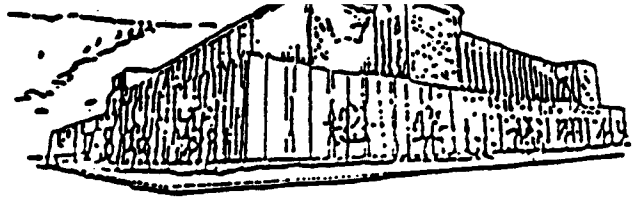
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SUBVERSION OF GENDER ROLES
IN THE
EXISTENTIALIST
SCIENCE-FICTION NARRATIVE
OF
ROSA MONTERO'S *TEMBLOR*

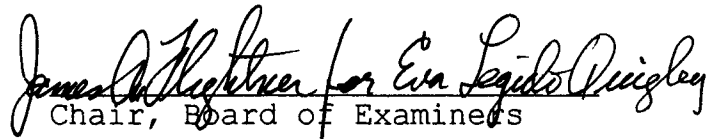
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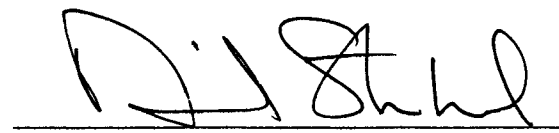
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B.A. University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, 1998

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Kim M. Hanley, M.A., May 2000

Foreign Languages

Subversion of Gender Roles in the Existentialist Science-Fiction Narrative of Rosa Montero's *Temblor* (52 pp.)

Director: Eva Legido-Quigley *JHF for E.L.Q.*

This thesis develops the subversion of gender roles in Rosa Montero's 1990 novel *Temblor*. Montero changes her traditional realistic style for that of science-fiction/fantasy. For the first time she centers a strong heroic female character as protagonist within a science-fiction framework.

The change to science-fiction only adds to the subversive literary work. Montero further challenges gender roles by partially inverting them within a matriarchal society. Thereby she presents women as the dominating force and men are considered inferior.

To further succeed in the subversion of gender roles, Montero includes several elements from different feminist theories such as: Hélène Cixous' emphasis on the female form, radical feminists' essentialism and anti-essentialism and socialist feminism. Montero wavers between each feminist position thereby producing an unclear feminist argument. The argument that does form a coherent and consistent position is existentialism.

The justification of the existentialist argument is the protagonist, Agua Fría. The novel traces Agua Fría's life from puberty to adulthood. Throughout this time the reader follows Agua Fría on her journey of self-discovery. Montero, through the triumph of Agua Fría's strong female character successfully shows the subversion of gender roles. The ending of the novel exemplifies the attainment of the "authentic life" according to existentialists. At the end, Agua Fría chooses to leave and separate herself from the newly founded government. Within the existentialist argument, her decision to leave represents the ultimate subversion of gender roles.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Rosa Montero's *Temblor*, is an atypical science-fiction novel in which gender roles are subverted. *Temblor* presents a future matriarchal hierarchy where women occupy the top of the societal structure and men struggle to gain political recognition. Hence, it hypothesizes what a "woman's world" would entail. Montero parallels this future matriarchal society with contemporary authoritative patriarchies. By constructing the matriarchal system similar to that of current traditional patriarchies, *Temblor* succeeds in deconstructing them. Thus, the novel provides a strong critique against the present day patriarchal society.

This insurgent literary work attacks certain feminist views, political hierarchies, and religious structures. Montero further subverts gender roles by creating an existentialist narrative within a science-fiction framework. To establish the subversion Montero intertwines characteristics from four feminist positions: Hélène Cixous' emphasis on female body, radical essentialist and anti-essentialism feminism, and socialist feminism. None of these positions are entirely or coherently presented. There is no singular overarching feminist view taken. We

are therefore presented with a postmodern feminist discussion. However, Montero's main character, Agua Fría, follows an existentialist argument that advocates human responsibility.

Existentialism becomes the overarching philosophy in *Temblor*. Agua Fría represents what the individual can achieve once they overcome societal roles and confinements. She creates for herself the authentic life. This paper will discuss the feminist characteristics developed in the novel and will show how they do not form a coherent feminist argument. The paper will then develop the stronger existentialist elements of the novel. However, a brief synopsis of *Temblor* will first be given so the reader may understand the context of the discussion.

The novel is divided into four sections. In the first part, *Tiempo de fe*, Agua Fría is introduced as the main character. During this part Agua Fría's relationship with her mentor is developed; Agua Fría receives memories from her Anterior (mentor). Agua Fría experiences the death of her Anterior as well as her mother. In addition, Agua Fría becomes aware of the cloud of nothingness when it overtakes her mother's home. Shortly after the death of her mother the imperial guard of Talapot, the center of a matriarchal society, arrive to take Agua Fría to be trained as a

priestess. Part one ends with Agua Fría's escape from Talapot. The second part, *Camino al norte*, develops Agua Fría's journey northward to find Oxígeno, *la Gran Hermana* in hopes to find answers about her mother's death, the cloud of nothingness and the destructive power of the matriarchy. Along the way Agua Fría encounters several groups: the merchant caravan lead by a woman called Diamante, the oasis headed by Koala and the community of Renacimiento also headed by a woman. In part three, *La medida del desorden*, Agua Fría finds Oxígeno. To the dismay of Agua Fría Oxígeno does not have any answers for Agua Fría. After the death of Oxígeno, Agua Fría goes to live with the primitive Uma tribe. In the final section, *El corazón de las tinieblas*, Agua Fría returns to Talapot in order to destroy the matriarchy. She is able to do this with the aid of each of the various groups she has encountered during her journey. At the end of the novel Agua Fría, pregnant, decides not to partake in the establishment of a new government.

For the first time, Montero changes her "traditional" realistic style for that of fantasy and science fiction. This new approach makes possible the critique of "modern" society by the open-ended possibilities that exist within

the science fiction/fantasy genre. Joanna Russ is quoted in the science fiction magazine *Vertex*:

"One would think science fiction the perfect literary mode in which to explore (and explode) our assumptions about "innate" values and "natural" social arrangements, in short our ideas about Human Nature, Which Never Changes. Some of this has been done. But speculation about the innate personality differences between men and women, about family structure, about sex, in short about gender roles, does not exist at all.¹

In this quote, Joanna Russ expresses her frustration with the failure of the science fiction genre to speculate about and deconstruct gender roles. However, it appears that she strongly believes that science fiction would be the ideal literary genre to "explore and explode" certain societal stereotypes. Sarah Lefanu, author of *Feminism and Science Fiction* develops the theory of subversive science fiction. She begins by describing what science fiction allows:

By borrowing from other literary forms it lets writers defamiliarise the familiar, and make familiar the new and strange. These twin possibilities, apparently contradictory, offer enormous scope to women writers who are thus released from the constraints of realism. The social and sexual hierarchies of the contemporary world can be examined through the process of 'estrangement', thus challenging normative ideas of gender roles...²

¹ Sarah Lefanu, *Feminism and Science Fiction*, 13.

Lefanu insists that science fiction offers women writers a new avenue to express gender inequalities. Science fiction can deconstruct, "to replace presence with absence," or act as a subversive discourse in that "it replaces absence (in this case the female subject) with presence."³ Science fiction literature enables the author to defamiliarize the familiar while familiarizing the unfamiliar. In Montero's *Temblor* the protagonist is a young girl and therefore replaces absence with presence. Her thought and action are central to the novel's development, resolution and "other worldliness" that Montero develops. The "other worldliness" is based upon the construction of a matriarchy that governs which is opposite to that of western society. Western society has evolved with patriarchal ideology that centers man as the father and as society's leader. In *Temblor* woman is centered as society's leader.

Within the matriarchy, the female protagonist at first takes on savior like characteristics or "the unfamiliar". The unfamiliar takes place through the heroic characteristics of the main character. It is not common to find heroic women protagonists who transcend traditional gender roles. Nevertheless Montero does not intend for

² Ibid., 21-22.

³ Ibid., 23.

Agua Fría to be the unquestionable "savior" in terms of a deity per se but only a heroine who has achieved self-awareness of her existence. Agua Fría becomes aware of her existence by attaining cooperation from distinct ideologically based groups of people. She, with diverse societal groups succeeds in the destruction of the fascist matriarchy. Upon integrating various societal groups, even those with opposite ideological positions, Montero shows that the ultimate in human responsibility is societal cooperation and compromise. Agua Fría's ability to learn about herself and others directs her character development and thereby facilitates the ongoing process of self-recognition and realization.

Montero continually develops the life of the protagonist; Agua Fría is constantly evolving into her existence. Thus, a savior theory is out of the question due to the existentialist motive within the novel which emphatically asserts a "no solutions" or "no absolutisms" position. Agua Fría is the heroine; she instigates and leads troops that destroy the fascist and unjust matriarchy. All of Agua Fría's choices lead her back to Talapot, the central government of the matriarchy. Montero's focus on a female protagonist is not uncommon. Many of Montero's novels focus on a female protagonist.

However, *Agua Fría* stands out to be one of the most successfully independent woman characters.

In *Temblor* Montero departs from realism to continue her subversive literary style by utilizing a science fiction/fantasy genre. In many of her other novels Montero also presents women as the main characters. However, the women often represent the marginalized women's voice and/or their psychological struggle to break away from societal defined gender roles. For example in *Te trataré como a una reina*, two of Montero's main characters are prostitutes and the other is a middle-aged overweight single woman. Montero describes the women and their lives with remarkable realistic detail, with the purpose of drawing her readers into these women's reality. Her intentions aim towards awakening the reader's consciousness in order to denounce the unequal, unjust patriarchal system that isolates the lives of many people. Within her realistic literature, Montero sets out to subvert accepted gender roles and sexual identity by establishing the characters within real *barrios* and cities. One would be able to go to many of the places written about in Montero's novels, but this is not the case in *Temblor*. *Temblor* develops fictional places and inverts the power structure but with the same intention, subverting gender roles. Instead of seeing women held

captive to the private sphere of the home and being the object of sexual desire to men, Montero's *Temblor* develops the inverse situation.

Temblor presents and criticizes a feminist utopia based upon an argument that states if women were to rule and establish new social practices/beliefs, society then would be ideal. This argument focuses on the fact that women have not been dictators, only innocent bystanders caught within patriarchy's domination. Thus, within this argument, women are innately "good," composed of the stereotypically associated characteristics: nurturing, non-violent, benevolent. Once these women would rule, the world would be cured of any abuse of power in the position of authority. They would govern peacefully without violent confrontations and therefore would be more accepting of others and their views. However, with the acceptance that women are innately "good," incapable of harming others, comes the acquiescence that women have a biological determination. That is, all women are born with a certain set of characteristics that define her. For this reason, states the argument, nature determines woman. Montero develops this feminist position by positing a matriarchal utopia. The utopia also celebrates women's ability to give birth, and children are educated in the public sphere. Men

are incapable of having children; hence the women in *Temblor* disdain and enslave them. They use religion, education and technology to strengthen and maintain their power.

Montero's feminist matriarchal utopia is not original. Many authors have used utopian literature to present a present-day situation in a negative way. When an author does this it is referred to as a distopia. Utopian theories reach far back into history. For example, in the *Republic*, Plato creates a utopic vision in which women are given as much educational opportunity as men. Society has decided that children should be educated in the public sphere to increase their level of participation and communication within the community. However, for Montero's *Temblor* the "utopia" reveals itself to be a distopia. In this case Montero is not advocating a ruling matriarchy but she is imploring that humanity create a society of cooperation and compromise so we as a civilization can improve our lives without destroying ourselves. The matriarchy represents a distopia due to its oppressive characteristics that parallel those exercised by a patriarchal, dictatorial and fascist regime. Thus, Montero says that a utopia does not exist with women or men exercising absolute power over the masses. Instead of

creating a utopia, Montero establishes that it is a constant gender cooperative struggle to fight for an egalitarian society.

It is the fascist and dictatorial presence of the matriarchy that establishes the connection to Spain's twentieth century history. In response to Spain's dictatorship under Francisco Franco, Montero's *Temblor* presents a failing dictatorial, fascist matriarchal society. Montero's *Temblor* shares many commonalties with Francisco Franco's dictatorship. However, instead of a ruling patriarchy, a ruling matriarchy governs Magenta, the central city of the administration in the novel. In both governments, we see a ruling body that manipulates and thus controls its citizens taking advantage of long-standing traditions and beliefs, in this case, namely religion.

During the twentieth century Spain's history is tainted with the fascist government of Francisco Franco that lasted for 36 years. Franco assumed control of the state after a bloody civil war that lasted three years. Prior to the Spanish Civil War Spain had established a second Republic. During the short rule of the second Republic, a more liberal government administered democratic ideals. For women, the situation improved. They were granted rights such as property ownership, civil matrimony

and divorce that had been previously withheld. However few women's gains were, they nevertheless were improving their status under the Republic. Their situation changed drastically after Franco assumed power.

Franco's reign epitomized the patriarchal ideology. Men were responsible for public matters and women were in charge of bearing children and managing the private sphere due to the belief that their emotional states were too fragile to participate in the public realm. Women's identity was connected directly with their bodies. Women were the vehicles through which Spain would produce future warriors. After serving her obligatory "Servicio Social" the woman would receive a pin declaring that she was now officially ready to fulfill her life's duties, to become a wife and a mother. Isabel la Católica represented the ideal woman figure and Franco personified the ideal father figure and to some extent was "God on earth."

Franco's primary objective was to maintain control and by doing this, he would be preventing people from questioning his ideology. In order to accomplish this feat, he proceeded to use Christian dogma to nurture his own. By utilizing the Church and Christian theology, education, and science to suppress opinion and questioning

Franco developed an unjust society. The same unjust laws between women and men also exist in *Temblor*.

The Church based its argument for female inferiority on certain sections of the Bible, specifically the creation story. "El hombre había sido creado a imagen y gloria de Dios, pero la mujer había sido creada para gloria del varón."⁴ From the Bible comes a clear and indisputable reason that establishes the women's position in relation to man; the woman was created for man's enjoyment. The Church tried to mask any pleasure in a woman's life with the claim that happiness is something of another world, referring to heaven. So, a very well established tradition, Christianity, proclaims the purpose and position of woman in society. Already with the creation of woman second to man's, the Bible continues her demise with the story of Eve and also the Virgin Mary. Scanlon explains that Eve was a symbol of everything bad that could result in a woman.

Eva representa todo lo malo de la mujer; su debilidad justifica que el hombre la tenga bajo su dominio y sus artimañas justifican la propia debilidad del hombre.⁵

According To Christianity, the story of Eve only shows how women are vulnerable to the temptations of others because

⁴ Geraldine Scanlon, La polémica feminista en la España contemporánea 160.

⁵ Ibid., 160.

of their fragile emotional state. For her sin against God or man, she and all other women receive the punishment of painful childbirth and "estar sometida a su marido" (Genesis, III, 16).⁶ The Virgin Mary, due to her sexual and moral purity became the perfect image of a woman to emulate.

¡María! ¡Qué tipo! ¡Qué ideal! ¿Ha soñado jamás la mente nada semejante? Pues después de su inmaculada pureza, que conservó desposada, y madre por privilegio insigne y único, ninguna otra virtud se exalta más en ella por la Iglesia que su profunda humildad, su sumisión absoluta e incondicional a su esposo.⁷

The Christian faith in the XIX century laid the foundation for certain ideas relating to matrimony that Franco supported. Matrimony requires sacrifice and the woman's ability to put up with her husband as a great sacrifice for "the greater good." This sacrifice extended not only to matrimony but also as a sacrifice for Franco's nation. It was necessary to control the woman sexually. The purpose of sexual relations was only to have children in order to perpetuate the man's family line. Thus, women were viewed in terms of their reproductive capabilities.

⁶ Ibid ., 160.

⁷ Ibid., 160. Her footnote taken from E. Roldán y López, *Las mujeres ya votan*, 114.

Oppression of women was only part of Franco's fundamentals, his other tenants are as follows: "el orden y la autoridad, el catolicismo inherente a la forma de ser de España, la patria entendida como algo que le pertenecía a él y a quienes pensaban como él, no aceptaba que hubiera otra manera de entender el bien de España que la suya."⁸ His fundamentals paralleled the absolutism of Christianity's ten commandments, which is also why Franco took on the role of "Father" of Spain. Franco's absolutism manifested superficiality to every day life. Despite the fact that Franco rejected the existence of class, it existed. For much of Franco's ideology, he capitalized on the teachings of the Catholic church to reinforce and fortify his own totalitarian ideals. Therefore, the Church, along with Franco helped create societal gender roles that classified all women into the private sphere of the home or simply as objects ready and willing to be possessed.

In Montero's Temblor, the matriarchy also uses religion to maintain its power hold over its citizens. Religion in Temblor composes many laws that must be obeyed at all times. If a person were to suggest that a particular law ought to be changed, or simply imply disagreement of any kind against the matriarchy, that

⁸Ibid., 7.

person would be charged with heresy and they would receive the death punishment. One of the high priestess' daughters, Relámpagos, dares to question the matriarchy's authority and is put to death by her mother; she represents a possible symbol of change in the unjust society that results in her public execution.

In addition to limiting the freedom of each citizen, education is distinct for girls and boys. Girls are able to attain and reach a higher status within the matriarchy than boys. Thus, Temblor's matriarchy shows pre-determined gender roles just as Franco's patriarchal dictatorship. Agua Fría, the female protagonist, discusses gender roles with her classmate Pedernal:

--No es justo que tú, por ser mujer, tengas la posibilidad de pasar al Círculo Interior y que yo, sólo por ser hombre, no la tenga.
 --Agua Fría se echó a reír... Siempre ha sido así, 'esa es la norma -respondió cantarínamente.
 --!Tonterías! ¿Qué tienes tú que yo no tenga, en qué eres tú mejor que yo?
 --Agua Fría se sonrió en la oscuridad calladamente; pensaba en los muchos ejemplos que podría citarle, pero no deseaba ofender a su compañero.
 --Qué quieres que te diga, Pedernal... Desde luego somos diferentes, eso está claro.
 --?Ah, sí? Bueno, nuestros cuerpos son diferentes. Pero nada más...
 --No digas bobadas, Pedernal. Es evidente que tenéis ciertas limitaciones.
 --?De verdad? ¿Cómo qué?
 --Oh, bueno, pues es obvio... Nosotras somos madres, somos las hacedoras de la vida - contestó la muchacha con sonrisa vanidosa y pedante.

--Pero nosotros también tenemos nuestra parte en eso, ¿no es así?

--!Pero no hay comparación posible, no es lo mismo! Nuestra es la sangre, nuestro es el cuerpo, los hijos son nuestros. Vosotros ni siquiera tenéis la posibilidad de saber si sois los verdaderos padres, a no ser que la mujer quiera y pueda confirmaros vuestra colaboración en el proceso.⁹

Within this quote, we see Pedernal's struggle to convince Agua Fría of his right to become a high priestess. He questions the norm, the standard that the *sacerdotisas* have imposed on Magenta. Faith in the religion is key to survival but Pedernal thinks beyond the "leyes" and desires answers to his questions. Agua Fría's answer represents that belief and constant application of "Las Leyes" of the religion only serve to perpetuate them. Manipulation through religion occurs in *Temblor* just as it happened within Franco's dictatorial regime. It serves only to strengthen the central power. Religion also creates and perpetuates beliefs in determined gender roles in *Temblor* and Franco's government. Thus, religion proves to be a negative force when trying to equalize the sexes.

In terms of education, Franco destroyed what the Second Republic had formed. In the few years of the Republic women had gained some basic concessions. However,

⁹ Rosa Montero, *Temblor*, 53-54.

once Franco took power these gains were taken away. Education once again became gender based. In *Temblor*, Montero parallels the same situation. Women in *Temblor* possess great intelligence and are able to control mental powers such as hypnosis, telepathy and telekinesis. During Franco's rule, it was common for a woman to become a teacher if she was searching for a career. This was one of the very few jobs open to her. Similarly in *Temblor* men are limited to certain positions under the assumption that they are inferior. As Franco perpetuated the idea of innate gender roles, men and women continued to believe in them. Montero questions many manifestations of Franco's regime in *Temblor* through role reversal.

After the first few pages of *Temblor* the reader acquires the most vital information of the novel. Within these first pages, we meet Agua Fría, the central protagonist and Corcho Quemado her "Anterior" or mentor. The captivating names of each character originate from a memorable and outstanding moment of the Anterior's life. In the beginning of the novel, the first paragraph indicates the emptiness and loneliness of the environment of Agua Fría. The empty hallways that once, in a past time, were illuminated with light and activity now reveal shadows and uncomfortable silence. In this precise moment

when Agua Fría enters la Casa de los Grandes, she perceives an "insorportable desolado" feeling about her surroundings. The desolate perception of the main character insinuates the first existentialist indications of Montero's novel. From here, we follow Agua Fría through her pilgrimage of self-realization and self-discovery triggered by the death of her Anterior and her mother. Through Agua Fría's journey of self-actualization, Montero develops fragments of different feminist arguments. These fragmented arguments only serve to strengthen Montero's intent to bring out an existentialist motive in the novel.

Chapter 2 Feminism in the Novel

Montero oscillates between several feminist theories but never develops one clear feminist argument. *Temblor* includes characteristics from four distinct feminist positions: the thought of French feminist Hélène Cixous, radical feminist essentialism and anti-essentialism, and socialist feminism. By including elements of each theory mentioned above, *Temblor* is contradictory and does not present one coherent theory. This chapter sorts through several issues that play a role in the development of feminism and also discusses certain contradictory assertions within Montero's *Temblor*.

Hélène Cixous' theory centers the woman's body as key focus to developing a feminine discourse. Upon writing about the positive aspects of women's sexuality, woman becomes free of the dominating patriarchal discourse that has limited and oppressed her. Radical feminism has two opposing positions. The first, essentialism, is based on the argument that women are innately the "good" gender. Within this position, essentialists argue that women possess "a priori essence" that carries a predetermined set of gender roles. In other words, nature has established how women are. In contrast, anti-essentialism argues that

society is responsible for creating and imposing certain gender roles upon men and women. Finally socialist feminism demands a more conscientious society in which men and women are treated as equals. The socialist feminist holds the following values central to their theory: "equality, cooperation, sharing, political commitment, freedom from sexual stereotyping, and freedom from personal possessiveness."¹⁰ Cooperation is the value that most stands out in Montero's *Temblor*.

Ritualistic practice of naming is one of the first insights into feminism in *Temblor*. Naming establishes an exchange of history and memory between two people. At the beginning of the novel Agua Fría enters *La Casa de Los Grandes* to receive her second name from her Anterior, her mentor. Agua Fría's Anterior, Corcho Quemado, then proceeds to pass on a name based on a single moment of her life that for the Anterior, personified life itself. Although Montero includes the possibility of having male Anteriors there is never character development into the life of a male Anterior, thus, the reader has to assume that male Anteriors really exist. In this particular case the passing on of the Corcho Quemado's memory in the form of a name is matrilineal. The process of naming is highly

¹⁰ Rosemarie Tong, Feminist Thought, 192.

ceremonial and the entire initiation into the name lasts more than two years. Within the ceremony Agua Fría learns the meaning of her Anterior's name as well. In addition to being an initiation the process of naming acquires a securing of the history of the society. For example, Corcho Quemado explains that her name derives from the desperate efforts of her Anterior to save the life of her son by painting a mustache on his face, with a burned cork, to distract him from his illness.¹¹ Montero is careful to point out the maternal connection between mother and child with the story of Corcho Quemado's name thereby affirming Hélène Cixous' feminist interpretation of "mother".

Hélène Cixous, a French feminist argues that women are different from men sexually therefore women should write about this difference by writing about the female body. Other feminists in this camp are Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Monique Wittig. By writing about and exalting the female form, they believe they create a new feminine discourse.¹² "Las mujeres deben "escribir el cuerpo" y al hacerlo, liberarán su inconsciente que ha sido silenciado hasta ahora."¹³ According to this feminist argument the patriarchal voice and its "falo-centrismo" has

¹¹ Rosa Montero, *Temblor*, 10. Corcho Quemado name means "burned cork".

¹² Elena Gascón Vera, "Rosa Montero ante la escritura femenina," 60.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

silenced the woman's voice thereby creating the dichotomy of presence and absence; men constitute presence and women absence. Cixous affirms that by presenting the role of mother as positive and venerating the female form, in its sexuality, maternity, and gestation, women will be able to break away from the domination of "falo-centrismo". The following quote relates to Cixous' argument and shows how Montero affirms this feminist position in *Temblor*.

Ahora Agua Fría podía revivir la emoción maternal, y se sabía las nanas, conocía los cuentos, recordaba la carita emanciada del pequeño, el suave tacto de su frente o el olor a animalillo febril que despedía su cuerpo. Ése fue su primer conocimiento, el primer fragmento del mundo que recibió.¹⁴

This quote suggests that Agua Fría's first impression of motherhood and the bond between mother and child is intrinsic. Thus, motherhood and the inherent bond between mother and her child correspond to Agua Fría's first piece of knowledge of the world around her. As Agua Fría listens to this memory she acquires more history of the woman she has been a student with for the past two years. Agua Fría then goes on to learn the origin of her own name. Within these first pages Montero has developed a strong relationship between women. She has established the ritual

¹⁴Rosa Montero, *Temblor*, 10.

of naming as also being a ritual for maintaining history based on an oral/telepathic tradition.

It seems that Montero establishes that an oral tradition can be both positive and negative. On one hand it maintains relationships between older and younger people and on the other it produces instability in that certain people are dependent on a select group of people. Montero certainly illustrates this second reason in the character of Océano, supreme high priestess of Magenta. Océano is the only person who possesses knowledge of what happened in the Gran Catástrofe. Throughout the novel there is no mention of history books, only the receiving of history in the form of memory transfer and oral history. Agua Fría listens intently to what Océano tells her, this account is the only account that Agua Fría receives of the history of the matriarchy. Thus, the protagonist and reader have no choice as both have to accept the priestess's story. Due to the tradition of naming and transfer of history Montero creates a dependent power relationship between the priestess' of the matriarchy and the common person.

The matriarchy is few, but they control society because they control history. A common greeting or leave-taking "Que la ley nos acompañe" (May the law be with us) symbolizes the manipulative and constant power exercised by

the matriarchy. If this is not part of a conversation, that person is then considered a heretic and a danger against "the system". The governing body has established a behavioral pattern within society. This is analogous to Franco's dictatorship in terms of establishing patterns of behavior. Carmen Martín Gaité elaborates on certain behavioral characteristics in her book *Usos amorosos de la posguerra española*. She describes one such characteristic, "la sonrisa", as a behavioral pattern expected of women during the Franco years. It was expected that the woman always maintain her composure, despite an unfair situation she was obligated to preserve the "sonrisa". "La sonrisa" signified a lack of doubting, or a lack of feeling different emotions other than happiness. For a woman to frown or to argue against traditional family values or Franco's political regime or even her own personal situation was an example of straying from her position. She was supposed to accept her "lot" in life, and if necessary sacrifice herself for the benefit of others. Therefore, a "sonrisa" or smile was the perfect symbol of the ideal woman. The ideal citizen in *Temblor* is one who repeats the matriarchy's dogma. In the end the power of the matriarchy's oral tradition does not win out, the questioning of one woman does.

In addition to the significance of naming in relation to the matriarchy Montero continues to revere the female form with great importance on the female gestation and its experiences. Agua Fría arrives at *La Casa de Los Grandes* when she is ten; she learns the origin of her name at twelve. The novel traces her life from puberty, the beginning of Agua Fría's menstruation, to her pregnancy at twenty-two. In the introductory pages Agua Fría's puberty stage is well defined in physical terms.

Ahora, en cambio, había cumplido ya los doce. Había crecido mucho, y su cuerpo era un tumulto de pechos naciendo y caderas redondeadas; un organismo rebelde empeñado en convertirse en otro ser; un extraño que la invadía desde dentro.¹⁵

This physical description of Agua Fría's bodily changes initiates discussion about women's biology. According to certain feminist arguments the woman's body should not be exalted in any form for that would only further women's oppression to men. For centuries the patriarchal system has cast women to the private sphere of the home due to their reproductive capabilities and "innate" child-rearing abilities. However, Montero thrusts the women's body and their reproductive capability into the public sphere in *Temblor*. Océano, in her explanation of the matriarchy's

history, cites women's ability to give birth as a primary factor for them gaining power after the Gran Catástrofe. Women's bodily changes are not something to keep hidden in private. Agua Fría's departure with her mentor and start of self-discovery begin with her menstruation. It is only with menstruation that she becomes capable of carrying life within her womb. Therefore, women's biology represents something positive; reproduction is respected. Revering the woman's body primarily illustrates Hélène Cixous' difference feminism.

In addition to Hélène Cixous' difference feminism, Montero brings together elements for both an anti-essentialist and essentialist argument. Anti-essentialist stands for a position against a particular radical feminist argument. The radical feminist essentialist claim postulates the existence of "a priori essence", that is a human essence found within nature that determines gender attributes. Whereas the counter argument or anti-essentialist feminist argument declares that men's and women's genetic makeup does not differ; women and men are ontologically the same metaphysical entity. The only difference between the two resides in the sex of each human. Predetermined gender characteristics are non-

¹⁵ Ibid., 11.

existent. Therefore, the overarching anti-essentialist position predicates that men and women obtain their gender characteristics from society not the "a priori essence".

The essentialist "a priori essence" has been firmly planted in history. Rosemarie Tong affirms "essentialist arguments were used to justify slavery, to resist the Nineteenth Amendment (which gave women the vote), and to sustain colonialism by arguing 'altruistically' that 'the natives are unable to run their own governments'."¹⁶ "A priori essence" resonates in the following phrases, "It's just the way men are" or "Boys will be boys". Both phrases signify a solid indisputable attachment to a fixed biology system. According to the essentialist, this fixed system determines gender characteristics depending upon the sex of the individual. Thus, when a boy is born, at birth we are able to compose a list that predetermines that he will be aggressive, authoritative, non-emotional, intellectual, rational, and will have an uncanny ability to think logically. On the other hand, when a woman is born essentialists assign her characteristics dealing with biological destiny such as nurturing, compassionate, non-aggressive, gentle, humble, supportive, intuitive,

¹⁶ Rosemarie Tong, Feminist Thought, 135.

sensitive and unselfish.¹⁷ Rather, anti-essentialists prefer to talk in terms of how society creates these gender constructs and how women and men actuate them. Jean Elshtain asserts, "radical feminism's mistake is to suggest that males and females are, on the ontological level, two kinds of creature—the men corrupt and the women innocent."¹⁸ Consequently, when we talk of anti-essentialism we are referring to a critique of radical feminism's essentialism.

Montero begins the novel by offering what appear to be solely anti-essentialist components. The first indication of this is the governing matriarchy. The second anti-essentialist element is the collection of strong self-made female characters, at the center, the main character, Agua Fría. The character of Agua Fría focuses on a girl/woman who decides for herself what her life will be.

It is my contention that it is possible to view the matriarchy from two distinct perspectives, one from an anti-essentialist position and the other from a radical feminist essentialist perspective. A group of powerful, aggressive and authoritative women are in control of the empire; they reside in Magenta, the capital. The anti-essentialist viewpoint is that women are just as capable in

¹⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁸ Ibid., 134.

occupying the public space and negotiating political dealings. Thus, from this standpoint the matriarchy represents a positive depiction of women penetrating what has been the traditional sphere of men. On the other hand the matriarchy can also represent a combination radical feminist's essentialism. The matriarchy could be demonstrative of claiming women's "innate" goodness and directly linking women and their destiny to reproduce. After all, this is the reason why the matriarchy came into power.

Within the matriarchy in *Temblor* we encounter several strong women figures who represent the anti-essentialist argument. These women have been governing since the fall of the egalitarian society. Many liberal feminist arguments speak of the need for women to enter the public space and forget about the private one because that is where there oppression has derived from. The argument goes further saying women must negate any "traditional" feminine characteristics such as nurturing, mothering and non-aggressive behavior to adopt a more masculine attitude. Thus, becoming feminist in this argument requires a woman to become more like a man. This argument falls short in truly "liberating" women from patriarchal domination and

only serves to exemplify it. The strong female characters in the novel do not personify this argument.

Montero portrays strong female characters in contrast to some of her earlier novels. *Agua Fría* is the prime example of a strong female character. She takes on the traditional patriarchal male role of traveling "hero" and subverts this role by being a heroic female. Other than simply being female *Agua Fría* is on a journey to discover her identity and along the way encounters many adversities that she deals with and in turn becomes more self-aware. *Agua Fría* is the center of the action in the novel; all other characters are secondary to her role. She is a questioning young adult, who journeys to discover why her surroundings are disappearing. *Relámpagos* is also a strong female character in that she is the daughter to the supreme *sacerdotisa* of the matriarchy, *Océano*, and still has the courage to stand up against her mother's and the regime's fascist dogma. *Piel de Azúcar*, *Relámpagos'* daughter, is the woman who gives the order of death to her mother. The leader of the oasis is another strong female who has fought long and hard to gain the land that she lives on with her fellow supporters. The crucial point is that all the women in *Temblor* are strong female characters; they do not represent the typical traditional or submissive female

character but do symbolize certain anti-essentialist feminist ideals for women.

On the other hand, despite the fact that they are strong female characters, they are not strong simply because they are female but because of their superiority derived from their reproductive capability. Within *Temblor*, Montero repeatedly interweaves women's tie to their bodies. She combines Cixous' emphasis on the mother with power. Upon establishing this connection of women in power with their ability to give birth, Montero contradicts an anti-essentialist position.

Upon combining elements of anti-essentialism, essentialism and Cixous' exaltation of the mother, Montero also leads the reader into socialist feminism. Socialist feminism demands that society play a key role in refuting certain patriarchal roles for women.

Agua Fría meets with several groups throughout her travels and needs to attain their cooperation to survive. When she returns to Talapot, many of those groups accompany her and assist her in the destruction of the totalitarian matriarchy. Of all the groups Agua Fría comes in contact with, the Uma present the biggest challenge. The Uma are a primitive tribe that still view women to be inferior to men. It is expected that women occupy the private sphere

of raising the children and cooking. Only one common link connects the Uma to the matriarchy, the belief that women cannot kill. This stems from an ideological standpoint of not believing that women have the moral competence to kill. When Agua Fría arrives she already possesses the knowledge of hunting. This puts her in direct conflict with the tribe. Furthermore, Agua Fría also possesses hypnotic powers with which she is able to freeze someone into a paralyzed state. Agua Fría's powers conflict with the tribe's ideology of inferior women. Agua Fría clearly represents a human being with equal if not superior intelligence and she possesses hunting capabilities. With all the differences that separate Agua Fría and the tribe the two end up supporting one another. The heroine forms a bond with the chief and convinces him of the approaching cloud of nothingness. Together they go to fight the matriarchy in hopes that the cloud will too be destroyed.

Montero desires to show that through cooperation and compromise equality can be achieved through time. When the Uma, Agua Fría, and other groups go to fight the matriarchy, Agua Fría is one of the leaders. It is possible to interpret Agua Fría's position in leading the charge as one based on equality, but I do not agree. I believe that Montero, though positing a socialist feminist

position, is also making another connection, which is directly related to essentialist feminism. Why does Montero make it necessary for her main character to join with a primitive society? In an article by Krishan Kumar she examines the relationship between creating feminist utopias and primitivism. Montero creates just that, a matriarchy, which can be construed as a utopia in certain feminist circles, and primitivism with the Uma tribe. Kumar points out that primitivism mixed with a feminist utopia tends to signify an exaltation of nature. She also notes that the meaning and motivation behind this attachment to nature stems from identifying technology with man's domination over women. Thus nature is to women as technology is to man. Within this type of utopia narrative, man is responsible for the "waste, pollution, and exploitation of nature and society."¹⁹ In addition Kumar states that the following elements are found in a feminist utopia, "empathic or intuitive knowledge, customarily associated with "the female principle," is preferred over the dominative abstract and scientific knowledge associated with the male."²⁰ Although Kumar herself finds this "a very dangerous line of thought for

¹⁹ Krishan Kumar, "Primitivism in Feminist Utopias", 63.

²⁰ Ibid., 65.

women to follow,"²¹ she argues her case by siding with industrialization saying

"For it is only in industrial societies, over the course of the last two centuries, that there has even been any serious attempt to better the position of women. This has come partly in the form of a more egalitarian philosophy, and less discriminatory laws. It is through technological developments that many feminine freedoms have been gained."²²

To return to the original question, why does Montero include the Uma as such an important section of the novel, and why does Agua Fría need to obtain their cooperation? Montero is advocating human responsibility. Agua Fría assumes responsibility in order to find out who killed her mother and to try and stop the cloud of nothingness. In order to fulfill this responsibility she implores others to help her, and she attains their cooperation. It is through all of Agua Fría's journeys that she finally finds a place for her identity. Montero presents many feminist characteristics from various feminist theories, but above all she affirms through the novel an existentialist responsibility that she exemplifies through the heroine, Agua Fría.

²¹ Ibid., 65.

Chapter 3 From Feminism to Existentialism

In this third chapter I intend to delineate *Temblor's* existentialist characteristics. As I stated in my thesis, the novel maintains a stronger existentialist stance than a feminist one. Our heroine, Agua Fría, is the principal justification for this point of view. The novel focuses on her life and the decisions she makes through the various experiences she encounters. Hence, *Temblor* is specifically about a young girl's self-identity; a self-identity developed in an existentialist manner.

Philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre developed existentialism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Central to their thought, the concrete individual represented their original contribution.²³ Jean Paul Sartre defined existentialism as his philosophy in the 1940's. In existentialism, existence precedes essence. An individual has no pre-given purpose or essence. Therefore, individuals have free will; life is an indeterminate system. Because the individual lacks essence and purpose "existentialists are concerned with

²² Ibid., 65.

²³ *Philosopher's Encyclopedia*, 497.

identifying the most authentic and fulfilling way of life possible for individuals."²⁴

With an understanding of existence comes an understanding of self. Self-awareness of one's existence leads to the realization of the individual's freedom to choose, to decide, to live. Thus, by recognizing one's freedom the individual creates his/her own essence. The individual then shapes truth. Along with this powerful freedom to make our own essence is an incredible responsibility to deal with that freedom. Sartre states "because I shape the world around me through my meaning-giving activity, I am ultimately responsible for the way the world presents itself to me in my experience."²⁵ Therefore, Sartre connects responsibility to humanity. That is, an individual's actions define humanity.

When we say that man chooses his own self, we mean that every one of us does likewise; but we also mean by that, that in making this choice he also chooses all men. In fact, in creating the man that we want to be, there is not a single one of our acts which does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be.²⁶

Understanding that one's actions define humanity inevitably leads to anxiety and anguish. These two sentiments

²⁴ Ibid., 493.

exemplify the full extent of an individual's responsibility to his/her existence and freedom/free will. For the remainder of this chapter I rely on Jean Paul Sartre's writings on existentialism.

In *Temblor* the protagonist, Agua Fría, makes an existentialist journey in which she discovers herself and chooses a way of life. Agua Fría begins the novel in the *nothing*; she is not aware of her existence. With her Anterior and Mother's deaths Agua Fría awakens into a consciousness not previously known to her. At this point Agua Fría first becomes aware of herself and attains knowledge of existence. From this moment on Agua Fría embarks on a journey, a personal quest to solve the murder of her mother and to understand and possibly stop the "gray cloud of nothingness" from overtaking the world. Throughout her travels Agua Fría confronts many situations that embody existentialist attributes that augment her gaining of self-awareness and becoming an authentic human being. In the following paragraphs I trace Agua Fría's existential metamorphosis from the beginning to the final pages of the novel.

²⁵ Ibid., 493.

²⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, Essays in Existentialism, 37.

At the beginning of the novel Agua Fría's character is depicted as naïve. She does not question her surroundings. She accepts her environment without any doubt. When confronted with something that shakes this foundation, Agua Fría is confused. For example, when Agua Fría's Anterior speaks out against the ruling matriarchy, Agua Fría is incredulous. She cannot believe her Anterior, for whom she has the utmost respect, would go against "La Ley". "La Ley" represents the code of the Matriarchal authority and to question it is understood as blasphemy. According to the existentialist, Agua Fría is not aware of herself, that she exists as a human being with the responsibility to choose her life. Agua Fría's Anterior is aware of her own existence and freedom thereby exercising her responsibility in questioning the present governing authority. Since Agua Fría does not possess self-consciousness she does not recognize her freedom to make up her own mind. She is following the herd. Another example of this occurs when Agua Fría has returned to her barrio. She has just purchased breakfast from a vendor and starts eating when a young man approaches. He asks to sit next to her and without waiting for her to answer he sits down next to her.

Agua Fría is disgusted by the forwardness of this "chico...que no era más que un varón."²⁷

El chico estaba bebiendo de un tazón que, a juzgar por lo turbio del color, debía de contener leche con cerveza. ¡Leche con cerveza a esas horas de la mañana! Agua Fría arrugó la nariz con desagrado. Desde luego esas gentes de los oficios inferiores no sabían lo que era el autocontrol y la disciplina.²⁸

This statement further indicates Agua Fría's naiveté towards life. She judges this boy as a person of inferior stature who does not possess the ability to control himself. Agua Fría's thinking mimics the dogma that the matriarchy has instilled. At this point in the novel Agua Fría represents an inauthentic human being; her reasoning has been given to her. We do not yet see Agua Fría creating her own logic. Further on in their conversation Agua Fría is confronted with her ignorance as Respy quite adamantly explains his position about the ritual of naming. In addition to Respy's position on the naming ritual he also denounces his Anterior as a complete "asno". Agua Fría perceives this affirmation to be complete blasphemy and heresy against the sacerdotes/sacerdotisas, the established authority. In this scene Montero contrasts two distinct individuals, one has thought through and

²⁷ Rosa Montero, Temblor, 17.

questioned his surroundings and thus arrives at the conclusions mentioned above. However, the protagonist remains cloaked in the dogmatic rhetoric of the governing body. One is a free thinking-choosing individual and the other is not. Nonetheless, Montero does not leave Agua Fría in this scene without letting some doubt and questioning arise from her encounter with Respy. Although Agua Fría condemns Respy's behavior, she also admits that she does not fully understand what he is talking about.

Acababa de realizar su primer ritual de salutación y los únicos nombres que le habían sido explicados hasta el momento habían sido el del Corcho Quemado y el suyo propio. Así es que no tenía elementos de juicio, pero desde luego no estaba dispuesta a confesar su ignorancia ante un muchacho. Además, ni tan siquiera entendía bien de lo que estaba hablando. Pero le parecía que decía cosas tremendas, incluso peligrosas. Herejías.²⁹

Despite Agua Fría's ingrained practice and the significance placed on the salutation ritual, she does not find the same dedication and duty in her companion. Respy refuses to comply with the naming explanation ritual. This is Agua Fría's first encounter with an outsider who does not accept the established rules of the matriarchy. She flees the scene because she cannot confront and question Respy's

²⁹ Ibid., 18.

reasoning. This inability to confront difference stems from Agua Fría's inability to acknowledge herself as an existing human being, free to make choices. Within existentialism, the first step in becoming an authentic human being is recognizing one's existence. Upon attaining knowledge of existence one becomes free. The individual is free to choose his/her life as desired. Everything one does is because he/she selects particular desires and acts upon them. Agua Fría's actions and thoughts are not free because she is still unaware of her existence.

Agua Fría's next encounter occurs when she reaches her home. The vanishing walls and rooms of her house are indicative of death. Agua Fría becomes aware that her mother has died of "muerte verdadera". It is at this moment when a "mendiga" appears saying she knows how Agua Fría's mother died. The mendiga explains the traumatic death of her mother and offers the suggestion that she could have been saved with science. To Agua Fría this explanation seems incredible. La mendiga asks Agua Fría,

¿No te has preguntado nunca por qué la
inmensa mayoría de los Anteriores alcanza
esa edad tan avanzada?...

--Porque son los más apropiados, los
mejores...--contestó vagamente.

²⁹ Ibid., 19.

-Pse, pse, pse, Eres una niña muy boba...--
dijo la mendiga.³⁰

The mendiga acts as stimulation to awaken Agua Fría's consciousness. Agua Fría is the only one who can awaken to the full responsibility of her existence. The *mendiga* also realizes this and finally offers some last words of advice.

Basta ya de cháchara. Recuerda que tu madre ha muerto injusta e innecesariamente... y guarda ese conocimiento en el fondo de tu corazón, para que ahí se pudra y fermente. La venganza puede ser un buen acicate para la reflexión, al menos en un primer momento.³¹

Shortly after the *mendiga* leaves an imperial guard appears and informs Agua Fría of her "destiny" to become a *sacerdotisa*. The episode with the *mendiga* and the *sacerdote* represent the beginning of Agua Fría's change in self-perception. Although Agua Fría is surprised by this and displeased, she acts out her displeasure timidly.

--¿Y qué pasaría si me negara? -aventuró tímidamente.
--No puedes negarte. Todo está escrito. No es posible cambiar el destino.
Sí, así era, eso decía la Ley, y Agua Fría era una muchacha piadosa y obediente. Pero, con todo, sentía dentro de sí un rechazo confuso y visceral, una sorda repugnancia ante la idea.³²

³⁰ Ibid., 25-26.

³¹ Ibid., 26.

³² Ibid., 27.

Even though Agua Fría ends this mental discussion by dismissing any idea of refusing to go with the priest, it is still indicative of her beginning to recognize her freedom. In *Talapot*, the fortress where Agua Fría learns the ways of the matriarchy, she will further confront and question authority and thus truly begin her transformation.

The term "destiny" is defined as a course of events that are predetermined and beyond the control of humans. In existentialism, an individual without God is a person who is free to choose life. Predetermination does not exist. In other words, once aware of his/her existence as a human being, a person becomes conscious of his freedom. Along with freedom comes responsibility. Nothing is predetermined; the individual will fill the nothingness with action.

During Agua Fría's time spent at Talapot she does become aware of herself. She begins to question aspects of the central authority. When she first arrives in Talapot she witnesses the execution of Relámpagos, daughter of Océano, the high priestess of the kingdom. After the execution Agua Fría questions the reason:

--Y eso...-balbució la muchacha--, ¿eso es sólo por haber dicho una herejía?³³

The priest answers emphatically that any heresy is a crime justified by execution. But he also explains that Relámpagos was a conspirator, in that she had attempted to change the world. The priest continues stating that this would have been impossible since the world is a constant, unchangeable entity. Agua Fría pursues her line of questioning by pointing out a fault in the priest's logic.

--Entonces, ¿por qué castigarla así? Si sus sueños era imposibles, si no podía hacer ningún daño, ¿por qué no dejarla en paz, como a los otros locos?³⁴

The priest ends the conversation by explaining to Agua Fría that Relámpagos represented a possible danger to some weaker minded people.

Agua Fría's metamorphosis continues throughout her apprenticeship in *Talapot*. In the first stage of becoming a priestess Agua Fría immediately finds herself in conflict with the teachings of the priest in charge of introductory lessons. The first stage involves the ability to remain silent. The justification is to instill the idea of *la norma* as supreme. Several times throughout the novel characters refer to *la Ley* as *la norma*, thus making the analogy to Franco's regime and the Catholic church. Agua Fría survives this stage due to the companionship of her

³³ Ibid.,. 33.

childhood friend, Pedernal. The relationship only further instigates Agua Fría's self-awareness. With Pedernal she learns to question the *norma*. During a higher stage of the apprenticeship Agua Fría makes her own decision to share her knowledge of hypnotism with Pedernal even though hypnotism is a tool only taught to women. After a discussion with Pedernal about how girls and boys are treated Agua Fría decides to teach Pedernal this secret power that only girls learn in the *Círculo Interior*. This decision is pivotal in Agua Fría's attainment of self-awareness. After this episode Agua Fría escapes the clutches of Talapot with the self-imposed purpose of finding the Gran Hermana. Although Montero still presents Agua Fría with doubts, it is still applicable to assign existence to this character. During her stay at Talapot she has had to endure *vaciedad, soledad, y ansiedad*. Her anxiety finally impels her to leave a decision she creates.

Agua Fría then makes a series of decisions, one of which leads her to the primitive Uma tribe. In this portion of the novel. Montero incorporates the meaning of humanity within existentialism. Agua Fría chooses to live with the tribe in hopes of finding a solution to the "cloud of nothingness" that is sweeping over the land. Through

³⁴ Ibid., 33.

learning the ways of the Uma, without accepting all their ways, Agua Fría adds to her own existence. She convinces the leader that he and his tribe should take part in fighting the nothingness and the "evil" matriarchy. By choosing to fight against matriarchy and *la norma* Agua Fría is choosing for humanity, that they too should fight against the onset of nothingness, and against an establishment stronghold based on unquestioned dogmas. Montero's final climax for Agua Fría occurs in the last pages of the novel. After defeating the totalitarian matriarchy Agua Fría, pregnant, elects to leave instead of staying with the people who fought with her. Upon choosing this route Agua Fría validates her existentialist metamorphosis.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, Montero's *Temblor* subverts gender roles by positing a female heroine who succeeds in eradicating the repressive matriarchal regime. Furthermore, Montero develops the dichotomy of gender roles in an inversed situation. Women occupy the public sphere and men are subordinate to them. Upon developing many interactions between men and women in the novel Montero presents elements of certain feminist arguments to show the absurdity of societal imposed gender characteristics.

By integrating various feminist characteristics Montero does not develop a clear feminist argument. No single feminist theory is the answer to societal sexism and inequality. What Montero suggests is that existentialism demands responsibility of each person. Ultimately, Agua Fría through her choices to develop her life represents existentialist responsibility. The protagonist's decision at the end of the novel further supports Montero's affirmation of existentialism. Instead of falling prey to becoming "one of the herd" Agua Fría leaves Magenta and the new order being established. Her departure represents the existentialist's plight for an authentic life. On the other hand critics have written that Montero's conclusion

represents a postmodern perspective. Agua Fría leaves and there is no consequence to her journey; she does not take responsibility for being one of the key figures in taking down the regime. I do not believe this is so. Temblor takes advantage of open-ended possibilities that science-fiction/ fantasy has to offer. It gives the reader a sensation of a never-ending journey. Thus there is no predetermined "fate" for Agua Fría but an open-ended journey full of possibilities. Agua Fría's history is not written but is left for her to choose. Thus, the female voice which has been considered the "other" or the "absent" is present. Montero has authenticated the female identity in Agua Fría's character. This identity is achieved through Agua Fría's experiences. She succeeds in attaining cooperation of many people throughout the novel, and it is only with their assistance that the matriarchy is brought down. This is Montero's intention in the novel; equality can be achieved through compromise and cooperation.

During the Spanish Civil War the *Republicanos* comprised a vast group of people with different ideologies ranging from communist to socialist to democratic to anarchist. One of the criticisms of the war has been that these groups failed to unite against the *Nacionalistas*, and lost the war that began decades of fascist dictatorship.

During Franco's rule, science-fiction was utilized by the fascist government as propaganda to reinforce the right's control. In *Temblor*, Montero utilizes science-fiction to expose inequality, contrary to that during the dictatorship. Montero inverts the power structure to exemplify men as the subject of others instead of being the subject of themselves and their own lives. Nonetheless, Montero creates an absurdity with her inversion of power. Thus, Montero shows that absolute power in the form of patriarchy or matriarchy is destructive. Society might always create gender roles, but it is up to the individual to make choices that empower herself/himself. By positing a woman in the novel who empowers her "self", Montero destroys stereotypical gender roles. Thus, the woman who during Franco's regime was constantly the subject of "others" becomes a self-empowered individual. Self-empowerment is the fundamental element to existentialism, existence precedes essence, thus self-empowerment is self-recognition and the realization that you exist outside the parameters set by others. Montero has used the framework of science-fiction to subvert gender roles within an existentialist narrative.

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