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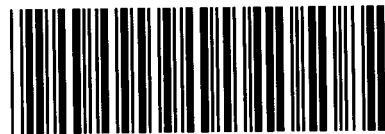
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INTERDICTIONS OF DESIRE: EPISTOLARITY AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN ADELAIDA GARCÍA MORALES'S *EL SILENCIO DE LAS SIRENAS*

The intertext is not necessarily a field of influences:
rather, it is a music of figures, metaphors, thought-words;
it is the signifier as siren.

Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 145

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El silencio de las sirenas begins and ends with an enigmatic missive that asks “¿Volveremos a encontrarnos?” The narrative hinges on this simple note, left by Elsa for María, who quotes the letter at the beginning and then recounts the events that led to its arrival. Written just before Elsa’s suicide, the letter marks a shift in the epistolary circuit of the novel. The final letter is a postscript to the letter writing enterprise that has consumed Elsa, as her previous missives were met with contempt and silence from their addressee, Agustín. The reader is thus led to believe that the failure to establish a loving relationship drove Elsa to suicide. Nevertheless, the decision to leave María a final letter, rather than Agustín, suggests that an alternative reading of this love triangle is possible. Although such a conclusion may be too hasty, the reader could conceivably argue that María, in the end, was the object of love all along, the object of an impossible desire that could only be achieved through writing. Written as a letter in death, though, the desire that potentially existed between Elsa and María is never realized or named. Any affective or erotic bond between these two women is restricted to the phantasmatic space of epistolarity. At the core of *El silencio de las sirenas* are the unpredictable ways in which epistolary writing transmits desire. By virtue of their postal trajectories, moving from one reader to another, the letters in García Morales’s novel ask what it means when one woman’s love letters are redirected to another woman.

Elsa’s choice of communication through the epistolary form establishes a link with the feminocentric genre of sentimental and amorous letter writing. She shares a textual space with other female predecessors – Mariana Alcoforado, Julie, Clarissa, Madame de Tourvel, and Tristana, to name just a few – and joins their tradition of heroines in search of love, happiness, and identity. The association of women’s writing with the genre of the letter, and specifically the love letter, has been, in the words of Elizabeth Goldsmith, “perhaps the most tenacious of gender-genre connections in the history of literature” (viii). The long-standing link between letters and women’s writing – a means of keeping women from the masculine-dominated domain of literature, some might argue – has been revalorized in contemporary feminist studies as a mode of rescuing and recuperating the suppressed voices of women. Critics continue to uphold the longstanding belief that the letter can function as a space for women writers, where writing serves as a means to reconstitute oneself as a subject (Bower,

Cousineau).¹ In the Spanish context, a cursory examination of epistolary studies reveals the same gender-genre alignment. In his introduction to the *Epistolario español* Eugenio de Ochoa writes that “es observación notable que en este punto las mujeres llevan ventaja a los hombres...” (vi). Recent interventions by Hispanist critics have emphasized the use of the letter by Spanish women writers for the creation of a female writing subject. As Kathleen Glenn writes of Carme Riera’s epistolary technique in *Cuestión de amor propio*: “Riera ha dado voz a la mujer para que ella cuente su propia historia” (168).²

In light of this generic connection, it must be acknowledged that García Morales’s novel maintains a decidedly ambiguous link with the epistolary genre. It is not, strictly speaking, a letter novel. Rather, her letters are intercalated piecemeal in María’s narration. But the novel draws from the conventions of the epistolary novel, hinting from the outset that intimate desires and secret confessions – expressed through letters – will be part and parcel of the narrative plot. Like many of her epistolary predecessors, Elsa’s voice is neither coherent nor uniform. Her writing is born from a failed romance that is not all that it appears to be. In Elsa’s letters and diary, there is always something more to her amorous crisis. While much criticism devoted to the genre of feminine epistolarity centers on the woman writer’s search for identity, little attention has been granted to a subset of the genre that emphasizes same-sex desire between women. In Laclos’s *Les liaisons dangereuses*, for example, Meurteil eroticizes her relationship with the young Cécile Volanges, who in turn writes to her friend of the passions that the elder woman has aroused in her. Balzac’s *La fille aux yeux d’or*, while not a *roman par lettres* (and thus closer, in fact, to *El silencio de las sirenas* in narrative form), uses letter writing to convey the same-sex relationship between Paquita Valdés and the Marquise, Margarita-Euphemia Porrabéril.³ In both cases, it should be noted that the epistolary love is

¹ Favret also acknowledges how many feminist writers reject the epistolary genre as overly restrictive and normative, a perspective upheld by Patricia Meyers Spacks, for example. See Spacks’s essay “Female Resources: Epistles, Plot and Power” in the Goldsmith volume. Favret’s study, in an effort to distance critical paradigms of epistolarity from sentimentality and privacy, considers the use of the letter by women writers for revolutionary political ends in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain.

² Carme Riera’s work has been the focus of much critical work on epistolarity. See Tsuchiya, “The Paradox of Narrative Seduction” for an analysis of the duplicitous discourse forged by the protagonist of *Cuestión de amor propio*, Ángela Caminals, in her letter to Ingrid. Valis’s recent essay shifts the focus from the self-reflexive discursivity of *Cuestión* to the issue of the professionalization of the woman writer in contemporary Spain. Glenn offers a brief account of the use of letter writing in a number of Riera’s works. For a broader perspective on the female writer’s use of letter writing, consult Bergmann’s “Letters and Diaries as Narrative Strategies in Contemporary Catalan Women’s Writing.”

³ A more recent example of this dynamic can be seen in the 1998 film *The Love Letter*. A bookstore owner, Kate Capshaw, finds an unidentified epistle – with no signature and no addressee – and it begins to circulate in a small New England town. The presumed heterosexuality of the letter is satirized when Ellen DeGeneres, Capshaw’s business partner, appears as the letter writer in a fantasy hallucination reciting the amorous message to Capshaw. At the end of the film, it is revealed that the letter was in fact a lesbian love letter sent by an old spinster, Mrs. Scattergoods, to her lover, Capshaw’s mother.

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never consummated and the authors are men (a point to which I'll return at the end of the essay).

These epistolary predecessors are implicitly invoked insofar as the epistolary genre functions in the novelistic universe of *El silencio de las sirenas* as a form of intertext. Genre is in many ways conceptually linked to intertextuality. If genre is understood to refer to an ever-shifting set of characteristics associated with a body of literary texts that compose, add to, and diverge from that genre, then genre itself is a form of intertext, residing as an ideal between the various texts that constitute the genre.⁴ Furthermore, one could assert that the genre of epistolary fiction in particular courts intertextuality: Héloïse returns in Rousseau's *Julie*, Mariana Alcoforado is resurrected in *The Three Mariás*, Meurteuil and Tourvel in *Les liaisons dangereuses* read *Julie* and *Clarissa* respectively. Yet the intertextual levels of narrative do not end with the epistolary genre in García Morales's novel, for other voices can be heard within María's narration. Elsa's vision of the world is shot through with the voices of other literary figures, foremost among them Proust and Kafka, whom she reads and copies in a vain attempt to seek appropriate models of conduct in the pages of literature. The novel's title already announces that intertextuality plays a significant role as it calls to mind the brief parable of the same title by Kafka. The multiplicity of intertextual voices in *El silencio de las sirenas* makes for a polyphonic, if not cacophonous, reading experience. As Elsa writes letters and reads literary works that often offer competing visions of love and desire, the reader is confronted with the thorny task of deciphering what those texts might mean for Elsa and for an interpretation of the novel as a whole.

Intertextuality is a term that has taken on a range of definitions in contemporary critical parlance. For critics such as Michael Riffaterre, intertextuality refers to the uncovering of suppressed voices and discourses through the isolation and identification of specific intertextual sources. The later, primary text in which these intertexts are incorporated, are revealed to the reader by direct citation, indirect allusion or other thematic or structural correspondences that the reader may perceive. Riffaterre's argument is that the readerly act is always driven by the intertext, and his emphasis is on the control of the text over the reader: the missing elements or gaps exert a "compulsory reader response" that seeks a solution in the intertext (58). A poststructuralist perspective, however, contends that intertextuality is a function of language itself, such that all texts are intertexts of another and that interpretation cannot be limited to the isolation and identification of specific sources.⁵ By way of example, one only need recall that Roland Barthes, after proclaiming the death of the author in 1968, affirmed three years later in "From Work to Text" that "[e]very text, being itself the intertext of another text, belongs to the intertextual."⁶

⁴ See Hazel Gold's "The Novelist at the Opera" for a similar appraisal of the intertextual function of genre in Clarín's *Su único hijo*.

⁵ Due to his theory's dependence on the competency of the reader, Riffaterre has been charged with elitism, reductionism, and the belief in a "correct" reading of a text. The tortuous logic of his analysis of Proust and asparagus certainly belies his condescending claim that intertextual analysis is "within reach of ordinary readers" ("Textual Unconscious" 385).

⁶ Barthes refers to the idea of intertextuality in the guise of the "cryptogram" (*Writ-*

Barthes's argument displaces prior texts as sources of authority that in turn exert undue pressure on the interpretation of a later text.

Neither approach does adequate justice to the interpretive questions elicited by intertextuality. The intertextual relationship is never solely the relationship between a single intertext and the primary text as the reader's response is dependent as well upon the generic categories to which each text pertains. Intertextuality invariably plays upon both the identification and analysis of specific intertexts as well as the intertextual function of genre. Furthermore, the act of interpreting correspondences or discordances between the text and intertext is rarely a simple matter. The framing of the intertext within the primary text establishes multiple, often competing points of overlap and contact that may fail to provide the reader with any coherent solutions. *El silencio de las sirenas* emphasizes these contradictions by drawing on specific texts, such as Proust's *La fugitive* and Kafka's *The Silence of the Sirens* as well as the broader intertextual function of the epistolary genre. Faced with two competing concepts of intertextuality – the citation or allusion to specific sources and the inscription of a text into the intertextual space of genre – the reader must decide if they function together as compatible hermeneutic devices or as multiple pieces to a puzzle for which there is no whole picture. Through her deft use of intertextual sources that confound reader expectations, García Morales rewrites the parameters of the epistolary genre: a close inspection of the dual function of the epistolary genre and intertextuality in *El silencio de las sirenas* highlights the spectral presence of lesbianism as an unspoken desire that haunts the protagonist and her letter writing. In so doing, García Morales provides crucial insight into how the diverse functions of intertextuality and genre, on the one hand, and analyses of sexuality and gender, on the other, inform one another.

INTERTEXTUAL VOICES AND THE ENIGMA OF DESIRE

Set in a small, lost town in Las Alpujarras, the novel dramatizes the vicissitudes of a love triangle composed of the narrator María, Elsa, and the mysterious Agustín Valdés, who resides in Barcelona. Before her suicide, Elsa leaves María an assortment of items of sentimental value, among them copies of all of the letters that she had sent to Agustín and her diary. With these texts, María composes the novel by culling fragments from the letters and diary as evidence of the painful love that Elsa felt for Agustín, and juxtaposing them with her own version of the past. Given that the story ends in death, the reader is hardly surprised that the relationship between Elsa and María begins in failure. María arrives as a young schoolteacher to the small town and is enlisted by Matilde, an older woman who practices magic, to help her cure Elsa's "mal de ojo."

ing Degree Zero 1965); such a notion marks the beginning of his work that will appear in "The Death of the Author" (1968), *S/Z* (1970) and "From Work to Text" (1971). Jonathan Culler, following Barthes and Kristeva, views intertextuality as the common domain of writing and reading and referring to a discursive space and codes in relation to which a particular text situates itself.

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Although the exorcism fails, this initial encounter sets the stage of Elsa's and María's relationship, a growing connection between the two women whose roots are to be found in this failed expiation of psychic ghosts. Elsa intrigues María not only because of her beauty – "Su delicada belleza me abstraía de todo lo que me rodeaba, absorbiéndome en ella por completo" (30) – but also because of her mysterious ailment. Although the disease is thought to be anemia, María quickly learns that it is a "monstrous" illness more subtle and dangerous than anemia, one that feeds on silence.

Spells and magic form one strand of the fantastic charge of the novel, hypnosis occupies the other.⁷ María lies to Matilde and Elsa about her ability to hypnotize in order to "tender un puente hacia Elsa" (37). Drawn together out of a shared sense of solitude, the two women quickly forge an intimate bond that centers on the multiple sessions of hypnosis. Hypnosis allows for Elsa to share her tortuous dreams and memories of her love for a man who does not love her in return. In particular, the reader learns that Elsa's dreams are haunted by the figure of Agustín Valdés, who repeatedly appears at the oneiric scene of her burial overtaken with grief. María is initially skeptical of Elsa's overtures of friendship – "Elsa sólo veía en mí el instrumento necesario para hurgar desesperadamente en algo misterioso que crecía en su interior, y que ella alimentaba cuanto podía" (37). Nevertheless, María is quickly drawn into Elsa's fantasy world as if seduced by the alluring song of a siren: "Algo había allí que lograba atraerme. Era una ligera emoción que surgía de aquella atmósfera tan singular, nacida a la vez de una casa asombrosa, de la música que Elsa iba eligiendo, y de ella misma: del aliento soñador que envolvía cada uno de sus gestos, su melodiosa voz, sus silencios, su mirada, vagando siempre por espacios irreales..." (46).

The hypnosis appears to be a shared ruse that both are willing to perform for the other. When Elsa asks María to hypnotize her, María feigns indifference knowing full well that she has never hypnotized anyone. Paradoxically, the hypnosis seems to work properly until Elsa begins to tell María what questions to ask: "Aquello desbarató, de golpe, la escena en la que yo estaba ya participando tanto como ella. Sospeché que quizá su trance fuera sólo un simulacro que se destinaba a sí misma" (70). Elsa's ability to remember everything that she says under hypnosis casts additional doubt on the veracity of these sessions. Yet, if these exchanges are voluntary, and perhaps even theatrical, acts of disclosure and confession, their motivation would seem to be the desire to share her desires *with* María. As María speculates: "Quizás aquello a lo que nosotras llamábamos hipnosis tuviera mucho de representación, más o menos consciente, pero *para mí estaba claro que en ella no había más público que Elsa y yo*" (104, my emphasis). Two pages later she reiterates her doubts about the true purpose of the hypnosis: "Ni siquiera ahora estoy convencida de que aquel rito, al que ambas nos entregábamos y el que nos abría la puerta desde la que contemplábamos aquella otra vida en la que Elsa aseguraba participar, fuera realmente una sesión de hipnosis" (106).

⁷ Significantly, Barthes links amorous seduction to hypnosis in *A Lover's Discourse* (94).

The enterprise of hypnosis that unites them is inseparable from the rite of letter writing. Epistolarity is the motor that continually drives Elsa's psychic disturbances, voiced in these sessions of hypnosis. Letter writing stands as the fundamental sign of an intimate connection with another, and Elsa depends upon the receipt of an amorous epistle as a form of emotional nourishment. The epistolary relationship between Elsa and Agustín that dominates the narrative plot is nevertheless itself never entirely explained to the reader. The receipt of a long-awaited letter sends Elsa scurrying to read it time and again. These scenes of amorous connection contrast sharply with a phone conversation in which she says that she would never live in the same domicile with him. The letter writing relationship, while ostensibly between Elsa and Agustín, seems to have multiple addressees. Indeed, the desire to connect via the epistolary mode is seemingly motivated by a phobic need to counter her own self-image as something monstrous and undeserving of love. To Agustín's admission that she initially produced in him an incomprehensible and overwhelming sense of fear, she retorts, "¡Yo soy normal! ¡No soy un monstruo! ¡No soy un monstruo!" (62). In her diary she writes: "Al dolor de perderte se unió entonces el miedo a que descubrieras mi monstruosidad: yo no era en realidad una mujer, sino una sirena. Cuánto tiempo duró aquel angustioso vuelo hacia el vacío de lo alto, exhibiendo ante tus ojos mi cuerpo monstruoso, signo, quizá, de una fatal prohibición de nuestra unión" (81).

The heterosexual matrix established in the tormented epistolary connection between Agustín and Elsa leads the reader to assume that Agustín is the sole destinatary of her writing. Yet the psychic impulse that compels Elsa to write to Agustín and to be hypnotized by María is one that cannot be explained solely by the avowed object of her desire. As if playing out the Freudian distinction between sexual object and sexual aim, Elsa's obsessive need to connect with Agustín seems to draw its anxious energy from another source, one that Agustín cannot fulfill. In fact, Agustín himself seems to perceive his superfluous role; in a phone conversation between María and Agustín, he explains his reluctance to respond to Elsa's letters: "Y, además, no me siento destinatario de sus cartas" (141). Letter writing has a long tradition of narcissism in which authors are, in truth, writing to themselves. The narcissistic element of letter writing is a result of the genre's introspective nature: the act of writing to another person often involves reflecting on and communicating our most intimate thoughts, desires, fears. The letter-writing subject splinters into the self that writes and the textual "I" inscribed on the paper, such that in the act of writing *about* the self, one is always writing in a sense *to* oneself. Kafka, making a similar but more concise point, said that letter writing was a discourse with one's own phantoms, a notion that Elsa herself confirms when she writes: "Si tú no fueras una sombra...si yo no te inventara...si te adivinara entre sueños y visiones surgidos de extrañas profundidades que hubiera en mí...Pero no puede ser. Tú eres sólo una sombra y ese es mi mal, pues las sombras no pueden morir" (130).

Elsa's "monstrosity," as she calls it, occupies a third position in the amorous triangle. Indeed, one of the main assumptions that the functioning of the epistolary-diary depends upon is that of the continuity of the destinatary. Nevertheless, why are we to assume that all of the passages are written to Agustín? Cer-

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tainly in a number of them, there is no indication that Agustín is in fact the implied interlocutor. As in this last example, the referent "tú" created by the use of apostrophe is certainly open to interpretation. The "monstrosity" in fact *motivates* her writing, as if in a sense she were writing to her own monstrosity, or, to paraphrase Kafka, to her own phantom. Thus, there is a paradox in her letter writing: on the one hand, she writes letters in order to expel her own psychic spectres by establishing a connection with Agustín; on the other hand, the epistolary mode unwittingly brings her own phantoms into existence through the very act of writing.

Phantoms are continually appearing and disappearing in García Morales's fiction. In *El sur*, the father is haunted by a secret that permeates the entire network of familial relations, and in *Bene*, the narrator Angela writes to her dead brother Santiago.⁸ So too are letters a common structural and thematic element of her fiction. In *El sur*, the daughter functions as an intermediary for the delivery of letters to her father. In the story "La carta," García Morales recounts the obsessive meddling of a middle-aged woman in the troubled epistolary love affair of a young couple. Akiko Tsuchiya, in a recent article, convincingly draws connections between three of her works and the function of the phantom in familial relationships. In contrast with these narrative works, the nature of Elsa's "monstrosity," the psychic ghost that plagues her, remains unspecified and opaque. First, the traditional family is all but erased. The odd community in which Elsa and María live is devoid of men, composed of women who have "rejected the norms of their sex." This feminocentric community, unnamed and hidden from the rest of the world, functions as a quasi-mythic space where gender norms are less restrictive: "Pues eran mujeres que habían dejado de serlo para convertirse en otra cosa, libres ya de las imposiciones sociales de su sexo" (18). Secondly, Elsa's monstrosity, although never fully explained, is clearly linked to the figure of the siren. The transformation into a siren is the destruction of her female body, and more specifically, the elimination of her sexuality. Critics such as Biruté Ciplijauskaitė and Currie Thompson have interpreted the image of the siren as a fear of losing her sexuality, a failure to achieve a desiring connection that Elsa is desperate to overcome.

The figure of the siren also has Sapphic connotations, appearing as an overt symbol of lesbian desire in Esther Tusquets's *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, which appears to be an implicit intertext. In an ironic echo, Elsa refers to herself in her diary as "un pozo repleto de horrores," the same turn of phrase used by Tusquets's narrator to describe herself (63). The presence of Paolo Ucello's *St. George and the Dragon* in *El silencio* similarly remits the reader to the allegorical function of the painting in *El mismo mar* as a representation of the woman's fear of her lesbian desire in the form of the dragon, killed by the heterosexual paramour of the knight in shining armour. These overlapping

⁸ In an interview, García Morales has commented on the connection between psychic disturbances and familial relations: "Si lees a Freud te quedas horrorizada de los casos que cuenta. Puede ser cultural. Lo único negativo que veo, más en el caso de padres e hijos, es la angustia que puede producir después, ya que de algún modo la norma social se interioriza aunque sea a nivel subconsciente y de alguna forma se sufre el castigo. Lo veo peligroso a niveles psíquicos profundos" (Sánchez Arnosi 4).

details, forming a network of intertextual influences, suggest that the image of the siren as the loss of her corporeal femininity may also be linked to a fear of same-sex desire. The rhetoric of "monstrosity" is prevalent in theoretical discussions of lesbianism, a rhetoric that Judith Butler reinforces in her discussion of gender: "...the fear of homosexual desire in a woman may induce a panic that she is losing her femininity, that she is not a woman, that...if she is not quite a man, she is like one, and hence monstrous in some way" (24).⁹

As quickly as such assertions are implied in *El silencio*, additional layers of ambiguity belie them. The possibility that Agustín may not be the true object of desire is not lost on María, who queries: "¿Por qué él no te escribe, ni te llama? ¿Por qué está tan ajeno a esa historia? ¿Por qué no hay ningún eco en él de todo lo que te ocurre a ti, solamente a ti?" (133). Compounding this insight, she confronts Elsa's fantasy by urging her to take up a relationship with a man of flesh and blood. Elsa's unexpected reply – "¡No quiero un hombre! ¡No quiero un hombre! ¡Sólo quiero sentir amor como lo estoy sintiendo, venga de donde venga!" (147) – shows that her choice of object is by no means constitutive of her desiring aim. Lacan's famous phrase "il n'y a pas de relation sexuelle" is relevant here. For Lacan, love was giving something that one did not have to someone who did not exist. "Love" as an empty signifier attempts to compensate for an impossibility in human relations, an originary trauma that has no cure. For Elsa, love too seems to be an object that she needs in order to compensate for this monstrosity that she perceives in herself. In this respect, Agustín forms a pretext for experiencing love, and now lost, she must seek it elsewhere. Desperate, she calls him again, only to have the epistolary relation cut off completely. María writes: "Esa peculiar forma de existencia que era para ella la escritura, acababa de ser destruida. Al escribirle, existía para él. Y también *era en la escritura donde únicamente se iba realizando su amor*. ¿Qué le quedaba ahora si se negaba a leer sus cartas?" (152, my emphasis). Elsa herself slowly realizes that Agustín is merely a phantasmatic creation that allows her to experience love and passion. Love exists only in the letters, and she needs an addressee to complete the circuit, even though he may be a mere pretext. As she writes in one of her letters: "En el interior sólo había silencio. Tu carta no estaba en ninguna parte. Ahora, al menos, he decidido no esperarla...Estoy aceptando ya que nunca me vas a escribir, que quizá nunca te vea. Algo así como si no existieras, como si jamás hubieras existido" (117).

Similar to the sessions of hypnosis, the letters serve not as communicative devices but as prosthetic links or vehicles for desire between María and Elsa. The association of letter writing with communication is broken so that the function of the letter is no longer to convey information so much as to establish a circuit of desire through which words, the marks of love, may flow. Reading and writing are portrayed as processes of reiteration and repetition: all of Elsa's letters are copied and rerouted to María, something that had to have

⁹ Butler considers "the 'truest' lesbian melancholic ... the strictly straight woman" (33): her feminine identification is an effort to become the woman that she could never love, to "preserve" the love that she felt for her mother as an identification that is marked from the beginning with the sense of melancholic loss of that other half of their initial relation.

happened from the outset in order for copies to be had. In other words, because the letters were sent to Agustín, in order to have copies of them, Elsa must have had the forethought to copy them after their initial composition. María, in turn, reads them time and again, reversing the epistolary circuit that ostensibly engendered them.¹⁰ She mentions to the reader on two separate occasions that she rereads the notebook, "cada vez que leo el cuaderno" (50). As part of the narration, the letters are copies that are then "recited" and laced into the narrative fabric woven by María. In a sense, it is María who responds to Elsa's love letters, rather than Agustín, by means of the composition of the novel.

In examining the possible relationship of desire that exists between these two women, however, it cannot be overlooked that María's role as editor of letters and sometime analyst raises several questions about the nature of their relationship. In some respects, they appear to share an intimate bond initiated by María's strange attraction to Elsa and Elsa's need for connection. In other respects, Elsa appears to engage María in a relationship of transference in which the latter simply functions as a surrogate for the unattainable object of desire. The relationship between Elsa and María is by turns sentimental and analytical. Her account of their triangulated connection borders on a psychoanalytic relationship between analyst and analysand. The story could be seen, in many ways, as the writing of a case history, in which the letters and diary are cited as evidence for María's retelling of the story. Elsa's need for hypnosis, allowing for some sort of psychoanalytic exchange, and María's willingness to provide the knowledge, imply a series of transferences between the two.¹¹ In transference, the analyst, by attributing meaning to the analysand's slips, dreams, fantasies, etc., becomes the cause of the analysand's wonderings, questions, and hypotheses – the cause of the analysand's desire (Fink 53). The subject in transference, rather than facing the impossibility of knowing the Other's desire, latches onto another object. As Fink notes, "The unknown nature of the Other's desire is unbearable here; you prefer to assign it an attribute, any attribute, rather than let it remain an enigma" (61).

María's attempts to steer Elsa away from Agustín, to redirect her to another object of desire in a futile attempt to discern the underlying motives of her obsessive letter writing and hypnosis sessions, place her in the position of analyst who induces a transference relationship. From this perspective, Elsa's decision to send the letter to María suggests that a certain demand toward María as Other has been made, that Elsa's own psychic dilemma has not be

¹⁰ As Barthes writes in reference to the copy: "The enigmatic copy, the interesting one, is the dislocated copy; at the same time it reproduces and reverses: it can reproduce only by reversing" (*Roland Barthes* 49).

¹¹ For Lacan, transference refers to the critical analytical moment when the analyst takes on the position of the analysand's Other, allowing the analysand to relate to that Other in order to refigure the fundamental fantasy. This allows the analyst to determine the signifier that underlies the analysand's demand for love from that Other. Demands are transferences designed to keep a problematic desire in place. The analyst's task is not to direct the subject to speak, because that then is taken to be the demand of the Other that the analysand will fulfill and thus avoid the true desire motivating his/her attempt to fulfill that demand.

resolved. Furthermore, the link between the circuit of desire between Elsa and María in these sessions of hypnosis and the prominent place of letter writing in the novel bear directly on the function of intertextuality in the interpretive process. Elsa's letters situate the novel in an intertextual relationship with the epistolary genre. At the same time, the status of the letters as copies of letters transcribed within the narrative frame transforms them into a form of literal intertext: they are pieces of correspondence that can never fully be recuperated. As such, they raise the question of the hermeneutic value of isolated intertextual influences in *El silencio de las sirenas*.

PERFORMING PROUST

Like Flaubert's Emma Bovary, Elsa's voracious reading of literature compels her to find tales against which she can compare her own passionate love story. María attacks Elsa's idea of love as "fantasmagoría" born from her novelistic readings. If we conclude that Elsa's literary love seems to set her up for a fall from the lofty heights of fiction, if she seems to be a bad reader who cannot see the difference between the real world and the literary text, it is perhaps a too hasty interpretation. Elsa's relationship to literature – her recitation of fragments of other texts – is a more complex one than the fantasy of experiencing in life what she has read in books. At one point in the novel, sitting in a café, Elsa alights on a passage from Proust's *La fugitive* when the book opens as she sets it on her lap to drink her tea. The seemingly fantastic mode of discovery causes her to reread the section voraciously, and its message inspires her to write a letter to Agustín. Thus, the explicit mention of those stories that she reads, and sometimes quotes, potentially establishes a correspondence between those stories and the larger frame-tale of the novel. Psychoanalysis insists that what is exteriorized or performed can be understood only through reference to what is barred from the performance, what cannot or will not be performed. Following this psychoanalytic framework, Riffaterre argues that "the intertext is to the text what the unconscious is to consciousness. Reading, therefore, is not unlike analysis" ("Compulsory" 77).¹² Setting aside momentarily possible objections to this argument, I want to consider whether the Proustian intertext offers some potential insight into the unknown of Elsa's psyche.

Reading García Morales is, on the surface, nothing like reading Proust. García Morales is light, ethereal, and mysterious. Proust, particularly in *La fugitive* (one of the volumes typically ignored in much Proustian criticism), occupies the other end of the spectrum, as the novel dedicated to Albertine is at times ponderous, at others profound, drawing upon the previous volumes of twisting mazes of anecdotes, characters, and memories. Yet if their styles are remarkably different, they do intersect on at least one account: the place of

¹² In the context of epistolary fiction, Bernard Duyfhuizen similarly claims that references to other books or genres "constitute intertextual extensions of the narrative by investing the text with a second, already determined, narrative matrix, creating a palimpsestic relationship of narrated events" (4).

memory in desire. In Proust memory is a recuperative mode of overcoming loss. Proustian anamnesis focuses on the reconstruction of the past through the exploration of the unconscious, involuntary function of memory exemplified by the famous scene of the madeleine. In *La fugitive*, Marcel the narrator is concerned specifically with the memory of Albertine, who has left him and eventually dies. Marcel is distraught at Albertine's sudden decision to leave, and because of the distance that now separates them, their relationship shifts to an epistolary correspondence. While he writes letters with the feeble hope that she might return, Marcel's narration becomes more introspective, and he reflects upon the schism that has produced the failed romance, namely Albertine's desire for other women. The epistolary correspondence occurs in the first half of *La fugitive*, "Albertine disparue." The second half, "Albertine morte," focuses on Marcel's attempts to overcome the emotional loss that her unexpected death from a riding accident produces in him. The fragment of the novel that Elsa rereads, and which sparks a new hope in her love, appears in the second section. An English translation of the quotation reads:

Besides, in the history of a love-affair and of its struggles against forgetfulness, do not our dreams occupy an even larger place than our waking state, since they...contrive for us, by night, a meeting with her whom we would eventually have forgotten, provided always that we did not see her again? For whatever people may say, we can perfectly well have in a dream the impression that what is happening in it is real. (549)

Elsa finds comfort in the quotation's message as it suggests that fantasies and dreams can provide a safe haven for the memory of a lost lover, a means of keeping reality intact. The textual location of this passage in Proust's narrative is key, for at this moment Marcel is attempting to hold on to the memory of Albertine after her death. This reflection occurs shortly after receiving a letter that provided him with further evidence of Albertine's lesbianism. Since her death he has been on a quest to find her former female lovers in order to answer the nagging question of whether or not Albertine was a lesbian. To my knowledge, only one critic has focused on this particular citation. Currie Thompson addresses the instability of the connection between Elsa and Agustín, noting that she may not actually be in search of a man. If, according to Thompson, Elsa "occupies a different space" (302), the gender of her object of desire is to be found in the Proustian passage. She quotes from the same section: "aquella a la que acabaríamos por olvidar, mas con la condición de no volver a verla" (qtd. in Thompson 302). Curiously, Thompson ends her analysis of the citation without attending to the original Proustian intertext. Instead, her argument veers away from the path that I am forging and proposes that what Elsa seeks is "Aphrodite, the Great Mother archetype" (302). Proust as an intertextual influence is never explored.

The presence of Proust's novel as an intertext invariably suggests a series of potential correspondences between *La fugitive* and *El silencio de las sirenas*. Both texts share the use of the epistolary mode. It is not insignificant that letter writing in Proust is often the conveyor of knowledge about lesbianism; Charlus finds a letter addressed to his lover Morel, only to find that it is from the

actress Léa to another woman. Similarly, in *La fugitive* a letter from his friend Aimé recounts an adventure between Albertine and a laundry-girl. Furthermore, Elsa's rereading of this brief passage sets up a complex web of cross-identifications with the various Proustian characters. Elsa's act of reading apparently identifies her with Marcel in order to overcome the loss of a lover; she is the lover who desperately awaits a return letter or the possibility of a reunion. Nevertheless, there is also an identification of Elsa with Albertine. Albertine represents the figure that Elsa wishes she could be: the woman who is desired and coveted by her epistolary interlocutor. This identification is further punctuated in one of her recurring dreams in which Agustín appears at her gravesite mourning her death, much like the narrator's grief in the face of Albertine's death. In short, Elsa becomes Albertine to Agustín's Marcel.¹³

The meaning of those correspondences, or identifications, is a far murkier matter. Not only is the nature of Elsa's identification not readily discernible, the function of identity in Proust is itself shrouded in mystery. Various critics have noted that the Albertine's lesbianism is a blind spot for the reader (Bersani, Sedgwick). Lesbianism in Proust is the enigma par excellence, what drives his incessant questions about Albertine's possible Sapphic tendencies. As Reginald McGinnis, in his analysis of the association of Albertine with Gomorrah, writes: "Dans la *Recherche*, l'homosexualité féminine s'associe à Gomorrah pour symboliser l'inconnu, l'inconnaissable" (95). Gomorrah, the sister-city to Sodom, appears as the unknowable, as an undefined space in which women are seemingly drawn to other women, begging the question that Marcel asks in *La prisonnière*, "What else can a woman represent to Albertine?" (311). Marcel is never able to answer that question, which in part motivates his desire (Bersani 101, 127). Lesbianism becomes the source of desire for him, drawn to the enigma of her sexuality in a relationship of desire that, if true, would negate the very realization of that connection. Lesbianism becomes a mental construction for Marcel, an imaginary creation designed to sustain the relationship of desire even as it causes him emotional anguish.

Lesbianism is not only a problem in Proust because of the enigmatic guise it is given. Under the "transposition of sexes" theory, lesbianism has long been interpreted by Proustian critics as nothing more than a mere masquerade for male homosexuality. Proust's work may be situated within a tradition of male-authored work whose concern with lesbianism has often treated the lesbian figure as an erotic object, not unlike the pornographic spectacle of lesbianism for straight male audiences. Yet, Proust's own homosexuality distinguishes him from Baudelaire, Balzac, and Gautier, and as a result, critics have often read the narrator Marcel's obsession with women's possible lesbian desires as a masquerade for Proust's own homosexual fantasies. Albertine is thus said to be based loosely on Alfred Agostinelli, Proust's chauffeur. Other female charac-

¹³ There is also a third mode of seeing this relationship: that of María now writing to Elsa in the form of the novel as a mode of preserving her memory. This is seen in the final letter that Elsa gives to María, not Agustín. At an earlier point in *La fugitive*, the narrator comments on the letter that he received shortly after receiving news of her death: "At any rate I was glad that before she died she had written me that letter, and above all had sent me that final message which proved to me that she would have returned had she lived" (519). The final letter from Elsa echoes this passage.

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ters are simply textually transgendered in order to skirt the issues of autobiographical narration. In a cogent departure from this critical trend, Elizabeth Ladenson asks, then, what is the place of lesbianism if, in fact, all the women are really men? Lesbianism, in the final analysis, is all but absent, deftly moved to the margins of reading and interpretation, as the textual veil is lifted on the enigmas of *A la recherche's* "jeunes filles en fleurs" to reveal a more easily recognizable Proustian phallus. Ladenson falls into cliché in arguing that lesbianism represents the "true" homosexuality as a desire for the same in the narrative, however, her analysis deftly avoids collapsing lesbianism into male homosexuality or into straight male fantasy. Lesbianism occupies a much more complex space in Proust. It is both the space of a transgressive femininity that Marcel covets and the absolute limit of his knowledge, that which escapes him.

Like Marcel standing outside the window watching Mlle. Vinteuil and her friend, the reader is forced to recognize that the glass barrier separating the spectacle from the observer is far less transparent than one would like to imagine. We may see what is happening, but that hardly translates into a more profound knowledge of the desires at play. The presence of *La fugitive*, then, points up the issue of the enigma of desire in *El silencio de las sirenas*. Albertine is an avatar of ambiguity, of the obsessed compulsion to know another's desires and of the ultimate limits of that knowledge. *Pace* Barthes, it does not necessarily follow that the identification of an intertext will completely freeze and stabilize the meaning of the text, and as a result, impede the reader's freedom of interpretation. In *El silencio de las sirenas* "lesbianism" as a form of Proustian intertextual presence is an epistemological space that cannot be entirely accessed, a gap that resists meaning. The question of desire – Albertine's or Elsa's – may incite suspicion and speculation from the reader, but it is precisely the intertext's function as an enigmatic, contingent connection that belies strict identification.

REWRITING KAFKA

This enigmatic desire is reinforced in the principal intertext of Kafka's parable *The Silence of the Sirens*, which clearly provides the title for the novel but is not mentioned explicitly until the end of the book. One of his shorter tales, it is itself intertextual, using Homer's myth of Odysseus and the Sirens to concoct a parable. Homer's intertext, however, becomes a canvas on which Kafka paints an entirely different image of Odysseus and the Sirens, rewriting the myth with a series of twists. García Morales too rewrites Kafka, literally, since Elsa copies the tale by hand to include in a final, unsent letter to Agustín, and figuratively, as the rewriting of Kafka within the context of the novel reconfigures the interpretative frame with which we read Kafka's parable.

The mythological tale of the sirens recounts that their piercing song would drive any man crazy, and therefore Odysseus tied himself to the mast of the ship in order to escape them. Kafka's parable alters the myth by suggesting that the Sirens wield an even greater weapon: their silence. In either case, the myth would suggest that Odysseus is condemned to failure. Kafka also alters the myth by having Odysseus use wax like his men. By stopping up his ears with

wax, Odysseus hopes to avoid their song, unaware of the Sirens' alternative weapon of silence. Therefore, when he passes by, and the Sirens are silent, he believes unknowingly that they are singing and that the wax has been effective: he is ignorant of the fact that had they been singing, their song would have pierced the wax. As a result of his ignorance, he survives the Sirens' attack. And yet, an enigmatic rejoinder to the short story offers a twist to the interpretation: "Perhaps he [Odysseus] had really noticed [...] that the Sirens were silent, and held up to them and to the gods the aforementioned pretense merely as a sort of shield" (432). Stéphane Moses, analyzing the parodic rewriting of the myth by Kafka at the end of the parable, posits that Odysseus' performance was a ruse: "the fiction he organizes has every semblance of reality, but it is really a staging, a show put on for the benefit of the Sirens..." (76).

Since Elsa perceives herself as a siren, it is her own silence that is at stake in the novel. According to Boa, *The Silence of the Sirens* is a "coded commentary on the relations between the writer as hero and his female inspiration" (98). The story, she argues, can be read as a myth of phallic power achieved through instinctual repression and demonization of the female object on whom the hero projects his own repressed desires which return in a threatening form. A supplementary reading of *The Sirens* might claim that it is a story about the domination of desire: chained from the object, Odysseus can escape unscathed. As a result, the sirens are no longer the object of desire, but rather, Odysseus is. Kafka's triple twist – Odysseus puts wax in his own ears, the Sirens are silent, Odysseus knew all along that they were silent – ultimately undermines the reader's ability to make a grounded claim about the knowledge of desire (i.e., who is the object of desire) and about the function of desire as knowledge. The desire to know (who desires whom) is the only desire available to the reader.¹⁴ Odysseus is the cunning figure who is not at all seduced and leaves the Sirens writhing and monstrous, and yet silent. Kafka's story, rerouted and sent back to Agustín by Elsa, but through María (who puts it in an envelope and mails it), begs the question of whether or not this final part of the book duplicates Kafka's coda: is there a twist in interpretation produced by the shifting hands that send the Kafka tale to Agustín? Is it Elsa's way of breaking her silence by pointing out that she knew all along that she was silent? Was it Odysseus who in fact was deluded into thinking that he knew the truth all along?

The ironic rewriting by Kafka in the larger frame of García Morales' novel suggests that perhaps Agustín knew the meaning of Elsa's silence, that is, why he felt that he was not the true addressee of her letters. While Elsa is ostensibly identified with the Sirens, the enigmatic end of the parable also suggests that Elsa can be identified with Odysseus. Thompson reaches a similar conclusion about this identification, and she emphasizes that the men in Elsa's life are the

¹⁴ In reference to the opacity of desire, Judith Roof remarks with regard to lesbian fiction: "While the drive of conventional history is to know, lesbian fiction histories frustrate the possibility of total knowledge and define the desire for mastery as unfulfillable from the start. Not fulfilling the desire to know sustains desire, continues it so that desire, like history, is a paradox: the desire is to desire not to have a desire fulfilled; it is the desire for an unfulfilled desire" (111).

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Sirens. If indeed Elsa can be aligned with Odysseus, the logical conclusion is that her epistolary writing was a pretense. As a result, it would appear that she never wanted a relationship with Agustín, was aware that he would be silent, and yet she used letter writing as form of ruse. Odysseus' ignorance consciously imitates the sirens' silence in their performance. By extension, Elsa's own performance of heterosexuality, much like the sessions of hypnosis, would be recast as a pretense.

Kafka's story invariably elicits a comparison between framing text and framed intertext, a comparison that necessarily draws upon possibly broader connections with Kafka and his literary works. Given Kafka's well-known concern with the vicissitudes of letter writing and the modern postal system, the inclusion of *The Sirens* within an unsent letter also suggests that there is something more to Kafka's presence within the novel. Kafka's literary production is inextricably linked to his letter writing, and conversely, many of his letters reflect his literary preoccupations: the concern with judgment and the law, with ghosts and his past.¹⁵ Drawing on this mutual imbrication of life and literature, Deleuze and Guattari have argued that Kafka's entire *oeuvre* is a form of textual machine among whose principal components are the letters. Therefore, the most perceptive link between Kafka and García Morales may be a shared sense of the failures of the postal system in human connection.

Fundamentally, Kafka's letters, particularly those to Milena Jesenská, reflect on the role of epistolary relations in the age of the postal system, anticipating Derrida's own ponderations in *The Post Card* on the impossibility of letter writing as a vehicle for communication. For Kafka there is something monstrous about letter writing, and he maintained a skeptical belief in the postal system as an institution that prevented direct connection. Writing and the transportation systems that overtook communication maneuvered love into the purview of the media, stealing it from the intimate, private space of the couple. Letter writing is thus an agonizing enterprise for Kafka. Yet, like Elsa, Kafka is initially desperate for letters, in the form of a constant flow between Milena and Franz through the intermediary of the post office. Many of his letters are self-referential, concerned with their arrival or delay, informing Milena in his next letter when the last one had arrived and when he himself was writing and would post. Nonetheless, letter writing fundamentally marks the failure of communication and the remorse of memory: "I received the Friday letter early, later on the Friday-night letter. The first is so sad – sad, sad station-face – and it's not so much because of its content, but because the letter is old, because all that it past: the woods we shared, the suburb, the ride" (64).

There is a sense of increasing fearfulness in Kafka's letters to Milena, the burgeoning belief that their connection was doomed to failure and that the letter writing was the true object of desire. The letters consume the relationship, indeed *becoming* the relationship such that the four-day visit in Vienna and the abominable reunion in Gmünd are merely cracks in the epistolary circuit: the unbearable anguish is that the letters are "noise" in the lines of com-

¹⁵ For example, *The Trial* has been seen as a reflection of Kafka's relationship with Felice Bauer and his failure to marry, and critics have drawn connections between Kafka's letters to Milena Jesenská and *The Castle*.

munication, and he wants to see her, yet he admits that the "deciding factor" for the decision to stop writing is "my increasing (letter by letter) inability to go beyond the letters" (221). This failure in Kafka is manifested in his letter writing as an expression of guilt, in the belief that he may be a monster, that the ghosts in the literary machine are his own, that what he really wants is the letter and not the person. In *Letters to Milena*, for example, he comments that even after conversation, he still needs letters (172), and early in their correspondence he speaks of her letters as metaphoric substitutes: "...I am tilting my head way back, drinking the letters, aware only that I don't want to stop drinking" (18).

This desperation and fear that imbue the epistolary correspondence similarly shares with Elsa the perception that letter writing was concerned with ghosts. In the March 22 letter in which Kafka reinitiates what will be the final episode of their epistolary contact, he remarks famously that letter writing "is truly a communication with spectres, not only with the spectre of the addressee but also with one's own phantom" (234). Throughout the letters, "ghosts" appear in a rather ghost-like fashion: as brief allusions, never discussed at length and often at the end of a letter: "It's also difficult for people to play 'tag' with ghosts" (178); "You're right about 'ghost letters.' But they are real; they aren't just wearing sheets" (208). His fear, which he confesses to Milena, is that the postal system is filled with ghosts that empty letters of their written kisses. The letters in Kafka necessarily point up the failure of the epistolary pact, as there is an unbridgeable scission of the writing subject into the textual "I" and the hand that writes. Thus he gives his diaries to Milena as well, as Elsa gives her diary and letters to Maria.

Significant differences between García Morales's novel and Kafka's work persist, for unlike Kafka's writings, Elsa's letters and diary were saved deliberately; Max Brod, ignoring Kafka's desire for literary death, published his works posthumously. Critics have noted that the "Kafkaesque performance" nearly always results in some sort of self-effacement, such as death or madness (Anderson 387-388). For Anderson, Kafka's self-effacement in the form of unsigned letters and the elimination of the "I" in various sentences allows him to merge with Milena in the space of writing, two linguistic signifiers fused on paper. At the same time Kafka calls into question the concept of love as anything other than a linguistic entity, and he renders his own signature a fiction: "he unsigned the letters, bidding his reader to consider them anonymous, their author dead" (397). The desire for literary destruction may have been denied by Brod, but Kafka did achieve a certain level of self-effacement within his writings, in the very act of writing. The "Kafkaesque" performance places identity in question as an enigma that has no answer and remains undecipherable for the reader. In contrast, all evidence suggests that Elsa certainly did want to survive rhetorically in her writing. Yet, can we not also see the gesture of self-effacement that appears in Kafka's letters to Milena in Elsa's own decision not to sign her final letter to Maria? The phrase "¿Volveremos a vernos?", read ironically, suggests that the only space for a reencounter would be the phantasmatic space of language, as signifiers on a page, yet the lack of signature erases her from that space, as an entity without a name.

This shared vision of the pathos of letter writing between Kafka and García Morales finds an uncanny link back to Proust through Deleuze and Guattari.

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In a lengthy parenthetical discussion of Proust, as an implicit intertext of their analysis of Kafka, they assert that for both Proust and Kafka letters are used to stave off the conjugal relationship: "The overall principle is the same in both cases: each letter is a letter of love, whether real or superficial" (33). For both Kafka and Proust, the epistolary pact fails; the writing subject is splintered into fractured selves. The fear is that the letter writing machine will consume them, turn against them. In the end, they want to end the letter writing so as not to be overtaken by it. The postal system (the postman as intermediary) becomes an erotic role, and the ghost in the machine becomes a spectre of desire (or a desiring spectre) whose presence for the letter writer is not entirely *desirable*. The intertextual presence of Kafka and Proust underscores the aforementioned paradox of letter writing for Elsa: the act of writing conjures forth the very fears that the letter writing connection is supposed to alleviate.

While Deleuze and Guattari may affirm that "it doesn't matter whether the conjugality is official or unofficial, heterosexual or homosexual" (34), in *El silencio de las sirenas* that question is not so easily skirted by an appeal to sexual indifference. Biruté Ciplijauskaitė, in her analysis of the intertextual influences of the epistolary mode and Goethe, has described García Morales's novel as "una cuidadosa interrelación de sub-textos y sub-versiones" (167). Her comment rings true, for these intertextual spaces, as we have seen, can be interpreted as spaces of interdicted desires. Interdiction normally implies prohibition, but the etymology of its Latin infinitive form "interdicere" also suggests literally "to say in between." From this perspective, "interdiction" functions as a syllepsis, a Janus-like signifier with two mutually exclusive meanings. Not coincidentally, Riffaterre notes that intertextuality is itself often dependent upon the trope of syllepsis, in which the manifest meaning of an intertextual reference requires the repression of the opposing meaning ("Textual Unconscious" 375; "Compulsory" 71). The very concept of prohibition is at work in syllepsis, and in the case of García Morales's novel, the syllepsis of "interdiction" refers to the repression of communication and to the voicing of desires that are ostensibly prohibited. In this respect, one can argue that it is between the texts that the lesbian signifier slips in, giving voice to a prohibited desire. Lesbianism as an interdicted desire surreptitiously sneaks into the text between the letters and in the form of intertextuality.¹⁶ Literally between letters, between the narrative and its intertexts, desire hides as an effect of reading, and, to be more precise, of reading literature.

Nevertheless, several questions remain to be answered: did Elsa commit suicide because of the failure of her relationship with Agustín or was it the impossibility of escaping her own phantoms? Did Elsa use the epistolary mode as a ruse or was she unconscious of her desires all along? Like the unknowable secret of Odysseus' pretense before the gods, they are questions for which there are no answers because Elsa's love-story cannot be determined by the letters and her diary alone. The entire story is mediated through María's own

¹⁶ In "Lesbian Intertextuality," Elaine Marks notes that a silence within women's literature is the space of same-sex love. Tracing a literary genealogy of lesbian writing, Marks establishes intertextual links in a French tradition of writing in order to offer an evolution of lesbian representation from Sappho to Monique Wittig.

retelling, and the epistolary evidence is molded by her function as editor and organizer of Elsa's letters.¹⁷ María's narration offers the reader evidence of Elsa's past desires and of the intimate bonds between the two women. Nevertheless, silence is what reigns in this novel: the silence of the sirens is the amorous space that cannot be named. The affirmation of a lesbian identity for Elsa therefore fails because the coherence of the signifier "lesbian" cannot accommodate the conflicting desires that she suffers. At one point during the hypnosis sessions, Elsa enters a trance unlike any previous episodes, and she begins speaking without being heard: "sus labios se movían como si su voz resonara en un lugar inaccesible para mí" (128). For Elsa, it is the first hypnosis session in which she cannot remember what happened: the inaccessible place of her psyche refuses to be heard, the words are forbidden, ultimately even for María.

In *El silencio de las sirenas* intertextuality is thus both a privileged space for the writing of desire and the epistemological limit of the reader's interpretation of that desire. It is difficult to sustain Riffaterre's belief that the reader's response is "compulsory" and that the text leads the reader to a "proper" or "correct" reading. Riffaterre sees the intertext as a signifier, a "mimesis of repression," that may guide the reader to the textual unconscious ("Textual Unconscious" 374). This approach certainly allows us to view textual repressions, in the form of intertextual allusions, as significant sources of meaning. Riffaterre's concept of intertextuality places the reader in a position of epistemological authority: collecting enough bits of "text-dictated segmentation" will add up to a textual roadmap that leads directly to the unconscious of the text. However seductive that approach may be – and my own analysis has courted this approach closely, perhaps too closely – it leaves no room for the possibility that the intertext may not reveal a final answer. The voices in García Morales's text compete to be heard, and they are not always sonorous when listened to in conjunction. Rather, they are like pieces of a puzzle that do not quite connect, too many to form a coherent picture. The recitation of Elsa's letters and of Kafka's and Proust's stories within the larger framework of María's narration initiates a process similar to what Paul Ricoeur referred to as the iconic moment in metaphor. In other words, the presence of the intertext engages the reader in a speculative activity to establish a clear, metaphorical meaning between the main text and its metonymic intertexts. Nevertheless, intertextual analyses inevitably confront the irresolvability of competing intertexts whose metonymic attachments can only suggest but never confirm metaphorical representations.

The relationship of intertext to text might reflect instead the transference relationship of analyst (María) and analysand (Elsa), a relationship of desire that may simply be a false, substitute love. As Seán Hand has argued, the inclusion of intertexts might be read more accurately as forms of transference. The

¹⁷ Duyfhuizen remarks: "The Editor or collector in a *Briefwechselroman*, like an omniscient third-person narrator, arranges the narrative discourse and creates meaningful juxtapositions between letters, though he never actively participates in the correspondence" (17). In many cases, however, the editor/narrator does actively participate in the events and even the correspondence, as García Morales's story amply demonstrates.

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intertexts cannot be read simply as a series of identifications with the subject positions in the text, but rather, they point to the underlying, ultimately unknowable, object of desire (Hand 90). Like the transference function of desire between Elsa and María, Hand's notion of intertextuality as transference similarly calls for a limitation on the reader's ability to secure a final coherent meaning for those intertextual relations.¹⁸ Such an approach underscores how the transference relationship extends as well to the heterosexual dynamics between Elsa and Agustín. Neither María nor Agustín can be read as the "true" object of desire. In *El silencio de las sirenas* same-sex desire between women appears as a siren signifier, silent yet not unheard, that exposes the limits of our ability to understand the protagonist's psychic conflicts.

POSTSCRIPT: INTERTEXTUALITY AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

The difficulty that external readers face in interpreting the meaning of intertextual influences for internal readers (such as Elsa), complicates as well any meaning that may be adjudicated to the external reader's relationship to the text. It has become *de rigueur* in contemporary criticism that the critic declare, explain or justify his or her positionality vis-à-vis the object of analysis. In particular, the relationship of male critics to feminist theory and literary criticism has been fraught with tension for some time. In Jardine and Smith's *Men in Feminism* (1983), Elaine Showalter attacked the sudden popularity of feminist theory among male critics trained in other schools of thought; she argued that their use of feminism was simply a critical appropriation in which they avoided their own positionality as male critics. There still persists a sense of intrusion or guilt on the part of male critics who do feminist work, as if they needed to apologize for their critical interventions. While it may be true that reading and writing are rarely, if ever, innocent acts devoid of politics and power, underlying the resistance to male feminist criticism is a notion of sexual difference that argues that men and women read in particular ways and that the motivations behind their reading practices are *a priori* different if not incompatible. The issue is further exacerbated when male critics engage lesbianism in literary and cultural studies.

Yet one might ask: does the presence of a man in feminism or in lesbian studies always translate into a wolf in sheep's clothing? Joseph Boone, addressing the tenuous and tortuous position of men who practice feminist theory and criticism, advocated an expanded view of the term "male," one that would

¹⁸ As Hand writes: "The dynamics of transference therefore resemble intertextual theories which locate meaning not in the author or reader but in the intermediate space of reading" (82). His notion of transference resembles Wolfgang Iser's argument that "[t]he convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader" ("Reading Process" 50). In this sense, Hand establishes points of contact between reader-response theory and psychoanalysis in which the meaning of texts resides at the interstitial space of reader and text at the same time that he questions the validity of the meaning produced by the reader.

not foreclose men's presence in feminism in the same manner as Stephen Heath who had claimed that "Men's relation to feminism is an impossible one" (1). Boone's argument was a call not to shore up the division between men and women that often results from the exclusive focus on women's difference. That critical maneuver often has the effect of foreclosing differences within the binary terms "male" and "female," and invariably reproduces a homogenized and phallic vision of what the signifier "male" encompasses.

The model of desire that courses through *El silencio de las sirenas* in fact allows for the presence of a male reader without prescribing a phallic role for his masculinity. The presence of "lesbian" desire as a reading effect establishes a dynamics in which "lesbianism" can be the affair of a man and a woman. Kaja Silverman, in a bold reading of Proust's *A la recherche*, reverses the transposition theory by refiguring male homosexuality as lesbianism. It is well-known that J.E. Rivers proposed that the narrator Marcel's homosexuality was to be found in the extratextual referent upon which Albertine was supposedly modeled: Alfred Agostinelli, Proust's chauffeur. Silverman reverses the critical direction of that analysis by urging us "to conceive of Marcel's affair with Albertine as one between two 'women'" (383). Silverman achieves her reading through an astute analysis of the famous section *Sodome et Gomorrhe* in which the narrator establishes a small subset of homosexual men who also desire women who desire women. She turns, significantly, to the scene after Albertine's death in which Marcel fantasizes about lesbianism, upon learning of Albertine's affair with the laundry-girl. It is, we must remember, the scene that leads to the fragment that Elsa reads repeatedly in *El silencio de las sirenas*. In the fantasy, Silverman argues, Marcel is able to insert himself in the lesbian scene precisely because the fantasy functions on a mental plane in which his own male body – the obstacle to a lesbian union – is absent (384-85). Fantasy, which turns on language, can dispense with, at least momentarily and in the space of literature, the male body. Thus, as Silverman claims, "the contradiction of sustaining at least a partial identification with femininity while occupying a masculine body" can be seen as an important psychic economy for feminism and lesbianism: feminism in particular (387, my emphasis).

Partial as that identification may be for a male reader, it can have powerful implications. At the very least, it may be an identification with femininity that refuses to secure for itself a phallic place within the lesbian fantasy, refusing, as it were, to reenact an all-too-familiar heterosexual fantasy. For male readers, masculinity undoubtedly mediates our reading practices, yet not all male readers necessarily relate to masculinity in the same way. Should my perspective, as a male, be generalized to include all other readers whose names are gender-inflected as "male"? What of my own identification with femininity? What of the place of sexuality? As Boone suggests, there are other differences besides gender that may have just as much to say about one's positionality. Silverman's reading clarifies the enigma of Marcel's desire for Albertine as a lesbian fantasy, but it does so as a *clarification*, by eliminating the enigmatic quality of desire that pulses through Proust's work. Thus, I want to underscore here in these final remarks that there is a limit to the male reader's intervention in literary lesbianism. The body may be one such limit, and as much as it is popular to believe that gender and sexuality are so mobile and fluid that the body can be

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discarded (such is the fantasy of computer-generated virtual realities), identifications cannot be easily and utterly detached from corporeal embodiment. Nevertheless, overemphasizing the *limits* of male identification with femininity simply appeals to some sort of corporeal determinism, as if the body were the sole factor in an individual's psychic life. The limit at issue is not ontological but epistemological, not the limit of a man's ability to identify with femininity, but rather, the limit imposed on how much we can know about the nature of the identifications that are produced and how they are constituted. Identification is always a partial act that can never fully articulate the psychic complexity of the subject. Just as Elsa's relationships to the literary works that she reads and copies are shrouded in mystery, so too are the forces of desire and identification that compel literary exegesis, forces that are not so easily *clarified* by an appeal to (the critic's) gender.

In *El silencio de las sirenas* the enigmatic quality of desire is portrayed through the formal guise of genre and intertextuality. Indeed, one could argue that in the novel, the relationship of intertextuality *to* genre may be akin to the relationship of sexuality *to* gender.¹⁹ If a reading of a text takes into account both genre and intertextuality, it is often the case that the intertextual influences may not necessarily coincide with the expectations of the genre. Intertextuality can conflict with genre in much the same way that sexuality often refuses to conform to the normative dictates of gender. The reader expectations elicited by the generic intertext – such as the heterosexual romance in amorous epistolary fiction – may, in turn, be subtly reworked and rewritten by those intertextual influences. In *El silencio de las sirenas*, the intertextual relations, oscillating between identification and transference, between metaphor and metonymy, reflect and refract the shadowy, opaque spaces of psychic life in which sexual desire may or may not be a sign of identification and identity. In this sense, the novel reveals that the contradictions of intertextuality and genre may be read as indexes at a narrative level of the social and sexual relations that are rife with contradiction, paradox, and enigmatic silences. In the end, the enigma of intertextuality *is* the enigma of sexuality.

Roland Barthes may have been alluding to the enigmatic function of intertextuality when he wrote: "The intertext is not necessarily a field of influences: rather, it is a music of figures, metaphors, thought-words; it is the signifier as siren." For Barthes, the erotic was always the point where language failed, where the reader encountered an impasse and was left facing the aporia that seductively begged to be answered. The erotics of the enigma in García Morales's novel is equally present and powerful. *El silencio de las sirenas* both reinforces and modifies the association of women writers with the genre of the love letter by casting doubt on the presumed heterosexual dynamics of epistolary fiction. The initial letter of the novel, "¿Volveremos a encontrarnos?", may now be answered in the affirmative. Left unsigned and detached from a single authorial identity, the letter signals the arrival of another voice of desire, which

¹⁹ My argument clearly draws upon Derrida's well-known analysis of the link between "genre" and "gender" in "The Law of Genre."

survives intertextually between the pages of literature. The siren signifier of lesbianism may be silent or she may be singing: like Kafka's Odysseus, the reader must remove the wax and listen.

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