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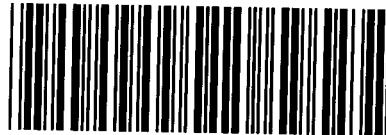
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EL SILENCIO DE LAS SIRENAS:
ADELAIDA GARCÍA MORALES' REVISION
OF THE FEMININE "SEESCAPE"

El silencio de las sirenas (1985) is, in the most literal sense, a revisionary text. Unlike much fiction, it does not aspire to impose a view of reality. Rather, by narrating the tragic effects that ensue when the protagonist Elsa allows herself to be hypnotized by María, the narrator, the novel turns our attention upon sight itself inviting us to consider how we see and to become conscious of the extent to which vision – particularly the vision of women (how they are seen by others and themselves) – may become a trap for the viewer.

The importance of seeing in *El silencio de las sirenas* is evident from the initial chapter, which accentuates the importance of visual stimuli, first, by emphasizing the absence of sound (the silence already referred to in the novel's title), and particularly, by concentrating on vision and eyes. As soon as she has entered the Alpujarras, the narrator notes the multitude of villages hidden "entre silenciosas cordilleras" (14) and reports that as she continued to climb, "crecía la intensidad del silencio que silbaba en mis oídos" (14). She awakens the following morning to discover that "reinaba un silencio de madrugada" (15). She reports that although she has often cursed the village for "su silencio y su quietud" (16), she would not be able to leave because the mountains often surprise her with "su silencio perfecto" (17). Only at the end of this chapter does María finally report a voice, that of the town's *sabia*, Matilde, who is introduced by "rumores... constituidos más por silencios y miradas temerosas que por palabras" (19).

In this absence of sound, visions – and eyes – are abundant. The narrator describes the insolent gaze of the villagers, noting that "Ante sus miradas me sentí invadiendo la intimidad de una grande y serena familia" (15). She describes them as having "ojos huidizos" and observes that "sus miradas... [estaban] absortas siempre en algo invisible para mí" (17). As I have already noted, the rumors about Matilde consist of "miradas temerosas" (19), and it is significant that the *sabia* is described as having "ojos [que] miraban con descaro y penetración" (19) and that her response to María's "good day" is the affirmation that it is a "clear" day – "Sí, hace un día muy claro" (19) – followed by the command to look, "Mire" (19).

As the narrator notes later, the villagers are afraid of Matilde's glance since they assume that her ability to cure the evil eye implies that she can also cast it: "Los demás habitantes del pueblo la miraban con temor. Indudablemente, alguien que tiene poder para conjurar el mal de ojo, también lo tiene para echarlo" (85). In this context many readers may choose to interpret her command for María to look, accompanied by her penetrating gaze, as an attempt to hypnotize the narrator. But readers may themselves have become entranced as early as the second paragraph of the text. In this paragraph (13-14) the nar-

rator lists nine items left for her by Elsa. As soon as these items are presented, readers – for reasons that we will explore later – conclude that they are signs and may fail to notice that they are visual objects that may capture our attention or seduce our gaze. A close examination of these objects reveals, in most cases, other eyes behind them. Three of the objects – copies of Paolo Ucello's painting of St. George and the Dragon, of Goethe's portrait, and of a Goya lithograph – are screens for the artist's gaze. In a fourth item – a photograph of the protagonist – we encounter the photographer's gaze. Behind the fifth item – the platinum ring uses to entrance the protagonist – one can visualize the hypnotic gaze of the narrator.

Surprised, we may turn our attention to other objects, such as the letters. But these, like the three works of art mentioned earlier, are reproductions. Moreover, the correspondence between Elsa and Agustín reproduces images from *Elective Affinities* just as Elsa's love for Agustín reproduces Otilie's love for Edward in Goethe's narrative. This novel (a copy of which is the seventh item left by the protagonist) is a visionary text, which may be regarded as a study of the danger of the gaze. The characters of Goethe's narrative initially entertain themselves in an effort to impose a design upon nature through the use of architecture. Later, however, they begin to impose artistic designs upon themselves by staging the representation of famous paintings in which they assume the role of the personages portrayed in them. In the final chapter of the novel one reads that Otilie – whose tragic death is reflected by Elsa's in *El silencio de las sirenas* – is laid to rest in the chapel to which the architect dedicated much of his work and that the architect stood mourning her just as "he had stood... before in [Van Dyck's painting of the – blind – Byzantine general] Belisarius" (271). We can conclude that the architect and Otilie have been frozen by the artist's gaze, and one might use the following description of Elsa from *El silencio de las sirenas* to describe them as well: "Su figura, profundamente inmóvil... pareció la de un retrato, detenida ya para siempre" (47). Apparently the artist's gaze is as fatal as the evil eye of the hypnotist, which deadens vision. "It is striking," observes Jacques Lacan, "when one thinks of the universality of the function of the evil eye, that there is no trace anywhere of a good eye, of an eye that blesses.... The evil eye is the *fascinum*, it is that which has the effect of arresting movement and, literally, of killing life" (*The Four*, 115, 118).

Aware of the dangers of the evil eye, readers may look away from the two texts (Elsa's letters and Goethe's novel), which promised but failed to protect them from the gaze, and may focus instead on the flowers. These flowers, however, are – like Otilie and Elsa – dead, and one may wonder if behind them there is not lurking a withering glance. A single object remains, then, in which one may seek refuge: the Chinese box – an emptiness. We make here a surprising discovery: unless there is an other looking back, we are left with an emptiness.

We may now begin to understand why readers assume the list of visual images presented by the narrator at the beginning of the text are signs – something from which they expect to receive meaning. We do not find it easy to tolerate the emptiness we have been left with (the Chinese box) and wish to fill it with meaning. As Otilie observes in *Elective Affinities*, "We put up with the unpleasant more easily than we can endure the insignificant" (169). Therefore

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we assume that the other objects listed with the Chinese box are signs; since they are located with it, we expect them to fill its emptiness. In other words, we assume meaning from contiguity or metonymy. In this respect, we share Elsa's madness. She too grasps at coincidences, assuming for example, that the initials E and O on Edward's drinking cup in *Elective Affinities* stand for Elsa and Otilie and mean that she and Otilie are the same individual (145).¹ The protagonist gives meaning to coincidences because she assumes they are intentional. But an intention requires an other. Consequently, the protagonist fills the emptiness of the Chinese box with a vision of herself by an other (the photograph) and with letters to an other. Those familiar with Jacques Lacan will perceive a relationship between these two fillers and the visual, objectified *moi* or "me" and the subjected *je* or "I," with which, according to Lacan, the human subject creates (me)aning in the emptiness of life.

It is instructive in this context to work through Lacan's gloss of Freud's famous dictum "Wo es war soll ich werden" (usually translated to mean that the ego should overcome the id, but stating literally that "I should become where it was") as it applies to *El silencio de las sirenas*. Before consciousness, Lacan states, "[n]ature provides... signifiers" (*The Four*, 20): S, pronounced *es*, German for *it*, which in Latin is *id*. Because it is a signifier, we can say that the unconscious is structured like a language. A signifier, however, is "empty" without a signified, so that the unconscious is experienced as "[r]upture, split, the stroke of the opening [that] makes absence emerge" (*The Four*, 26). Elsa – although it is not appropriate to refer to her as Elsa at this stage since this is "[b]efore strictly human relations are established" (*The Four*, 20) – is, like all humans, an emptiness or lack of being – what Lacan terms a *manque à être*. She – or, rather, at this stage of her existence, it – is a signifier in quest of meaning.

The subject's first attempt to find meaning is visual. Modifying Hegel's pun – in the "sense certainty" section of *Phenomenology of Spirit* – relating "mine" (German *mein*) and "meaning" (*Meinung*), we may note that the beginning of (me)aning is *me* – French *moi*, the imaginary self or ego that comes into being during Lacan's "mirror stage," when the still unspeaking infant (Latin *infans*) catches a glimpse of itself as an object of – reflected by, mirrored in – an other's gaze. At this point there occurs a first effort to fill the emptiness (the Chinese box) by inserting into it the image of self (Elsa's photograph) as seen and objectified by the other – captured in the other's gaze.

As speech is acquired, the self as object (Lacan's *moi* or *me*) can be related to another self as subject (Lacan's *je* or *I*). This is the self that is "subject to" society's symbolic codes, most notably language – so that now Elsa's letters to an other can join the image of her in the empty box.

¹ The narrator comments on the protagonist's tendency to assume meaning from coincidences:

bastaba una insignificante señal del exterior, algo en que ella pudiera leer una referencia a su amor, para que de nuevo cobrara aliento su esperanza. (120)
Eran signos cargados de significado que la asaltaban inesperadamente y que ella iba guardando y constituyendo con ellos las pruebas irrefutables de una historia misteriosa que ya no surgía solo de su interior, por muy insondable y desconocido que se le presentara. En torno a ella se habían ido congregando señales que la conmovían peligrosamente. (139)

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It is clear that *El silencio de las sirenas* – in which one discovers "una cuidadosa interrelación de sub-textos y sub-versiones" (Ciplijauskaitė 167)² – is repeating Lacan and Goethe, and an informed reading of it makes it imperative for us to recognize the innovative nature of repetition. As Lacan remarks, "Repetition demands the new. It is turned towards the ludic. ...Whatever, in repetition, is varied, modulated, is merely alienation of its meaning" (*The Four* 61). In other words, repetition is also revision. An example of this dimension of repetition is Elsa's interpretation of the initials E and O on Edward's glass to mean Elsa and Otilie. In *Elective Affinities* these letters originally stood for Edward Otto (Edward's full name), but Edward interpreted this coincidence as a sign meaning that he and Otilie were destined – intended, meant – for each other. It is clear in this context that Elsa's interpretation of these initials in *El silencio de las sirenas* is a repetition of Edward's interpretation of them in Goethe's text. This repetition is ludic or playful; it creates a movement – an example of Lacan's *glissement* or drifting.³ In this drifting the signifier (E and O) stands for three different signifieds: Edward Otto, Edward and Otilie, Elsa and Otilie. In this context, it is appropriate to expect new meaning to emerge from *El silencio de las sirenas*' repetition of Lacan (and Goethe). An important aspect of this new meaning is the text's treatment of seeing and being seen.

Elsa is obsessed with seeing. As the narrator remarks, "Parecía que su único deseo era el de contemplar, el de ser espectadora de una historia de amor supuestamente suya" (132). She is, moreover, especially interested in reflected images: "El reflejo era para ella lo realmente intenso. Y en eso decía que consistía precisamente la vida: en intensidad. No importaba que ésta viniera más del simulacro que de lo real" (31). In Venice, where she goes after her last encounter with Agustín, she becomes especially interested in "imágenes umbrías que respiraban ondeando entre oquedades pétreas, imágenes reflejadas en los húmedos espejos de los canales" (80).

These reflections both attract and frighten her. In Venice she is "presa de un miedo inexplicable" (80). Viewing the reflections of the buildings in the water, she reports that suddenly "se me aparecieron entonces como espectros amenazadores que abrían sus ojos a la noche y vertían un aliento helado que se me anudaba a todo el cuerpo" (80). Apparently, Elsa wishes to see but is frightened at the prospect of being seen; when the narrator visits her later (also at night) in the Alpujarras, she reports that she found her "cerrando las ventanas. Pues en cuanto caía la noche, se apresuraba impaciente a encajar todos los postigos, como si temiera ser observada por ojos sin rostro, ocultos en la oscuridad, tras los cristales" (95).

² Ciplijauskaitė's study, like this one, explores the intertextual dimension of *El silencio de las sirenas*. It is evidence of the richness of García Morales' text that, except for our attention to the Kafka story that gives this narrative its title, our essays, although they reach compatible conclusions, do not overlap.

³ Alan Sheridan translates Lacan's *glissement* into English as a "sliding" or "sliding-away" (61). To justify my choice of the term "drifting," which is more appropriate for an interpretation of *El silencio de las sirenas*, I note that the *Nouveau petit Larousse* defines *glisser* as uninterrupted movement over a smooth surface and gives as its first two examples the movement of a boat and of a swan in water.

Elsa is evidently afraid of being captured by an other's vision, and it is in this context that we may interpret her ambiguous declaration, "sólo soy ya un fantasma, santuario de tu imagen" (148). "[T]u imagen" here may mean either "my image of you" or "your image of me (which I saw reflected in your eye)," in which case "tu imagen" is the equivalent of Elsa's photograph in the empty box or of the Lacanian *moi* – an objectified self frozen by an other's gaze – a dead self, so that Elsa logically equates being "santuario de tu imagen" with being "un fantasma."

It becomes imperative at this point to clarify who the other on whom Elsa has become fixated is. Since the sentence just cited is from a letter to Agustín, the most obvious conclusion is that the eye that has caught her in its gaze is his. Agustín, however, declares that he does not believe Elsa's letters are really addressed to him: "no me siento destinatario de sus cartas" (141), and Elsa's own attitude toward him bears this out. When the narrator urges her to go to Barcelona and confront him so that perhaps they may live together, Elsa's answer is highly revealing: "Así por las buenas... vivir, vivir... ¡Qué prosaica eres" (135)! When the narrator later refuses to hypnotize her again and suggests that she needs "un hombre real" instead of her hypnotic visions, Elsa is even more specific: "¡No digas sandeces!... ¡Yo no quiero un hombre! ¡No quiero un hombre! ¡Sólo quiero sentir amor como lo estoy sintiendo, venga de donde venga" (147)!

In light of her declarations, it is clear that Elsa's other is not Agustín in Barcelona. Her other occupies a different space. The narrator initially assumes that this space does not exist and refers to "espacios irreales" (46), "un lugar inmaterial" (48), "ese otro lugar donde suceden los sueños" (55), or "aquella tiniebla suya de la que parecían brotar insistentes imágenes de amor y de muerte" (67). Elsa also associates this space – which Freud called "another showplace" – with dreams, but does not question its existence: "¿[N]o ocupa el sueño un lugar aún mayor que la vigilia, el sueño... que nos prepara, por la noche, un encuentro con aquella a la que acabaríamos por olvidar, mas con la condición de no volver a verla" (121)? In this passage, Elsa, who only later declares that she does not want "un hombre" (147), provides the first clue regarding her other's gender: "aquella a la que acabaríamos por olvidar, mas con la condición de no volver a verla." A more detailed clue is provided in Elsa's description of her arrival in Venice: "Y entonces me hallé en un espacio nuevo, no sé si de mi sueño o de alguna suerte de vigilia. Allí te encontré plenamente como no lo había logrado antes en Barcelona" (81). Evidently, Elsa encountered her other in Venice, where as we noted earlier, she saw – and became frightened by – her reflected image in the matrix of canals that make up that city. If we recall that Venice is the city of Venus or Aphrodite, we may begin to understand, and our understanding increases when we read in Erich Neumann's listing of the representatives of the Great Mother archetype,⁴ that "the Great Mother is Aphrodite" (178).

⁴ Since some readers may assume that the term "archetype" necessarily has transcendental and even mystic connotations, I must stress that I employ this term to mean nothing more than (as defined by Jung and Neumann and as explained in the body of this essay) a visual representation of a drive. The assumption that images are transcendental or, in any sense, definitive would be incompatible with my thesis that an important aspect of *El silencio de las sirenas* is its denunciation of precisely such a view.

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This is but a single instance of the many examples of the Great Mother archetype in *El silencio de las sirenas*. As those familiar with Jung's and Neumann's writings recall, this archetype is an imaginary or visual representation of one stage of the ego's separation from the unconscious. For Neumann the primitive and unconscious union the infant experiences with its mother when nursing – or, rather, the differentiation it does not yet experience – is the source of the image of the uroboros or serpent biting its tail: "The uroboros is properly called the 'tail-eater,' and the symbol of the alimentary canal dominates this whole stage" (27). Later "when consciousness begins to... recognize and discriminate itself as a separate individual ego, the maternal uroboros overshadows it like a dark and tragic fate" (45). This "maternal uroboros" – primal unconsciousness threatening to devour consciousness – is, nevertheless, separate at this stage, so that now the image of the uroboros becomes that of a dragon or serpent accompanying the Great Mother image of the origin of life (Neumann, 48-49, 262). The St. George myth – which *El silencio de las sirenas* evokes by the previously mentioned Paolo Ucello painting – is, in this context, the image or imaginary representation of a heroic consciousness defeating the unconsciousness from which it arose. Elsa, who sends a postcard reproducing the St. George painting to Agustín, asks him, "¿No te gustaría ser tan valiente como san Jorge?" (64), and Neumann's writings enable us to understand why, following Agustín's silent refusal, the protagonist becomes afraid of being devoured by the evil eye of the Great Mother whom she encounters in the matrix (womb) of the Venetian canals. Her reaction is not unlike that of Matilde's husband, who, when he receives the opportunity to demand that the earth ("Mother Nature") open to yield "una riqueza incalculable" (32), becomes afraid of being swallowed by a "lengua gigante" (32). The sirens referred to in the title and elsewhere in the text are yet another example of the Great Mother archetype.

The text's references to sirens may be interpreted in various other ways as well. On one hand, they seem to suggest that Elsa is a siren who is unable to attract and destroy Agustín (Ulysses). The narrator comments, for example, "Además, no comprendía que Agustín Valdés no estuviera ya fascinado, que las cartas, la voz, el amor de Elsa, no hubieran sido, para él como un canto de sirena a cuyo hechizo ya tenía que haber sucumbido" (143). Apparently, Elsa herself attributes Agustín's reluctance to succumb to her charms to her fear that he has realized that she is a siren. When in Barcelona he tells her, "entre bromas, que ella le despertaba un miedo incomprensible" (62), she responds by shouting repeatedly that she is not a monster, but after returning from Venice she writes in her notebooks of a dream illustrating her fear that he might discover "mi monstruosidad: yo no era en realidad una mujer, sino una sirena" (81).

On the other hand, readers should not allow these statements to prevent them from realizing that in *El silencio de las sirenas* it is Elsa who on several occasions is described as drifting (46, 129, 141, 152-53) and who in a repeated vision sees herself lying shipwrecked on a beach amid "fragmentos metálicos con restos de pintura y algunas piezas de hierro oxidado" (127), where she realizes she has died: "Allí he muerto yo" (112). In this vision she sees Eduardo – identified later as Agustín (124) – sail past repeatedly with the "aspecto... de un

loco" (112) as he gazes at the place where she is lying. Although Eduardo's – Agustín's – crazed expression as he sails by Elsa can easily be related to Ulysses' expression as he sails past the sirens, we should recognize that this is only one part of this vision. Lying dead on this beach, Elsa is indeed a signifier of a silent siren, but she is lying dead on the beach because she has already been shipwrecked there, and one of the silent sirens who called – or, rather, appealed – to her (precisely because of his silence) was Agustín.

Elsa's fear that she is a monster and the later equation of Agustín with a siren recall Hélène Cixous' essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." "Who... hasn't accused herself of being a monster?" asks Cixous (280), who later suggests that women "have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning" (289). But García Morales' text's treatment of Cixous is like its repetition of other texts, ludic, or revisionary. Although *El silencio de las sirenas* coincides with "The Laugh of the Medusa" in suggesting that men may be sirens, it does not conclude that one may simply "stop listening." Rather, citing the Kafka story from which it takes its name, it suggests that the sirens will be vanquished, not by repression (stopping listening), but by greater awareness or consciousness: "...de haber tenido conciencia, las sirenas habrían sido destruidas aquel día" (167).

It would be impossible for Elsa to "stop listening" to Agustín, moreover, because, as *El silencio de las sirenas* makes apparent, he is not speaking. Although Agustín appeals to Elsa, he does not call to her. It is Elsa, rather, who clamors for attention from him and who becomes frustrated because he ignores her. Agustín's silence does not mean that he is not a siren, however. Rather, his silence only makes him more dangerous since, as Kafka's text notes, "the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence" (431).⁵

We may become conscious of the nature of Agustín's silent appeal if we realize that he is a sign created by the gliding of the signified in a process already illustrated by the transformation of the signifieds for the E and O of Eduard Otto's cup. The original appeal – for Elsa and for all humans – comes from the "mother country" from which we are exiled. Although both Elsa and Agustín may be viewed as sirens, they are merely signs pointing to that primal landscape.

The narrator gazes at this landscape in her first encounter with Matilde, when the *sabia* commands her to look and points to "el triángulo invertido que el mar formaba en el horizonte, allí donde dos montañas se cruzaban" (19), but she appears to have glimpsed it earlier when she arrived in the Alpujarras and had "la impresión... de penetrar en un mundo extraño que se volvía hacia sí mismo, encerrado en una quietud intemporal" (14). In this landscape she observed towns that seemed to sleep "en las faldas de las montañas" (15),

⁵ Referring to this passage by Kafka, Ciplijauskaitė notes, "[N]o hay defensa contra lo no formulado, contra lo que sólo existe en la imaginación" (170). I am in complete agreement. Hence, the only defense against capture by the imaginary order is investment in the symbolic order. Elsa's difficulty is that she has not made this investment. Although she uses language, this language is "empty." Her letters to Agustín are a "reflection" of images from *Elective Affinities*. Her symbolic self or "je," which is insufficiently developed, is under the sway of the imaginary self or "moi."

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towns that were "sin sentido alguno como un paisaje anterior al tiempo de los hombres" (17). It is, of course, this virgin landscape that swallows Elsa in its "blanco inmaculado" (165) and in which she seems in death to "vibra[r] ...con la misma pulsación de la tierra" (165). Viewing Elsa's dead body enclosed by a uterine ring of mountains, the narrator feels a wish to leave her "en aquel espacio, tan ajeno al mundo de los hombres... que ella misma había elegido... como si por fin hubiera encontrado su sitio" (165). Evidently entranced by Elsa's reunion with "Mother Nature," the narrator, who never entirely reaches the level of consciousness that would free her from the sirens' call, feels "un hondo descanso" (165) followed by panic that recalls the fear the protagonist felt in Venice. Moved by this fear, she retrieves Elsa's "cuerpo rígido" (165) so that, stiffened by the rigors of death, it can be inserted in the earth's awaiting crack - the *nicho* Matilde had purchased earlier. For the narrator, Elsa has become a phallus.

The vision of the subject as phallus is a familiar one in the literature of psychoanalysis. Such a vision underlies Neumann's discussion of the confusion that sometimes exists between what he calls "primary" and "matriarchal" castration:

The threat of matriarchal castration impends over an ego that has not yet broken its tie with the Great Mother... and for such an ego, self-loss [is] symbolically identical with loss of the penis. But the primary loss... concerns a complete individual who makes himself independent by this very act. Here the loss has an emotional coloring, is expressed in guilt feelings, and has its source in the loss of *participation mystique*. (117)

Lacan's revision of these ideas sheds an interesting light upon Elsa's dilemma:

If the desire of the mother is the phallus, the child wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire.... Paradoxical as this formulation may seem, I am saying that it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that a woman will reject an essential part of femininity, namely all her attributes in the masquerade.... But she finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of him to whom she addresses her demand for love. (*Ecrits* 289-90)

This passage sheds light on Elsa's dilemma in a paradoxical manner. Her situation is the opposite of what Lacan describes: although she has addressed to Agustín "her demand for love," she does not find in his body "the signifier of her own desire." As we have already noted, she rejects the narrator's suggestion that she live with Agustín because she believes that this proposal is too prosaic - "¡Qué prosaica eres" (135)! Elsa does not want signifiers - prose, language. Rather she wants to see: she rejects the symbolic and is captivated by the imaginary *jouissance* of the silent, speechless "seescape" of the Alpujarras. She consequently becomes incapable of the one act that could rescue her from the sirens' fatal charms: breaking their silence.

Elsa's problem is not that she sees too much but that she has become fixated or entranced by a vision of what does not exist. A quotation by Fernando Pessoa placed at the beginning of *El silencio de las sirenas* warns, "Dios permite

que lo que no existe sea intensamente iluminado" (11). Dazzled by a vision of imaginary plenitude, Elsa is no longer capable of seeing at all. She is accurately described by the Biblical paradox that Lacan repeats in his discussion of the gaze: "They have eyes that they may not see" (*The Four*, 109).

What Elsa is incapable of seeing is the nature of seeing. Although it appears to function in an unconscious and straightforward manner, vision is not a simple matter. One does not see directly and immediately. That vision is unconscious does not mean that it is primary. The unconscious is linguistic, so that, as we noted earlier, nature's signifiers are prior to the imaginary order.⁶ Elsa is blind because she is unable to explore the history (in every sense of that word) of those signifiers. Rather than inquiring into the discourse that brought them into being, she accepts the images she perceives of women and men as eternal, transcendent, and unchanging – as archetypal.⁷

It is, for example, her acceptance of the archetypal view (image) of consciousness as masculine – illustrated by Neumann's discussion of the St. George myth⁸ – that makes Elsa believe she needs Agustín to be her "san Jorge" (64) and leads to her despair when this request meets with silence. It is essential to note, however, that Elsa is captivated by her view of consciousness as masculine because she is fixated on another – noxious, although seemingly positive – view of woman as Great Mother that underlies it. Julia Kristeva, repeating and revising Lacan, speaks to this question with clarity:

If the archetype of the belief in a good and pure substance, that of utopias, is the belief in the omnipotence of an archaic, full, total, englobing mother with no frustration, no separation, with no break-producing symbolism (with no castration, in other words), then it becomes evident that

⁶ As Hegel demonstrated in his discussion of "sense certainty" in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, sensing involves ideas. Hegel concludes that sense certainty must become conscious of itself. Although Lacan's concept of the (id)ea is different, he repeats – revises – Hegel when he suggests one must see oneself being seen (*se voir se voir*). Ellie Ragland Sullivan summarizes succinctly: "The path toward seeing one's Desire in relation to the Other(A) is not to be sought in auto-observation or through the eyes of others, therefore, but in the observation of observation.... Authentic analytic consciousness – as opposed to the robotlike refractions which we call consciousness – resides in seeing oneself being seen (*se voir se voir*) in the Other(A)" (93-94). The repetition of Hegel is evident in the word play: *se voir se voir* and *savoir savoir* (to know that one knows).

⁷ In the context of *El silencio de las sirenas*' critique of Elsa's capture by the imaginary and of her incapacity to engage the symbolic order, it is interesting to speculate regarding what considerations led Adelaida García Morales to dedicate this novel "A Víctor" (9) – presumably, to Víctor Erice, her companion and the director of the film version of her earlier novella *El sur*.

⁸ Neumann writes, for example, that the beginning of consciousness "which initiates the independence of the ego and consciousness by giving rise to the principle of opposites is therefore also the stage of increasing masculinity. Ego consciousness stands in manly opposition to the feminine unconscious" (126). It is precisely this aspect of Jung's and Neumann's psychoanalytic theories that Demaris Wehr criticizes in her assessment of them listed in the bibliography. Citing their identification of the masculine with logos and the feminine with eros, Wehr shows how such identifications handicap women by presenting as natural or transcendent gender differences which are historical and social (46).

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we will never be able to defuse the violence mobilized through the counterinvestment necessary to carry out this phantasm, unless one challenges precisely this myth of the archaic mother. It is in this way that we can understand... Lacan's scandalous sentence "There is no such thing as Woman." Indeed, she does *not* exist with a capital "W," possessor of some mythical unity - a supreme power, on which is based the terror of power and terrorism as the desire for power. (29-31)

Two of Kristeva's ideas merit special consideration in the context of *El silencio de las sirenas*. One is her insistence that women have no essential identity - an observation that is consistent with Lacan's comment, cited earlier, that "an essential part of femininity" is a woman's "attributes in the masquerade" (*Ecrits* 289-90). In other words, a woman's true identity is her ability to change her image - to revise herself. *El silencio de las sirenas* evokes the masquerade and the image of the feminine in its list of gifts to the narrator. One of these gifts is "un retrato de Goethe contemplando la silueta recortada de un rostro de mujer" (13). Another is "la reproducción de una litografía de Goya, en la que se ve a un hombre inclinándose sobre una mujer que oculta su rostro con un antifaz. Al pie hay unas palabras: 'Nadie se conoce'" (13-14). Both deal with the image of women - with the silhouette of a woman's face in Goethe's portrait and with the masked woman in the Goya lithograph. The inscription at the bottom of the lithograph suggests that women's identity is concealed by a mask or an image - and that, consistent with the passage from Lacan just quoted, women do not know themselves until they learn that an essential part of their identity is the capacity to change their appearance.

Foremost among Kristeva's ideas in the passage just cited, however, is her association of the desire for mythic unity with terror. Jung and Neumann's psychoanalysis is predicated upon the assumption that the integrity or wholeness - *participation mystique* or *jouissance* - lost in the process of differentiation can be recovered. In their view, one can accept the invitation of the sirens' song to overcome the separation from the mother that Neumann terms "castration." Kristeva, however, identifies the belief in the Great Mother - "the archaic, full, total, englobing mother with no frustration" - as a violence producing illusion and extols, instead, the "break-producing symbolism" or "castration," which Jung's and Neumann's system attempts to overcome. Like Lacan, she accepts that "Castration means that *jouissance* must be refused" (*Ecrits*, 324).

Oddly, however, Lacan's solution involves an encounter - though not a reunion - with another representative of the Great Mother: Artemis or Diana:

For truth proves to be complex in essence, humble in its offices and alien to reality, stubborn to the choice of sex, akin to death and, all in all, rather inhuman, Diana perhaps.... (*Ecrits*, 145)

The truth... is that which runs after truth - and that is where I am running, where I am taking you, like Actaeon's hounds, after me. When we find the goddess's hiding place, I will no doubt be changed into a stag, and you can devour me, but we still have a little way to go yet. (*The Four*, 188)

Actaeon, who illustrates the Lacanian concept of revision – seeing oneself being seen (*se voir se voir*) –, was transformed, not by integration, but by mutilation or “castration.” Speaking of Lacan’s use of this myth, Catherine Clément writes that readers should understand that they are being invited to share his fate: “to expose [themselves] to the snarling hounds” (47). In this context, to see oneself being seen is to accept castration, to surrender the omnipotent – manic and imaginary – enlightenment of *jouissance* in exchange for the humble *plaisir* of the wounded vulnerability of consciousness.

El silencio de las sirenas is an invitation to encounter Actaeon’s hounds. Although it is rich in images, its complex network of intertextuality encourages us to look beyond the immediately apparent – to discover language so that we may break the silence of the illusions that hold us in their sway. In this manner, it prepares us to share – and understand – the hope Ottilie expresses in *Elective Affinities*:

We may imagine ourselves in what situation we please, we always conceive ourselves as *seeing*. I believe men only dream that they may not cease to see. Some day, perhaps, the inner light will come from within us, and we shall not any more require another. (146)

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