

The Feminization of Female Figures in Spanish Women's Poetry of the 1980s

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. . . y a mis compañeras hermosos cantos
cantaré yo ahora para alegrarlas . . .
Safo

Female cultural stalwarts—Cibeles, Danae, Penelope, Lilith, Eve, Lot's wife, the Virgin Mary, Ophelia—are frequently alluded to by Spanish women poets of the 1980s.¹ Inscribed in myth, folklore, the Bible, and seventeenth-century drama, and reinscribed over the centuries in poetry, sculpture, painting and narrative fiction, they represent some of the richest expressive currency available to poets. Undoubtedly, women writers are attracted both to the accumulated wealth of significance and to the femaleness of these figures and turn to them for poetic strength and authority. But there is a rub: the images are man-made and saturated with masculine concerns and perspectives.

To understand the complex and paradoxical treatment of canonized female figures in women's writing, it is useful to recall the relationship of woman to the production and use of language. In his book *Man Made Language*, Dale Spender explains how language and, through it, thought and reality were produced in accordance with male, not female subjectivity:

The group which has the power to ordain the structure of language, thought and reality has the potential to create a world in which they are the central figures, while those who are not of their group are peripheral and therefore may be exploited. . . . In the patriarchal order this potential has been realized. . . . In this

process women have played little or no part. It has been male subjectivity which has been the source of meanings. (143)

Woman's speech is hesitant when she attempts to express her own subjectivity, because first she must translate female experience into the male code. Adrienne Rich (203) terms this hesitancy speaking "in an alien tongue" and Tillie Olsen (6) calls it "unnatural thwarting." Shirley Ardener (ix) speaks of "blocking," underscoring the fact that woman's language cannot flow uninterruptedly from the deep structure where meaning is generated to the surface structure where it is expressed.

In feminist literary criticism, hesitancy is described in terms that enhance female subjectivity. The transformation is not viewed as entry into the male register, but as a theft. Movement is not in the direction of the male code, but with the stolen property in hand, toward female meaning. Hélène Cixous, with an emphasis on women's marginality, speaks of "thievery," Claudine Herrmann of "tongue snatchers," and Alicia Ostriker of "stealing language." It is in this context of transformation that the presence of hallowed females in recent Spanish women's poetry can best be understood. Rather than sacrifice the poetic wealth and public authority of established mythical, religious and literary images of women in a utopian quest for a purely "female" language, poets undertake the feminization of existing figures, stealing their expressiveness and artfully transforming their maleness.

The liberalization and democratization of Spain following Francisco Franco's death in 1975 substantially changed women's roles. The new social conditions serve as a catalyst for the evolution of women's poetry, which emerges with force, invading the mainstream. Female poets are now in a better position than ever before to create images of women at variance with patriarchal order. It is during this period of accelerated change that a number of prominent female figures of Western civilization lose their rigidity and flow into female subjectivity. To keep our analysis within prescribed limits, we will focus our attention on Ophelia, Lot's wife, and Eve. All are alluded to by several authors and undergo varied and poetically successful transformation. We have identified three basic strategies of feminization employed by Spanish women poets of the 1980s: embracement, subversion, and revision. Although we examine each strategy separately, it will become apparent that they seldom appear in isolation.

The strategies mirror three distinct phases of the evolution of women's writing, which Elaine Showalter terms *Feminine*, *Feminist*, and *Female* and defines as follows: "First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity" (*Literature* 13). Embracement, the least frequent strategy, lies on the border between the *Feminine* and *Feminist* phases and reflects the predicament of a poet living roles imposed by male domination, but sensing the presence of a silenced, imprisoned self. The destructive force of subversion, aimed at dismantling patriarchally defined reality, corresponds to the *Feminist* phase, and revision to the constructive *Female* phase. Both strategies are found repeatedly, but revision appears to be gaining strength.

To illustrate embracement we turn to Shakespeare's Ophelia. From her debut in *Hamlet* (1600), the character has been portrayed by the dominant tradition as a fragile, passive woman, gone mad and drowned by the tragic events that surround her and over which she has no control. She is a white, transparent object, a mirror that reflects the color of Hamlet's moods (Showalter "Representing" 89) and a symbol of gentle death (Bachelard 80). Ophelia's behavior hardly seems an appropriate model for women on the brink of the twenty-first century, but what draws poets to her is the recognition of a shared desperation of non-being. R.D. Laing, for example, describes Ophelia's condition as "an empty space," and goes on to say: "There is no integral selfhood expressed through her actions or utterances. . . . She has already died. There is now only a vacuum where there was once a person" (195n). The struggle between two voices, man's voice and one's own, shut in a closet and stilled, leads to the pain and madness of a self divided, a condition Ostriker (59-90) finds at the very core of women's poetry in America, and one that likewise penetrates the texts of Spanish women poets.

In María Victoria Atencia's (b. 1931) poem, "Ophelia" (*Marta & María* 1976), the poet/speaker and the Shakespearean figure share the acute anguish that selflessness inflicts. Because of this affinity the author embraces Ophelia, fusing herself, the speaker, and dramatic character into one figure. For Atencia, as is true for many women

writers, the character's madness is, "an expression of female powerlessness and an unsuccessful attempt to reject and overcome this fate" and also, "a penalty for *being* 'female,' as well as for daring *not* to be" (Chesler 39). In the final verses, there is a glimpse of a positive green-world model (Pratt 16–24) where female wholeness can flourish and speak. The felicitous space, however, is presented as a fleeting hope, because its flowers resemble those used by Ophelia to adorn herself before committing suicide:

Adornar mi pelo la flor del rododendro,
inventar canciones distintas de las mías
y cubrir mi cuerpo de lirios y amarilis
por si el frescor imprime templanza a mi locura.

(Marta & María 50)

I shall deck my hair with rhododendron flowers
And make up songs different from by own.
And I shall cover my body with lilies and amaryllis
In case freshness lends temperance to my madness.

(Selected Poems 38)

In "Retrato de una joven dormida" (*Paulina o el libro de las aguas* 1984), the feeling of "already died" again unites the persona with Ophelia, and with Desdemona and Goya's *Dama Dormida* as well. The plurality of figures suggests that the truth unveiled surpasses the poet's own self-knowledge to encompass all women:

Retrato de una joven dormida

Si por la oculta noche retenida
me pudiese llegar a tu lienzo y velarte,
tan cándida y cercana y tan ausente,
acaso

la luz que se detiene en tu pecho y lo alza
alcanzara a decirme si duermes a la vida,
si vives en la muerte, si puedo ser contigo
Ofelia de tu légamo, Desdémona en tu almohada.

(Paulina 16)

Portrait of a Young Woman Asleep

If through the hidden, suspended night

The same complex feminization of Ophelia found in "Retrato" also appears in the works of other poets. In Blanca Andreu's (b. 1959) "Cinco poemas para abdicar" and "Hundir mis manos en la noche que no existe" (*De una niña de provincias que se vino a vivir en un Chagall* 1981), for example, "the lyrical subject is disintegrating and imagines itself floating in water," but the sea in which she floats is a sea of poetic creation (Wilcox 32). In "Ofelia" (*Memorial de Amauta* 1988) Amalia Iglesias Serna (b. 1962) similarly combines embracement and revisionist strategies. Again, the reader senses a

bond of mutually shared anguish between the lyrical subject and Ophelia, but at the same time, because of nearly five centuries of cultural inscription, recognizes the relationship between Ophelia and the power of the word. In the revisionist portion of the transaction between male code and female meaning, not the image itself, but the authority to inscribe is accepted. The revised Ophelia found in the poems of Atencia, Andreu, and Iglesias Serna signifies woman's refusal to be a blank page. No longer will she be "written over or on by the male imagination" (Showalter "Ophelia" 89), but is now her own creator.

Some degree of subversiveness is present in almost all the texts of Spanish women poets of the 1980s in which mythical or literary female figures appear.³ The realization that the prevailing order smothered female subjectivity inspires accusatory and suppliant poems, and established female figures are enlisted as co-conspirators in the dismantling of a male-dominated world. The results are powerful, masked lyrics, never strident political poems. To illustrate the expressiveness of the subversive strategy, we turn to Eve, the essence of the concept of woman in Western Civilization. Eve's man-made image, created during thirty centuries of Jewish and Christian doctrine, is subverted, and, paradoxically, the "first woman" is recruited as a force in her own destruction. Eve's presence in Spanish women's poetry of the 1980s emphatically states: this woman is not me.

The Genesis II:18–23 rib version of woman's creation immediately overshadows the more equitable account found in Genesis I:26–28, in which Eve is made of the same material and simultaneously with man. Geoffrey Ashe summarizes the character ascribed to Eve in the dominant account: "Whatever the Life-Goddess Eve was originally like, she appears in Genesis as a Hebrew Pandora, the villainess in a story about the origin of human misfortune. . . . She has dwindled to being merely the first woman, a troublemaker, created from a rib of the senior and dominant first man" (17, 16). If the Old Testament does not make clear why Eve speaks with the serpent and therefore causes the Fall, abundant reasons for her weakness have since been supplied: curiosity, vanity, gullibility, greed, lack of moral strength and reasoning skill. When her flaw is accounted for by sensuality, conspiracy and an active imagination, she is linked to the demonic (Phillips 62–64). Calvinist and Lutheran reevaluations fail to redeem her, and not even twentieth-century inter-

pretations by comparative mythologists or psychoanalysts liberate Eve from misogamy (Phillips 118, 93).

Women poets of Spain find Eve's man-made image a prime target for subversion. In Luisa Castro's (b. 1966) book *Odisea definitiva. Libro póstumo* (1984), Eve is made to symbolize what woman now refuses to be. In poem "VIII," for example, after acclaiming the pleasures of heterosexual love-making, the poet rejects male violence ("morteros patriarcales") and female subjugation. Eve's blameworthiness for eating the forbidden fruit is subverted as a symbol of woman's subservience: "Otra cosa es la lluvia y los morteros patriarcales, / las herencias seculares de comerse una manzana" (18) ('Something else is rain and patriarchal mortars / secular legacies of eating the apple'). In *Indicios vehementes* (1985) Ana Rossetti (b. 1950) employs festive irony to turn male/female roles upside down. Eve's role as devilish seductress in the Garden of Eden is exaggerated to such a degree that its truth is negated.⁴ In the poem, "Cuando mi hermana y yo, solteras, / queríamos ser virtuosas y santas" (50-51), for example, the protagonist and her sister avoid "los manzanos" ('apple trees') and "serpientes enroscadas en los macizos de azucenas" ('coiled serpents on beds of white lilies'), but the male character in the poetic anecdote, an innocent seminarian, is not so fortunate: "y ni el terrible infierno del albo catecismo / podrá evitar el cauce radiante de tu esperma" ('and not even the terrible hell of the snow white catechism / will prevent the radiant flow of sperm'). To fully appreciate the carnivalesque inversion, it should be noted that elsewhere in the poem, the seminarian's sperm is referred to as 'Adam's milk.' In Rossetti's subversive version of the Fall it is Adam, not Eve, who sins.⁵

In the context of the poetry at hand, the feminization of Eve is particularly significant, because it binds poets of the 1980s to mid-century female predecessors. Most notably, Carmen Conde's (b. 1907) transformation of Eve, formulated as a protest against woman's subjugation, underscores the fact that recent poets, suddenly in the limelight with unprecedented force, are not without literary mothers. In spite of the oppressively limited role for women endorsed by the Franco regime (1936-1975), which exalted maternity and femininity with all the "'natural' adornments of fragility, submission, asexuality and a spirit of sacrifice" (Febo 138), strides were made toward the inscription of an authentic female identity. In Conde's *Mujer sin Edén* (1947) the protest against imposed voicelessness is piercingly

felt. In a letter to Conde commenting on *Mujer sin Edén*, Vicente Aleixandre (27) recognizes the poet's dissatisfaction with woman's place in the order of things. He speaks of her "profound lament" and "bitter reproach" and underscores the importance of at last giving Eve a voice with which to speak of her suffering. *Mujer sin Edén* influenced poets of Conde's own generation such as María Benyeto in *Eva en el tiempo* (1952) and *Criatura múltiple* (1956) and today attests to the fact that the evolution of women's poetry has a history, even if critics have failed to record it.⁶

In *Mujer sin Edén*, Eve metamorphoses into other female figures, including Lot's wife, whose reproaches are heard, in the poem "La mujer no comprende": "¡Nunca admites, oh Dios, que yo quiera saber!" ('You never admit, oh Lord, that I still want to know') and "Si la hembra de Lot, no perdonas que mire" ('If Lot's wife, You do not forgive my looking back' *Woman* 125). Lot's wife strengthens Conde's bond with the poets of the 1980s because the Old Testament figure makes similarly subversive appearances in poems by Atencia, "Mujer de Lot," (*Compás binario* 1984), Fanny Rubio (b. 1949), "No quise blanquearte" (*Retracciones* 1982), and Luisa Castro, "VI" (*Odisea*). The silent, nameless icon moves center stage and is held up to protest woman's "nothingness" as inscribed in masculine discourse. Lot's wife's textual presence, like Ophelia's, says, "my silence is not mine," and expresses an implicit demand for female autonomy.

Castro's poem, for example, reveals the horror of seeing what woman really is, "un ave bajo tierra" ('a buried bird'), and the resolve to end the long history of female subjugation.⁷ The poet steals the onerous weight of the image of Lot's wife to subvert its contents of passivity and subservience, calling women to put an end to silent renunciation: "no vamos a ser la estatua de sal, / la mujer de Lot" (*Odisea* 16) ('Let's not be the statue of salt / Lot's wife').

In an interview, Rubio makes the following comments regarding the significance of Lot's wife in her poem "No quise blanquearte": "Lot's wife is speaking when the poem begins. She's a figure that impressed me as a young child because she is one of the few Biblical characters without a name. It seemed to be a great injustice on the part of whoever was doing the naming that she appear as belonging to someone but never as herself. And when she finally acquires a name with her gesture, which is rebelliousness, memory and a vision of destruction, in that very moment she is punished. My poetry has this

origin, it tends to be a statue of salt, a vision mounted on destruction, a slightly subversive vision, and if possible, a vision from the ashes." The final lines of "No quise blanquearte" move beyond subversion, addressing the active role that women writers now have in creating—on the ruins of female "nothingness"—an authentic self.

Atencia's poem is also more than a dismantling of Lot's wife's immobility and silence. The text's closure suggests a potentially apocalyptic power awaiting women who dare to rebel against masculine order and look back for their lost subjectivity:

fuera del orden propio natural (o invitada
por ese mismo orden), olvidando la antigua
dulzura consabida, y supiste de pronto
que era aquel gesto tuyo quien prendía las llamas.
(*Compás binario* 46)

outside of the natural order (or invited
by that very order), forgetting ancient
well-known sweetness, suddenly you knew
it was your own gesture lighting the flames.

In our description of embracement and subversion we have already begun to discuss revision, which is the most fruitful and frequent type of feminization.⁸ Its significance stems from the fact that revision permits women to move beyond protest to the inscription of a true female self. In the cases of Ophelia and Lot's wife, as we have seen, poets snatch the authority of the venerated written word attached to the figures, leaving behind lethal qualities, and revise it to symbolize their own empowerment as writers. In Spanish women's poetry of the 1980s two other important insights are also often expressed through revision. The first deals with the awareness that female subjectivity is closely bound to female eroticism, unfettered by false modesty and culpability, and the second, with the knowledge of the permeability of the female self, desirous of a space free of hierarchies and rigid limits.⁹

We return to Eve to explore the role of revision in the poetic configuration of these insights. In two poems focusing on the Biblical character, Atencia challenges the validity of condemning Eve's sexuality. In both "Eva" (*Paulina*) and "Eva" (*La pared*

contigua 1989), the poet celebrates female desire, severed from evil and presented as completely natural. In the latter more recent poem, the I of the speaker is masked by Rodin's "Eve."¹⁰ The sculpture, more than distancing the poet from her autobiographical voice, helps create a collective female voice—the Biblical Eve and her subsequent interpretations symbolized the statue, the poetic persona, and the poet herself—that speaks for all women when she says that any sense of modesty or surprise in the face of sexual arousal surely must be feigned: "y era yo tan sabida, tan usual, tan propia / que he de fingir pudor y sorpresa" (43) ('I was so knowledgeable, so normal, so myself / that I must feign modesty and surprise'). In the poem, awakening to sexuality, "Ya no era una niña" (43) ('I was no longer a little girl'), is simultaneously an awakening to female subjectivity. This revision of Eve salvages and edifies female desire and places woman as subject in a position to reject the historical association of Eve's sexuality with original sin and death.¹¹

In the opening poem of María del Carmen Pallarés' (b. 1950) most recent collection, *Luces de travesía* (1989), revision helps convey the feeling of transcendence experienced by lovers in a non-hierarchical union. In the poem, entitled "Historia de adán y eva," the author rewrites the events of the Fall, usurping the preeminence of sexual pleasure and the cosmogonic force of the story. The characters' roles, however, are modified and their sinfulness denied.

Historia de adán y eva

Un horizonte largo, luna nueva.
 La serpiente abandona su árbol de oro.
 Ellos, tendidos junto al animal,
 ven dibujarse en la pulida fruta
 las letras a, de, uve, ene, e.
 Pierden sus ojos en lo alto.
 Luego observan las móviles
 raíces de la primavera.

(*Luces* 11)

The History of adam and eve

Broad horizon, new moon.

The serpent abandons the golden tree.

They, laying beside the reptile,
 discover in the shiny fruit,
 letters, a, d, v, n, e.
 Eyes lost in the firmament.
 They observe the fluid
 roots of spring.

The use of the third-person plural subject pronoun, *ellos*, avoids the inherent division of an I/Thou structure characteristic of the Petrarchan tradition of love-poems. By merging the two subjects into one, neither lover can be subjugated into object. The pleasurable transcendence of the encounter ("Pierden sus ojos en lo alto") deconstructs the concept of culpability associated with the sensual delights of the Garden. But most significant, the lovers are portrayed as equals in the story, which now proclaims life ("las raíces de la primavera"), not death. The scrambled letters of Adam and Eve's names reiterate the mutuality of the relationship and at the same time, through synecdoche (Adam for mankind and Eve for womankind), the power of the poet to free gender from the rigidity of binary opposition.

Clara Janés' (b. 1940) poetic journey of self-discovery also leads to the knowledge that female identity is not dependent on an autonomous, masculine-like ego, but on the mutual fusion of self with "other." Female fluidity gives rise to what Ostriker calls the "female erotic vision," in which the self—not an ego committed to defending its own boundaries but an array of selves—feels equivalent to and interchangeable with the "other" (178). This is the same vision that Estelle Lauter points to in her study of contemporary women poets and painters: "Over and over again this 'chordal' analysis of common images and themes leads us back to a view of relationships with the world in which the customary boundaries are not preserved. Inside is barely distinguishable from outside, and the distinction matters only momentarily. What matters is the flow of energy from one realm to another, so that life is sustained" (220).

The "female erotic vision" manifests itself in Janés' love poetry, in which an osmosis-like interchange exists between lovers. Rosa Chacel points to the presence of this "feminine" relationship in the book *Kampa* (1986), dedicated to the Czechoslovakian poet Vladimir Holan, and terms it "communion-union" or "fusion" (101). In a poem in section "II" of the book, a revised Eve contributes to the expression of the experience of a permeable relationship. The poet combines letters of Eve's name with those of Adam's and visa-versa,

in much the same way Pallarés does in “Historia de adán y eva.” The communion of lovers is conveyed with deep intensity because the language of the text resembles that of the *chora*, the prelinguistic flow of movements, gestures, sounds and rhythms which are part of the semiotic order of language associated with the feminine realm.¹² Through the sung repetition (the written text is accompanied by a cassette tape in the poet’s own voice) of isolated words and syllables the interwoven presence of love (“amor,” “amar”), death (“morir”) and life (“vivir”) is established. Midway in the poem Eve is woven into the textual fabric:

a mor	l ove
amore	lovee
a mor ve	l o vee
amor eva	love eve
eva iba	eve leave
fue (56)	left

In the final lines there is a fusion of letters from the names of Adam and Eve, whose communion of love culminates not in death but life (“vivir”) and self-abandonment:

a mar	l ove
a amar	l aove
adamar	Adamle
evirir	Elivea
vir	live
ir (58)	leave

Eve’s wickedness and inferiority are erased and in their place her capacity to flow out of herself and let the “other” flow in (a fluidity felt deeply in the sung version), is boldly inscribed. Eve, the first woman and everywoman, is no longer man’s woman.

The riches of a revised Ophelia rival those of Eve. We have already noted above in poems by Andreu, Iglesias Serna and Atencia, that the Shakespearean character is transformed into a sign of woman’s inscriptive power, but it is in Rosa Romojaro’s “Minué” (*Agua de luna* 1986) that we can best appreciate the force and subtle complexity of the resurrected Ophelia’s contribution to the expression of an autochthonous female self.

Minué

Quietud.

Pesa el agua como aceite de ébano.

La luna ocupará su sitio en la explanada,
oronda como un pavo real con sus cien ojos,
bufante, con su cola de islas:

The moon is my mother -dijo Ofelia, la simple,
mecida en sus lianas, cayendo en el ardido
del pezón plateado: de la verga de sémola-.

Todavía es alquimia:
una pócima oscura sobre la mano débil,
un bulto de silencio en el remo del brazo.

Desde los miradores,
lámina refractante de baquelita negra.

Ahora, un baile rococó.

(*Agua de luna* 65)

Minuet

Stillness.

The water heavy like ebony oil.

The moon takes its place in the esplanade,
showy like a peacock with a hundred eyes,
huffing, with a tail of islands:

"The moon is my mother," said Ophelia the naive,
rocked in her beams, falling into the cunning of
the silvery nipple: the semolina phallus.

The alchemy persists:
an obscure potion on a weak hand,
a lump of silence on the arm's oar.

From the lookout,
refracting plates of black rosin.

Now, a rococo dance.

Ophelia emerges as protagonist in “Minué”; she is the text’s matrix, not only at the mimetic level, in which she appears and speaks, but also at the level of deep structure, where her presence resolves agrammaticalities into unified significance (Riffaterre 1–22). The recovery of her voice is emphasized by the direct quotation preceding the preterite verb “dijo.” Spoken in a foreign language and written in italics, Ophelia’s words stand out on the page, not only underscoring their meaning, but also highlighting the demise of silence. In addition, the presence of a foreign language is a subtle reminder that women are obliged to speak in an alien tongue.

The character’s naiveté (“la simple”) is no longer marked negatively, but appears as an asset, permitting fearless movement through masculine order toward genuine selfhood. Ophelia’s recognition of the moon—in primitive cultures a symbol of female sexuality (Cirlot 283)—as her mother, reveals that she now comprehends that her identity lies in her sexuality.¹³ In the strophe preceding Ophelia’s declaration, the moon’s pervasiveness is established. The heavenly body’s silvery light spreads itself across the dark waters in the form of an elaborate peacock’s tail. The conceptual complexity and the beauty and visual sensuality of the peacock image contribute substantially to the pleasure and significance of the poem. The image is crucial because it emphasizes, synthetically and retroactively, the text’s focus on the reevaluation of female identity. The concept of narcissistic contemplation, introduced in the first line with the word “quietud,” which suggests a speaker looking at her own reflection in still waters, is strengthened when associated with the “eyes” of the tail. Even greater emphasis is placed on woman’s need to see truths that patriarchy makes invisible when in the penultimate strophe the word “miradores” is added to the constellation. The association of the female moon’s voice with the powerful “bufante” sound of the peacock is also understood retroactively, when in the fourth strophe, voice is linked to the poet’s power of self-inscription. In addition, the comparison of the female moon to the masculine peacock (it is the male bird who spreads his tail) results in an androgynous image that implies a reassessment of gender boundaries. The poet condenses multiple significance into the peacock image and another possible implication is that women should “strut their stuff,” that is, express with pride and confidence the discoveries that self-contemplation affords.

In “Minué” Ophelia’s process of self-discovery resembles a mythical journey of initiation, and in that sense she serves as initiation

guide to the poet who has embarked on a quest of her own. The self must voyage to the underworld, to the watery depths of the subconscious, and experience a symbolic death before enlightenment and return to the world (Campbell 245–46). The predominance of the color black, “ébaño” in the opening lines and “baquelita negra” in the closing, contributes to the presence of a figurative death, enhanced by the moon, which symbolizes death as well as female sensuality. Water is similarly bisemic, symbolizing the fluidity of the female body—blood, amniotic fluid, milk—and death (Bachelard 47), especially in its dark viscous state (“Pesa el agua como aceite de baño”). Enticed by the power of the moon, her own veiled sexuality, Ophelia ventures over the threshold, taking the poet with her, into the mysterious darkness of unconsciousness, and there repossesses female Eros.

Woman's traumatic encounter with and rejection of a false identity, leaves her in a precarious state of namelessness that female writers are called upon to resolve. Both “brazo” and “mano” (weak because of the trials of the quest) are metonymic displacements for writing. It is significant that parts of the body, through which woman begins to recognize herself, are made synonymous with the act of literary inscription. In the fourth strophe, Ophelia as initiation guide retires, leaving the poet-speaker alone to ponder the significance of the journey. The astonishing revelation of an authentic self rooted in female erotic pleasure continues to be felt (“Todavía es alquimia”), although its significance is not yet fully deciphered (“una pócima oscura,” “bulto de *silencio*”). But the poet's word will lead her through the confusion (“el remo del brazo”) to the truth.

Further distancing and continued reflexivity (“Desde los miradores,” “lámina refractante”) confirm the power to see and capture the joys of self-discovery, expressed with exquisite concision in the final verse. The very order of things has been transformed. Initially, the minuet predominates, a dance governed by preestablished patterns and a certain rigidity of movement, suggestive of the *logos* that psychological discourse identifies analogously with the unity of the phallus.¹⁴ In the end, however, the minuet is replaced with a rococo dance, free of pre-prescribed movements and invented by the poet herself. This final stirring of the waters closes the poem's artfully constructed frame, leaving the reader with a new dynamic image of female subjectivity, fluid like the forms of nature mimicked in rococo art, blessed, not cursed, by sexual desire, and speaking with its own voice.

Feminization of female figures means divesting them of

falsehoods and salvaging authority and inscriptiveness. Even the wickedest of Eves, the most silent of Lot's wives, or the meekest Ophelia, when stolen and transformed, becomes currency of selfhood for women writers. To express the desperation of entrapment and the madness of a self divided, authors rescue and embrace man-made images of women. The poets recognize, for example, that Ophelia's desperation and their own are both rooted in patriarchal order which denies female subjectivity. Beyond the pain of subjugation, authors recruit mythical and literary female figures as accomplices in the dismantling of a male-dominated world. Subversive strategies transform them into destructive signs whose ironic presence festively or tragically declares, "we are not and will not be what our historical images purport." Finally, feminization enables Spanish women poets of the 1980s to construct an authentic identity, and in this respect Eve is an especially valuable piece of stolen property. She is made to communicate the awareness that female subjectivity is closely bound to female eroticism and knowledge of the permeability of the female self, desirous of a non-hierarchical space. Perhaps the most astonishing feat of feminization in the texts examined is the transformation of poor insipid Ophelia and speechless, nameless Lot's wife into symbols of woman's new freedom and power to inscribe herself.

Notes

1. Date of birth was not used to determine a poet's inclusion in "poetry of the 1980s," but rather the degree of poetic activity, measured primarily by the number of publications during the years of rapid social and political change, the late 1970s to the present. Circumstances such as extended periods of silence (fifteen years in Atencia's case and twelve in Janés'), poets who began to publish late in life (Romojaro was thirty-five) or very early (Castro was eighteen) account for the broad range of ages: María Victoria Atencia (1931), Clara Janés (1940), Rosa Romojaro (1948), Fanny Rubio (1949), María del Carmen Pallarés (1950), Ana Rossetti (1950), Blanca Andreu (1959), Amalia Iglesias Serna (1962) and Luisa Castro (1966). This list includes only poets whose works are examined in this study.
2. All translations of Spanish quotations are my own except for those from Atencia's "Ophelia" and Conde's "La mujer no comprende"; these translations are from the English-language editions listed under works cited.
3. Cixous ("Laugh" 292) goes much further, stating that all female writing is essentially subversive: "A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is vol-

canic, as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way." Irigaray's ("This Sex") concept that female discourse must dismantle the universe of logic is similarly all-encompassing.

4. See Sharon Keefe Ugalde, "Erotismo y revisionismo en la poesía de Ana Rossetti" for a more extensive discussion of subversive irony in Rossetti's poetry.

5. Anne Pasero's analysis of the poem corroborates this reading: "Not the female but the male is portrayed as the victim of his sexual arousal" (78).

6. See Emilio Miró for an overview of women's poetry in Spain during the years of the first and second promotions of the postwar period.

7. Gilbert and Gubar (83–92) document the presence of the imprisonment images in the female imagination of the nineteenth-century.

8. Ostriker dedicates the last chapter of *Stealing Language* to "Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking" (210–38), underscoring its importance in American women's poetry during the last twenty-five years. I use the term "feminization" which includes embracement, subversion and revisionist strategies, while Ostriker's general term is revisionism in which she includes subversive tactics.

9. Spender's (172–82) descriptive summary of the absence of female sexuality in patriarchical language and reality makes clear why women in the process of self-discovery must inscribe female sexuality as the foundation of their new being.

10. The absence of a first-person speaker in Atencia poetry is not simply a matter of following the contemporary poetic fashion which T.S. Eliot described as "the extinction of personality." In the case of women poets like Atencia, other factors contribute to a preference for masking the *I* of the poet behind objects of art. See Sharon Keefe Ugalde, "La subjetividad desde 'lo otro' en la poesía de María Sanz, María Victoria Atencia, y Clara Janés."

11. Both Pasero (76) and Catherine Jaffe point to a reaffirmation of female sexuality in Atencia's Eve poems.

12. Julia Kristeva (86–89) describes the relationship between the pre-Oedipal *chora* (in Greek enclosed space or womb) and the imaginary stage of psychological development during which the body of the mother occupies the principal space. In ordinary adult language there are only residuals of the *chora* (more frequent in art, poetry music and dance) because the development of the individual ego, coherent syntax and rationality (all phallogocentric constraints) diminishes its flow. Kristeva claims the unsuppressed flow of liberating energy of the *chora* for women (Selden 144).

13. Textual interpretants—the presence of other texts recalled by the reader (Riffaterre 81)—that identify the moon with a sensual female realm strengthen Romojaro's expressive force. Especially effective in this respect are García Lorca's mythical images from *Romancero gitano*, such as the moon in the form of a dancing, sensual woman in "Romance de la luna, luna" (*Obras completas* 427–28). Other moon interpretants are ancient moon goddesses such as Ishtar and Hathor.

14. Feminist writers frequently attempt to dismantle male logos. Irigaray's "This Sex Which is Not" is an excellent example, which Burke (296) describes as follows: "Irigaray questions the structures of logic in which the female as concept has been suppressed, then displaces the whole system. Deconstructing structural polarities that assign priority to the first term and devalue the second, she attempts to leave behind the conceptual universe of the Logos and its symbolic policeman, the phallus. This new ideological place of Irigaray's writing could be described as preoedipal or postpartirarchal, or, as the place of a desire. It is a site where women's relations to each other might acquire appropriate expression."

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