

FEMININE CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE NARRATIVE
OF MARÍA LUISA BOMBAL AND
ÁNGELA NÚÑEZ HERNÁNDEZ

THESIS

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ABSTRACT
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The purpose of this investigation is to explore the writing of Ángela Hernández Núñez and María Luisa Bombal, set apart by country and time periods. Hernández is situated within post-Boom contemporary literature of the Dominican Republic and Bombal is situated within pre-Boom vanguardist literature of Chile. Bombal and Hernández share a

deep desire to recover, recreate, and redefine the female existence as portrayed through the protagonists of their stories. Bombal is grouped with an earlier generation of surrealists. Hernández is a contemporary writer who shares some of Bombal's characteristics. Indeed, surrealist nuances can be seen in the work of both Bombal and Hernández.

The works and respective protagonists under consideration in this study are: the anonymous protagonist of *La última niebla*, Ana María of *La amortajada*, and Brígida in "El árbol," by Bombal, and Faride of "Cómo recoger la sombra de las flores," Elba in "Más allá," and Teresa Irene in "Teresa Irene," by Hernández.

In this study, I will explore how Bombal and Hernández use dreams and fantasies as guides for their protagonists to achieve identity and autonomy. The protagonist, whose name is never mentioned, of Bombal's *La última niebla* and Faride of Hernández's "Cómo recoger la sombra de las flores" flee their realities and create illusions of imaginary love affairs through which they are able to enrich their unsatisfying lives. These two protagonists are alienated and as a result withdraw and escape into the world of their imaginations. Besides exploring similar themes of alienation, I will also discuss shared themes on death and liberation. In addition, I will elaborate on how the interior world of each protagonist is bound up with natural elements. Having strong connections with nature forms a part of their identities and allows them to bridge their two realities, the real world and their constructed, imaginary worlds. A conflict between the real world

and the world of dreams and fantasy pushes the protagonists to resolve their conflicts in different ways. Some abandon their fantasy. Some unite with nature.

CHAPTER I

FEMININE CONSCIOUSNESS

Fiction by female writers from Central and South America, including the Caribbean, has drawn increasing attention from literary critics during the last thirty years. Novels, short stories, and poetry written by women in these various regions explore numerous themes that are relevant to gender, class, and culture. Through their literary works a “feminine consciousness” emerges, giving expression to a collective female voice that has often been silenced or disregarded. These women writers are often able to redefine identity, recover their experiences as women, and reconstruct memory with a female perspective through their fiction, which entails a symbolic rebirth of “self,” especially the creative “self.” Approaching narration from a feminine perspective challenges the “master narrative”—by which I refer to the traditional patriarchal conventions used in much canonical literature—and allows previously overlooked sectors of a society to express themselves and to be seen and heard.

In the context of the latter twentieth century, Latin American and Caribbean narratives are most widely known for the sensational Boom literature that began in the sixties and progressed well into the eighties. Boom literature was a cultural phenomenon through which Latin American writers, many times as a product of exile, created an “intellectual separation from the motherland, or the *patria chica*, that has allowed these writers to return in their imagination to the very places they left behind” (Feal 119).

Boom literature is accepted by many critics as pertaining only to the 1960's but some of its characteristics can be argued to extend into the 1980's and beyond. Donald Shaw asserts that specific dates are problematic, because, "if the starting date is put too far forward, a certain number of major figures have to be presented as merely precursors; if it is put too far back, distinctions begin to be flattened and figures who are genuinely transitional have to be presented as already fully fledged members of the movement" (361). Key authors of Boom literature are: Mario Vargas Llosa, Augusto Roa Bastos, Julio Cortázar, Juan Carlos Onetti, Juan Rulfo, Gabriel García Márquez and, Carlos Fuentes, to name only a few on a list from which female authors are conspicuously absent. Jorge Luis Borges is widely accepted as a precursor to this remarkable literary movement, and María Luisa Bombal can be considered a precursor as well.

A brief definition of Boom literature is central to the exploration of the two authors presented in this study, María Luisa Bombal and Angela Núñez Hernández. The literary works of Bombal are important because they mark a change in Chilean literature from naturalism to surrealism. With the publication of *La última niebla* in 1935 she is considered a precursor to the Boom movement. Many critics, such as Amado Alonso, Cedomil Goic, Marjorie Agosín, Lucía Guerra-Cunningham, Hernán Vidal and Michael Ian Adams have commented on Bombal's unique narrative techniques, which many feel are ahead of her time. Hernández, having produced most of her writing from the 1980's until present day, is clearly at the other end of the spectrum. Each author represents a different phase relating to Boom literature. One of Shaw's conclusions about Boom literature is that its writers question their reality in a radical manner, which ushers in a rejection of "old-style realism, with its simple assumptions about time and cause and

effect” (363). These new explorations of reality lend a sense of mystery and ambiguity to the narrative. For example, an anonymous narrator, used in *La última niebla* and “El árbol,” forces the reader to take a more active role in interpreting the story. Hernández’s “Cómo recoger la sombra de las flores” involves three narrative points of view and also creates a stronger possibility for the reader’s participation with the story. Also, these different uses of narrator allow the protagonist of each story to develop a more subjective perspective and permit the use of dreams and fantasy. In contrast to the omniscient narrator, who conveys everything to the reader, the limited narrator leaves room for ambiguity—an ambiguity, that the authors combine with fantasy and the unreal to help reconstruct and reinvent the realities of their characters. This seems to be especially true for María Luisa Bombal and Ángela Núñez Hernández, who both use dream-like fantasies and imaginings of their protagonists to suggest a sort of metaphysical questioning of their realities. Both authors put forth a notion of “self” that is neither static nor stable, but rather is something that constantly transforms and evolves.

The broad objective of this research is to compare and contrast the writings of Ángela Hernández Núñez and María Luisa Bombal, set apart by country and literary movements (Hernández from the post-Boom contemporary literature of the Dominican Republic and Bombal from the pre-Boom vanguardist literature of Chile). Although Bombal’s writing precedes the height of Boom literature and Hernández is a member of the post-Boom literary era, both authors share a deep desire to recover, recreate, and redefine the female existence as portrayed through the protagonists of their stories. The pre-Boom era included surrealism, Dadaism, futurism, expressionism, and ultraism.

The post-Boom era, as it pertains to literature, is not so much a rejection of Boom narrative styles or tendencies. Donald L. Shaw asserts that the post-Boom is more reader friendly and less preoccupied with form and technique (*The Post-Boom* 20). Shaw also notes that, during the Post-Boom era, there exists an emergence of an important group of women writers previously absent (15). As for how Hernández compares to Bombal in stylistic literary tendencies, Hernández seems to renew some of the surrealistic tendencies used pre-Boom. At the end of each story, the protagonists are able to experience a certain degree of autonomy, using imagination and fantasy as their guides. In this sense, Hernández seems to mirror contemporary Cuban writers, who in addition to turning to these techniques and themes, often refer explicitly to Boom and Pre-Boom writers such as Alejo Carpentier.

Each character discussed in this study utilizes the creation of an alternate space or imagined reality as a reaction to her exterior world. This invented reality is an otherworldly realm that allows each female protagonist to dream and imagine an existence in a world of her own, thereby redefining her identity. The reality of Bombal's protagonists is internal and experienced only on an individual level, while Hernández's protagonists boldly expose their alternate realities to those surrounding them. These imagined spaces provide validity and affirmation to the character's lives otherwise not achieved due to restrictive societal impositions.

As each protagonist searches for her identity, she isolates herself from society, becoming more and more withdrawn. The alienation of the protagonist appears as a central theme in each of the works addressed by this study. As the protagonists turn within, it is almost as if a primordial force beckons them to their origins. In Hernández's

short stories “Teresa Irene,” “Más allá,” and “Cómo recoger la sombra de las flores,” each protagonist returns to nature as a means to return to her primitive state. Bombal’s protagonists in *La última niebla*, *La amortajada*, and “El árbol” have been displaced from their country life connected to nature and inserted into the city, where they feel disconnected from their origins. The force of nature and the importance of one’s connection with it serve as a gravitational pull back to their origins and allow each protagonist to symbolically be re-born and regain a sense of self.

Lastly, this research will confront the theme of death as utilized by both authors. At first glance, it might appear that the physical deaths of the female protagonists in “Teresa Irene” and *La amortajada* could be interpreted as a failure of each woman to exist independently within a society governed by patriarchal norms. While the topic of victimization should not be ignored when considering these narratives, the denouements of both works seem to suggest the attainment of a sort of individual liberation on the part of the characters. Social restrictions may have mortally wounded these protagonists, but through self-creation they can be seen to have achieved a certain degree of autonomy.

María Luisa Bombal

María Luisa Bombal was born on June 8, 1910 in Viña del Mar, Chile. Her parents were Martín Bombal Videla and Blanca Anthes de Bombal. She was one of three daughters whom the widowed mother was left to care for when her husband suddenly died nine years after María Luisa’s birth. During a 1979 interview with Gloria Gálvez Lira, Bombal described her father’s death as the only misfortune of her childhood because she deeply loved and adored him. Blanca took her three daughters to Paris, France where Bombal studied at Notre Dame de L’Assomption, later to finish her degree in philosophy at the

Sorbonne. In 1933 she returned to Chile and within the year published her first short novel, *La última niebla*. In the subsequent years she published *La amortajada* and the short story “El árbol.” According to Cedomil Goic, the publication of *La última niebla* is significant to Chilean literature because 1935 marks a change from the pervasiveness of naturalism in Latin America. He says that 1935 “es la fecha hacia la cual entra en vigencia la generación surrealista con la que inicia propiamente la literatura contemporánea en Chile” (144).

This marked shift away from naturalism reflects a younger generation of surrealist and vanguardist writers during that time. Until 1935, naturalism had dominated Chilean literature for three generations (Goic 144). Goic asserts that, “When María Luisa Bombal begins to write, she does so completely within the system of preferences of the new sensibility. She belongs to a younger generation than the surrealists; she moves with comfort and surety of means within the new rules imposed on the contemporary novel” (qtd. in Adams 16). Critics of the day regarded her narrative style as lyrical and innovative. Along with Goic, other critics categorized her within the realm of a new narrative structure in Latin American literature. This new wave of narrative structure incorporated levels of reality not used before. It utilized the uncertainty of dreams which does not present reality directly. For instance, this new structure did not say, “while I was dreaming about a different life, I imagined a lover.” Instead, it would say, “I saw a lover in the mist, calling me,” and reveals that the information is a dream through other events. During the eighties, when a new wave of criticism towards her writing style came about, it was said that Bombal “transcends the causal, temporal, and spatial movement that characterizes conventional fiction” (Kostopolus-Cooperman 2). Her narration is strongly

marked with metaphors and imagery that reflect the inner thoughts of her protagonists. A frequent metaphor for Bombal is water. In *Las desterradas del paraíso*, Marjorie Agosín describes this important characteristic of Bombal's writing as, “prosa acuática, acuosa, prosa, inmersa en lloviznas, neblinas, pozos profundos. . . espejos que reflejan imágenes a través del agua de un estanque en constante dinamismo” (7). The use of water as a motif powers the imaginativeness of Bombal's writing, perhaps due to the memory of the waves from her childhood, which she recalls nostalgically.

In the context of feminine discourse Bombal was ahead of her time not only in her personal life but in her literary career as well. In literary circles Bombal was very close to Pablo Neruda, Federico García Lorca, and, Jorge Luis Borges. In Chilean society during the thirties and forties women were and continue to be marginalized in society, as well as in a literary career. This is why Bombal is such a notable exception during her time. Bombal's protagonists reflect the conflicts arising from women's existence in a male-dominated world. She portrays the frustrated existence of middle-class Chilean women in these patriarchal circumstances. They find survival, she suggests, only in an imaginary sphere of reality.

Ángela Núñez Hernández

Angela Núñez Hernández was born July 16, 1954 in the small village of Jarabocoa in the Dominican Republic twenty years after the first publication of Bombal's first novel, *La última niebla*. She was the eighth of nine children. Her father died when she was two years old. As with the family of Bombal, Hernández's mother raised her children with an emphasis on education, believing that a woman's intellect was extremely important. Due to her family's difficult financial situation, Hernández also pursued education as a means

to overcome impoverished circumstances. In an interview conducted by Carolina González in 1993, Hernández describes how important education was to her mother. Her mother felt that education was the only “way we would be able to value ourselves as people, especially the women” (Gonzalez 1002). Hernández’s mother had been taught to read by her husband and was determined that her children would advance themselves through education. During the first seven years of her life, Hernández experienced a great deal of freedom playing in the countryside of Jarabocoa. This freedom to play outdoors and connect to nature is considered by Hernández as critical to her sense of identity. She describes her connection with nature as a fusion with everything and a feeling of “intimacy with all things” (Gonzalez 1001). This connection with nature is quite prevalent in her collection of short stories, *Alótopos*, published in 1989. Hernández was uprooted at the age of seven and sent to Santo Domingo to stay with an older sister. She recalls that this upheaval provoked in her a sort of existential crisis (Gonzalez 1002). She felt that the very essence of her being was linked to a life nurtured by the liberty she had experienced in the countryside of Jarabocoa. In the years that followed she moved twelve times from house to house — she does not detail whether the moves were with relatives or strangers — in less than stable or loving circumstances. At one point when she was thirteen she lived in a home in San Isidro, a place she simply called “that house,” where she underwent physical abuse. Hernández describes this time in her life as difficult, but maintains that it motivated her to complete school. Hernández described adolescence as a time of “deep rebellion against the ways in which the world works,” whereas her childhood had been “innocent and fulfilling” (Gonzalez 1002). These strong contrasts of perspective became a force that inspired her to create, “to make beauty one has lost in

another space to reestablish that lost innocence, that intimacy with all things” (Gonzalez 1002).

Despite the difficult circumstances of her home life, Hernández graduated from high school at seventeen and later entered the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, where she majored as a chemical engineer. During her studies at UASD in the 1970's she became involved in the student movement and other political matters. Her studies revolved around mathematics, chemistry, and physics, which made her feel estranged from literature. She recalls “measuring myself through intelligence and rationality, but feeling like something essential was missing, something which was more important than my career, than the party, than anything” (Gonzalez 1003). Pushing herself toward her academic goals, Hernández eventually found herself isolated from those around her and pursued her writing more seriously. She abandoned politics, engineering, and her marriage at that time. She recounts that, “I underwent a number of divorces in my life. I divorced the party, I divorced my husband, and I also underwent an intellectual divorce with my career” (Gonzalez 1005). Her first collection of short stories, *Las mariposas no temen a los cactus*, published in 1988 in Santo Domingo, explores problems that women face in the Dominican Republic such as a lack of access to abortion, education, and divorce. Later, in 1989 Hernández published her collection of short stories, *Alótropos*. This collection lovingly recreates the Edenic quality of her childhood experiences in Jarabacoa.

Hernández's writing incorporates fantasy and nature, as well as themes of love, alienation, and liberty. She also explores the feminine consciousness in original ways. Her style of writing is unusual in that she incorporates different genres and styles such as

journalism and diaries (Gonzalez 1006). She asserts that, in her writing, she does not obey a specific technique, but rather she hopes her short stories maintain their “intensity from beginning to end” (Gonzalez 1007). When Gonzalez asks if the pronounced appearance of a feminine consciousness in her writing is intentional, she calls it “spontaneous” and believes it reflects how she sees the world (1007). When asked to describe her style, Hernández resists defining her techniques: “I have never wanted to tie myself to the notion of technique, because I would be subordinating what's most important, creation itself” (Gonzalez 1007). It seems that the very act of writing is what Hernández values most, allowing her stories to guide her to enjoy the beauty of creation. Her description of her style leaves the reader to decide where she fits into the literary landscape. The time frame of her writing places her within the context of the post-Boom narrative. She belongs to a long list of female Dominican writers such as Julia Alvarez, Angie Cruz, Aída Cartagena Portalatín, and Loida Maritza Pérez. For the purposes of this study, Hernández’s technique and style will not be emphasized greatly. The focus here is on how the general themes of feminine consciousness relate to other subtopics of alienation, modes of liberation and self-definition. Her elaboration of these themes is sometimes similar and sometimes in contrast to the writings of María Luisa Bombal discussed in this study.

CHAPTER II

ALIENATION

An individual's self-imposed estrangement from the values of a society and from the family in which he/she lives constitutes a condition seen by Karl Marx in the nineteenth century as a response to industrialization. Marx uses the term alienation as a social application in his *Communist Manifesto* (82-87). One example of the process of alienation occurs when a person becomes unhappy within his or her community, family, or society and therefore separates him- or herself from these groups. Enduring a sense of restriction and alienation within these groups can disorient a person's sense of self so that he/she may lose it all together. In some cases the individual's reaction to such feelings can be conformity to the group; in other cases one may resort to estrangement by using spatial dislocation (Adams 7-13). In addition to spatial dislocation, an individual may also distance him/herself mentally. The protagonists of both authors studied here often imagine another reality in order to cope with such feelings. As a literary theme, alienation is frequently characterized as a loss of self.

In this discussion of alienation as a literary theme, I will refer to Michael Ian Adams' definition in *Three Authors of Alienation, Bombal, Onetti, Carpentier* as a guide. Adams explains that alienation, as it relates to literature in the twentieth century, is the experience of a lack of realism felt on the part of the characters. These characters, in turn, cover up what is real with an altered reality, an imaginary one. Adams goes on to

describe one of the characteristics of an alienated personality in literature as a “loss of individuality and, more importantly, a loss of a sense of reality” (8). The mental state of the characters in the works by Bombal and Hernández indicate a “reduced sense of reality” (Adams 8). Bombal's protagonists, as middle class women in Chilean culture of the early twentieth century, experience a lack of individual identity and uniqueness. During the 1930's and 1940's, when Bombal was writing her narratives, middle- and upper-class women had their place in the home, taking care of children and tending to their husbands' needs. Women were not as liberated as they became later in the twentieth century, so their position in society was passive and traditional. Their role in society left them with a heavy burden of anonymity. In contrast, and existing in an opposing socioeconomic position, Hernández's protagonists appear completely foreign as members of the society in which they live; others view them as enigmatic or crazy. In both cases, the female protagonists are alienated from their families and their societies, withdrawing from the exterior physical space of their existence and dwelling within their own constructed inner realities.

The inner realities constructed by the female characters in the stories of Bombal and Hernández operate in a sphere separated from those around them. These characters inhabit imaginary realms of existence that allow them to reinvent and rediscover who they define themselves to be. From an extreme perspective, the behavior demonstrated by the protagonists can be seen, by those who surround them, as somewhat insane. Erich Fromm explains that, “the person who dreams while awake, that is, the person who is in touch only with his inner world and who is incapable of perceiving the outer world in its objective action context is insane . . . the insane person is the absolutely alienated person;

he has completely lost himself as the center of his own experience; he has lost the sense of self" (qtd. in Adams 8). Insanity, according to this definition, is an extreme manifestation of alienation. Each character under consideration here demonstrates varying degrees of alienation. Bombal's protagonists are women functioning in society as alienated persons, whereas Hernández's protagonists can be seen as women who are insane, at least by the standards of the communities in which they live.

Although Bombal wrote in the 1930s and 1940s, while Hernández began writing in the 1980s, their views of women within society share similar characteristics. Both authors create characters who construct imagined spheres of reality that are both highly subjective and highly individualistic. Hernández gives her protagonists strong individual characteristics by creating enigmatic, almost supernatural characters. For example, in the short story about Teresa Irene, she becomes a waiflike creature who no longer lives within society; instead she resides in the wild, taking on unreal characteristics. Without specifically referring to Hernández, Adams points to the sort of personality fragmentation she describes as "an extreme of alienation" that relegates her characters to the absurd. Bombal's women are not depicted in an extreme manner, but as unconventional in their middle- or upper-class position in Chilean society. Both authors use the interior movement of each character to separate them from their circumstances through the processes of imagination and fantasy-formation.

La última niebla

Bombal addresses the theme of alienation in all three of the works discussed here. Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman confirms this, stating that, "all of María Luisa's heroines are individuals who have been displaced from their social environments. Inherent in their

perceptions of themselves and their outer realities is a progressively expanding network of antithetical images which artistically accentuate an alienation arising from the conflict between self and other” (3). The “antithetical image” that is used to contrast the protagonist’s real-life circumstances with her constructed fantasy in *La última niebla* is the mist. The mist acts as a nebulous image that makes it difficult for the character to distinguish between what is real and what is imagined.

Movement away from her real self and into an imagined space is the result of the forces that surround the protagonist, who is never named. In this case, the primary influence is her husband, Daniel. Her position as a second wife who has replaced, “su primera mujer que, según él, era una mujer perfecta” (13), causes her to retreat into a created world acting in opposition to her grim circumstances, an unhappy marriage. Daniel wants her to emulate his late wife in every respect. In this imitation of another, the protagonist allows herself to be alienated from herself, her family, and her society. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist is numb to her surroundings and displays a detached acceptance of her position. When she and Daniel arrive at their home in the countryside she barely responds to his conversations, behavior, and inquiries. For example, when Daniel has just finished justifying their marriage due to their long history of acquaintance, her only response to him is silence. She thinks to herself that, “Mi cansancio es tan grande que en lugar de contestar prefiero dejarme caer en un sillón” (10). When he attempts to ask her why she thinks they married, she disdainfully responds, “Por casarnos.” When Daniel laughs and tells her how lucky she is to have married at all, she responds, “Sí, lo sé,” then adds her thoughts: “cayéndome de sueño” (11). Her lack of explanation demonstrates an early response of separation and passivity.

Later, when she discovers her husband in emotional distress, she does not attempt to console him, but rather decides to ““fingir una absoluta ignorancia de su dolor”” (10). Instead of attending to her husband, she distances herself from her current situation, goes to bed, and falls into a deep slumber. This initial state of detachment increases throughout the work until she is compelled to design an imaginary space that she can enjoy.

Many of the elements in her surroundings symbolize, reinforce, and reflect the way in which her inner emotions are pushing her farther into herself. In the beginning when she first ventures outside, she encounters a funeral with a young girl in a casket whose face is “vacío de todo sentimiento,” just as she feels herself to be (12). The vision of the dead child in all of its emptiness impacts her greatly. She wanders into the forest, which is blanketed with a fog that mutes any sound, producing a disturbing silence that seems to transcend her present circumstances: “Silencio, un gran silencio, un silencio de años, de siglos, un silencio aterrador que empieza a crecer en el cuarto y dentro de mi cabeza” (12). This silence, which seems to the protagonist to have existed from the beginning of time, wraps itself around her, a vast mist that fogs her vision and ability to see her true existence. She feels immobile within the mist, which acts as an external alienating element. This stagnation grips her with a fear that causes a brief eruption of emotion: “¡Yo existo, yo existo...y soy bella y feliz! Sí, ¡feliz!” (12-13). This outburst could signify her desire for happiness and a contrast with the physical and emotional alienation she is experiencing, or this cry could be seen simply to resist the strange experience and to affirm her physical existence. Since she feels empty of emotion in her marriage, and unfulfilled due to Daniel’s desire for her to be someone else, she seems to

be discovering, through her experience with the mist, that she is her own person declaring her own beauty.

The protagonist is consumed with ardent emotions that are violent and full of life. Her inner and outer worlds are in conflict on a minute level. She describes her hair as once light, beautiful, and violent before she married Daniel. Now, it is bound to imitate that of his former wife and darkens more and more every day, an exterior reflection of her inner thoughts. This darkening of her hair that was once light coincides with the dying emotions within her, and could also offer an additional explanation of why she had cried out that she was alive. Her act of exclaiming that she is alive, and that she is beautiful, contrasts with how she describes her hair, as dull, dark and lifeless. She sees passion and ardor in her cousin Regina's interaction with her lover, as Regina approaches him with an intense gaze "como si estuviera siempre viviendo una hora de violencia interior" (14). Regina and her lover exchange glances of such fervent passion that the protagonist flees into the garden searching for the strong embrace of a lover. Once again natural elements accentuate and symbolize her desire for sensuality and fulfillment. The protagonist finds this lover's embrace with a tree: "¡Oh, echar los brazos alrededor de un cuerpo ardiente y rodar con él, enlazada, por una pendiente sin fin!" (15). On fire, figuratively, she undresses and submerges herself in a river to abate the flames.

As the narrative continues the mist plays a larger role in the drama. It begins to permeate the house of the protagonist and take over completely. The mist engulfs, distorts, and disembodies what is real:

La niebla se estrecha, cada día más, contra la casa. Ya hizo desaparecer las araucarias cuyas ramas golpeaban la balaustrada de la terraza. Anoche

soñé que, por entre rendijas de las puertas y ventanas, se filtraba lentamente en la casa, en mi cuarto, y esfumaba el color de las paredes, los contornos de los muebles, y se entrelazaba a mis cabellos, y se me adhería al cuerpo y lo deshacía todo. (17)

During the protagonist's first encounter with the mist, it causes a visual distortion of reality as she can barely make out the outline of the trees. She doubts that the trees actually exist, and has to touch them with her hand to prove they are there. In this part of the story, the protagonist feels afraid, as if the mist is attacking her, blocking her way, and immobilizing her. For Adams, the mist acts as not only a physical barrier but also symbolizes "parallel emotional movement" of the protagonist (19). He says about the mist that it, "becomes a barrier, isolating the protagonist from any emotional contact with external reality" (Adams 24). In this first encounter with the mist, she reaches out her hand to touch her surroundings because she is uncertain whether or not they exist, a gesture that symbolizes her own self-inquiry regarding her existence. She repeats this behavior later in the story, affirming that the protagonist is becoming "less and less in contact with herself" (Adams 17). As Adams points out, the narrator does not give the reader a precise description of how she is feeling. Rather, the natural elements are an "emotional symbol of her internal confusion" (17). This can be seen throughout the story as the mist takes on its principal function of clouding what is real, according to Goic, serving as a "shadowy border between dream and wakefulness" (qtd. in Adams 23). The boundary between the real and the imagined is nebulous to the protagonist. Therefore, the mist serves as an ideal ambiance for her to fantasize and create an alternate reality. The narrator loses herself and begins to create more meaning for herself in her fantasy world.

At this point the protagonist and Daniel travel to the city, not without the accompaniment of the mist, “la espesa cortina de niebla, suspendida inmóvil alrededor de nosotros” (17). During their first night in the city she awakens with a feeling of suffocation and feels as though she is drowning. The reader is not given an explicit reason for this but it can be deduced that the presence of the mist is creating an atmosphere of moisture that permeates her being. Filled with sorrow and unhappiness, she wanders again, this time through the avenues of the city. Her thoughts accompany the narration and she questions what she should do. Fleeing seems less enticing than death, but she is incapable of either, so strong is the grip of her passivity. While meditating on what can be done with her life, she begins to fantasize. One night she dreams that she is walking alone in the streets and sees a young, handsome man in the shadows. They embrace and kiss, and he leads her away through a garden and into a house. A passionate love affair begins, and she is able to realize all of the burning sensuality for which she has longed. The reader feels immersed in this night of passion alongside the narrator. The only curious component of these steamy pages is the absence of any verbal communication between the narrator and her lover. Yet, since she rarely speaks, the reader can accept this love scene as part of the “real” story.

The protagonist moves farther and farther away from reality as the story unfolds. The memory of her lover and their night of ecstasy sustain her in her stultifying existence. As she expresses it, “Tan sólo con un recuerdo se puede soportar una larga vida de tedio” (23). Unfortunately, what sustains her is not true self-definition and self-discovery, but an altered reality, one that is false and imagined. She cannot face herself fully at this point, nor does she want to. Her imagined lover becomes real to her; her

fantasy allows her to believe in a life of possibilities. As time passes from day to day and year to year, she looks for a sign from her imagined lover: “Espero. ¿Una carta, un acontecimiento? No sé, a la verdad.” Her daily tasks and tedious concerns seem to be tolerable to her if she knows he is out there. She asserts that, “me basta saber que existe, que siente y recuerda en algún rincón del mundo” (24). Her imagined identity hinges on the appearance of an imagined lover, which she awaits. The protagonist is not able to “awaken” from this dream-like fantasy and incorporate herself into the real world.

Susanne Jill Levine confirms what other critics agree upon about the metaphor of mist in this short novel: “Mist which deforms vision becomes an opaque fantastic object which inserts itself into reality” (143). The protagonist’s conflict is an inability to confront personal circumstances, so she evades them by fleeing mentally to another dimension of reality, thus alienating herself from those who surround her and from her “true” self. Bombal affirms this by saying that the protagonist of *La última niebla*, faced with the disillusion of her life, “tiene que llenar ese vacío con lo que ella hubiera querido que fuera” (qtd. in Munnich 28).

As the protagonist of *La última niebla* continues seeing what is not there and believing in what is not real, she struggles to maintain her own creation. After all, she does not know the name of her lover and has only experienced one amorous encounter. Just as her imagined world had settled in with the mist, it lifts and dissipates into nothingness. Her disillusion is initiated by the lack of evidence supporting the existence of her lover in a scene in which she tries to convince Daniel that she has left in the night many times before.

-Acaso no he salido otras veces, a esta misma hora?

- ¿Tú? ¿Cuándo?

-Una noche que estuvimos en la ciudad.

-¡Estás loca! Debes haber soñado. Nunca ha sucedido algo semejante. (33)

Desperately wanting to hold on to what occurred in the city as real, she tries to tell Daniel what happened. He asks her if she remembers the voice of her lover, and she cannot. As a result, she begins to doubt herself. She thinks to herself, “he mentido a Daniel. No es verdad que aquel hombre me haya hablado” (33). Now that she can produce nothing real to support her story, doubt disrupts her ability to continue creating her imaginary dimension, and she is thrown back into a world of monotonous daily tasks. Still, she finds it difficult to accept what her life has become, preferring to stay linked to her fantasy. Before, an image of the flames of a fire, and places such as the forest and the park had reflected remnants of her lover. Now, these places and things appear as they are, empty and without an expectant lover. Knowing that everything she imagined was false injures her deeply. At this point in the narration, a distinct transition takes place.

Coinciding with the suicide attempt of Regina, her cousin who experiences love through an extramarital affair, the protagonist begins to question her “real” self. How much time will pass before she stops seeing her imagined lover as a reflection in objects? How will she live if she no longer remembers him? (36-37). During this time the mist is no longer ever-present. The absence of the mist can be seen as parallel to the emotions and thoughts of the protagonist. Free from the mist of fantasy, her thoughts are approximating reality instead of what is imaginary.

The next time the mist appears the protagonist is out searching for the house of her lover. This time she describes the mist for what it represents “en medio de la neblina,

que lo inmaterializa todo” (40). The mist breaks down everything and doesn’t allow clarity; it is the veil that prevents her from locating the house. While searching for the house she cries in frustration, “¡Esta neblina! ¡Si una ráfaga de viento hubiera podido descorrerla, como un velo” (40). The alienating effect of the mist is emphasized in the following descriptive pasaje: “La niebla, con su barrera de humo, prohíbe toda visión directa de los seres y de las cosas, incita a aislarse dentro de sí mismo” (40). After encountering what she believes to be the house of her lover, she discovers that its owner was someone else, an old blind man who had died years before. Once again, she flees from the scene, as she has done so many times before when seeing what was real seemed too much for her to bear. She blames the mist: “Era mi destino. La casa, y mi amor, y mi aventura, todo se ha desvanecido en la niebla” (42).

In the final pages reality comes into the protagonists view, clear and unwavering. She notices how old her husband is, the same age as herself, and acknowledges the foolishness of her fantasy. The protagonist attempts to throw herself under the wheels of a vehicle, but this fails because Daniel pulls her away. The protagonist sees her failed suicide as foolish, she admits that, “el suicidio de una mujer casi vieja, qué cosa repugnante e inútil” (44). She asks herself: “¿Mi vida no es acaso ya el comienzo de la muerte? Morir para rehuir ¿qué nuevas decepciones? ¿Qué nuevos dolores?” (44). In the end she longer evades what is real. Her fantasizing abruptly ceases when she accepts her life as it is, a life of unhappiness. She sums up her life as “una infinidad de pequeños menesteres; para cumplir con una infinidad de frivolidades amenas; para llorar por costumbre y sonreír por deber. Lo sigo para vivir correctamente, para morir correctamente, algún día” (44). In the closing description, the mist symbolically mirrors

the reality of the protagonist for the last time and closes the story just as it had begun it: “Alrededor de nosotros, la niebla presta a las cosas un carácter de inmovilidad definitiva” (44). The real world in which the protagonist lives does not reflect the self that she wants to be. Accepting her dismal reality, she disregards the possibility of living as she desires, and so she also disregards who she could have become. She accepts being foreign to herself by not becoming who she desires. She is therefore forever alienated in her existence until death.

During the decade of the thirties, when Bombal wrote *La última niebla*, women in Chilean society were subject to traditional roles. The protagonist’s resignation regarding her role at the end of the story conforms to such social expectations. This society was strongly marked by patriarchal values to which women were expected to adhere. In Emma Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti’s essay “María Luisa Bombal y el silencio,” she asserts:

Las heroínas de la Bombal se enfrentan constantemente a la moral establecida y al deseo de liberarse de las ataduras que esta moral les impone. El mundo social en que les ha tocado vivir determina que sea el hombre el responsable de las decisiones que afectan el destino de la mujer. La mujer, por su parte, tiene como deber aceptar el dominio del hombre y no cuestionar por ningún motivo su capacidad de decisión. Desde aquí nace una gran dependencia y pasividad que la mujer está obligada a aceptar con resignación. (230)

This explains concisely what the protagonist in *La última niebla* has resolved at the end of the novel. It also sheds light on why she appears to be somewhat insane because her desire for fulfillment and individual identity is impossible under these circumstances. Her

life surrounded by an intense atmosphere of imposed morals instigates madness, stifling her creativity, her self-expression, and her identity. Since she is unable to realize an authentic self, madness envelopes the protagonist pushing her to an extreme where she constructs an imagined reality.

“Cómo recoger la sombra de las flores”

Moving forward from the decade of the thirties to the 1980s — the decade in which Ángela Núñez Hernández wrote *Alótopos* — we can view how Hernández’s protagonists have similar experiences to Bombal’s. Hernández’s characters are also alienated beings in their societies. “Cómo recoger la sombra de las flores” is the most recognized story from her collection, which won the 1988 Casa del Teatro Literary Prize. It is the story of a young Dominican woman named Faride who yearns to break the monotony of her village life. Faride’s character exhibits the same dissatisfaction in her life and experiences equal levels of alienation within her society as Bombal’s protagonist in *La última niebla*.

The short story “Cómo recoger la sombra de las flores” is narrated by three different voices in third person. The first narrator is José, Faride’s brother, who narrates the history of his sister to an anonymous listener; presumably a university professor. The anonymous interlocutor becomes a second narrator, whose interjections consist only of three italicized paragraphs, narrated as if he/she is contemplating the information provided by José. The last narrative voice in the story is Faride’s mother, whose thoughts about her daughter are shared in conversation with Faride’s father. With separate narrative voices, they suggest Faride’s alienation in two ways. The first and third narrative voices suggest Faride’s alienation from her family unit. The second narrative voice represents an objective outsider, part of the community and society in which Faride

lives. All three narrators agree that Faride is estranged from reality—familial and societal—and that she behaves oddly. Combining these multiple perspectives reinforces the story's thematic focus on alienation.

The story opens with a poem written by the protagonist: “Viaje en un viaje de cien regresos / de veleidades / fe de suspiros / vueltas sin giro / ratos reunidos / y en mi entrecejo sagrado cello de perecer / quizá volver” (95). This poem is strongly marked with a sentiment of yearning to return. It implies the loss of something or someone that needs to be regained; what or whom is a question not answered at this point. Perhaps this longing is for the return of a lover or a return to one's origin, of the sort described by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert in her article, “Allotropes: The Short Stories of Ángela Hernández Núñez.” Paravisini-Gebert notes that Hernández was uprooted in early childhood, a circumstance which “tore her away from everything that had meaning in life. Her stories, as a result, are marked by a strong yearning to return to the place of origin” (983). For Hernández, a loss of meaning in one's life drives one to rebel against society and generate certain levels of “unconformity with reality” (Gonzalez 1002). This “unconformity of reality” is evidenced in the behavior of the protagonist, Faride, within her society.

The opening poem leaves the first narrator, José, confused. José explains that his family found this writing underneath Faride's mattress and had hoped she left it as a clue to help them understand who she is. Nonetheless, its contents leave him baffled, and he believes that they will never fully comprehend the strange behavior of his sister. This brief passage opens the story, and within the first few paragraphs we see that Faride's

family does not understand what causes her behavior, and that she is alien to those who surround her.

As the narration continues, José describes Faride as the privileged daughter in their family; she is the only one with a degree from a university. Early in her life she had exhibited no remarkable characteristics. To her family, “era ella, sencilla, seria y reservada” (95). The use of the past tense is important because it provides a point of departure for the character, a beginning state that is altered in some way later. José has taken some photos of his sister to share with the person he is talking to. As this other person views the photos he/she notices in Faride’s eyes a dual expression, one of a “fuerza contenida: expresiva vaguedad, negra llamarada tras una engañosa cortina de vacío” (96). In Faride’s eyes is the expression of her inner being, a person of violence and ambiguity. To the anonymous listener she appears, on one hand, a normal being, and on the other hand, captivating and strange. This initial recognition of the dual nature of Faride hints at the later presence of two realities, the real world as others see it to be and a constructed imaginary world. The listener observes Faride’s family as they attempt to understand her uncommon behavior, but they do not encounter anything unusual in her circumstances. She is one of nine children, all raised in the same home with the same parents and the same customs. The listener explains that José, “el sexto, y a quien conozco mejor, es un muchacho normal entre los normales” (96). Clearly, Faride is an anomaly in her own family, and not only misunderstood by *them*, but also by an outsider. This suggestion by the first two narrators of Faride’s strange behavior sets a tone of mystery for the rest of the story, which is told through the eyes of others: her brother, the anonymous listener, and her mother.

As tradition dictates in Faride's society, she marries at a very young age. This tradition, as José describes it, stems from generations past: "en mi familia las mujeres contraen matrimonio antes de cumplir los veinte" (96). Without a very clear understanding of marriage and what it entails, the protagonist follows what the women before her did, which results in unhappiness. During the first four years of marriage she has two children with her husband, Raúl. Raúl never finds stable employment, so Faride returns to her parent's home with her children. José notes that, "al regresar con sus hijos a nuestra casa, ella estaba triste" (96). Her life has become a disappointment, leaving her sad and alone. She supports her children by working in a fabric store, and spends most of her time at home sewing tablecloths and bedspreads. Faride lives a solitary existence, made fun of by her peers, because her husband never returns from the United States. Since Faride spends so much time sewing and keeps to herself without complaint, no one suspects that a change is taking place: "Ninguno de nosotros, ni siquiera nuestros padres, había captado la paulatina transformación que se operaba en el interior de nuestra hermana . . . imprevista irrupción del mundo que se gestaba en sus adentros" (97). This passage indicates that Faride has been undergoing an inner change that is about to manifest itself outwardly. In the following paragraph, this transformation is brought to fruition and we can glimpse the imaginary world that she has constructed to live in.

At the breakfast table with her family, Faride tells her mother that she has found a man who, in contrast to her husband Raúl, a man who is extremely passionate and meets her needs: "Me carga diariamente para conducirme a la cama, y si vieran qué cama, blanda como una canción filtrada por el agua. Bastan mis miradas para comprenderme" (97-98). Stupified by her words, her family just stares at her in shock. She continues to

perplex her family when she describes her love affair in a fantastic fashion. Faride and her lover meet in a transparent glass house, their love-making fueling the growth of gigantic flowers: “La casa ha reventado de flores en los pocos días de amor que llevamos juntos. Flores agigantadas con cada minuto de amor” (98). A mountain of flowers has grown as the passion shared between the two lovers fertilizes them. Violets and poppies grow deliriously; fennel and sunflowers create beautiful umbrellas (98). This invention of an enchanted glass house where she and her lover meet reflects Faride’s inner world. United with her lover in the transparent glass house, she can experience passion and love that is absent in her actual life. She has created an Edenic world, fantastic, and surreal, apart from her everyday existence. “La casa estaba solitaria en el mundo,” much like Faride and her imagined lover (98). Paravisini-Gebert says of “Cómo recoger la sombra de las flores” that it is the fruition of disharmony “between a lush internal world where dreams and passions lurk and the mundane” (984). These passions are symbolized in the description of the house of flowers whose garden is a metaphor for Faride’s unbridled sensuality. Faride questions her family, “¿Qué haremos si las flores continúan encaramándose en el techo y llegan a ocultar el sol?” (98), which makes little sense to them. She is a person out of reach from others, very much like the flowers that ascend so high that they might hide the sun. Her statement that her lover “sabe que el jardín crece sólo para mí,” (98) affirms that the house and its garden are creations of her own making. Faride does not want to accept her life as it is, and would rather live in a sphere of her own creation where she can be fulfilled. Paravisini-Gebert concurs that, “Faride yearns to withdraw from the village life into the enchanted space of profuse nature and fulfilled passion” (985).

Much like the protagonist in *La última niebla*, Faride rejects reality and dreams of an existence that captures her true, creative self. In her imagined reality she would not be subject to the prescribed roles that society has imposed on her. She rejects tradition and opts for an affair, albeit imagined, to enrich her unsatisfying life. As a result of her fantasizing, she creates a separate, alienated existence outside the realm of her family's understanding. Not only is her "house of flowers" an illusion, but she, herself, becomes an enigmatic, incomprehensible character.

The anonymous listener, in an effort to comprehend Faride's mysterious behavior, contemplates how she has arrived at this bizarre state of mind: "¿De dónde extraía sus figuraciones? ¿Puede afirmarse que obedecen a un estado de alucinación? ¿Tal vez un tipo particular de esquizofrenia?" (99). According to Adams' description of the alienated character, Faride represents a divided person, having two selves (9). Using R. D. Laing's explanation of the term, a schizoid's "experience is split in two main ways: in the first place there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself. Such a person is not able to experience himself 'together with' others or 'at home in' the world" (qtd. in Adams 9). As an alienated character, Faride is thus doubly-divided. On one hand she lives in a magical and enchanted world estranged from reality. Her bizarre behavior in turn serves to alienate her socially from her family and associates.

Faride continues to tell stories of her passionate love affairs to her family; the next affair is with the director of the Institute of Oncology. Faride describes each affair with rich, poetic fluidity, adding elements of fantasy. For example, she and her lover are suddenly transported, still seated in office chairs, from his lab to the seaside:

“permanecemos sentados en dos sillas de madera, sobre las rocas, frente al mar.” She adds dreamily that, “las otras personas estaban lejos. Las rocas sobresalían sobre el mar, navegábamos en un aire añil a varios metros por encima del agua” (101). Faride fuses mundane objects with impossible physics. She and her lover are transported to the sea in wooden chairs and are suspended in the air. In this passage, Faride is physically distancing herself from others, pointing to her growing sense of estrangement.

Her poetry also reflects her inner thoughts of alienation: “Existir y no ser / es un milagro / ser el borde de lo indescifrable / equidistancia de la aceptación / una cordura al margen de preceptos / un lúcido candor / una dorada vértebra escondida / encaje de violetas circulares / que forman un violeta corazón” (102). These verses could be seen as Faride’s poetic definition of self: that she exists but isn’t herself. She cannot be true to who she is due to her life’s restrictions. She defines herself as “el borde de lo indescifrable,” indecipherable to others and a creation of her own making. Faride is beyond the acceptance of her community and family. She seems to be saying that she is the gray matter that exists between what is sane and insane, a person without definition. Imagination and fantasies are the only vehicles Faride can employ to bear the insipidity of her life. Hernández’s protagonist, like Bombal’s heroines in *La última niebla*, *La amortajada* and “El árbol” are motivated, “por placeres, deseos sensuales. Se encierran cada vez más dentro sí mismas ya que los alrededores que las circundan poseen otros valores diferentes” (Agosín “Aproximaciones” 190). Faride yearns for sexual pleasure and fulfills these needs by using her imagination. Clearly, the values of those who surround her do not coincide with hers, and this difference creates an invisible barrier between her and her family in their everyday lives. She is perceived by others as a

madwoman, detached from reality. Her brother cannot reach her because she has become somehow foreign; he explains that, “tampoco me atrevía a tocarla, la presentía distinta y ajena” (103). Her mother also feels estranged from her daughter: “no era mi hija quien hablaba” (102).

When mother and daughter attempt to communicate, it is clear that an enormous gap of understanding exists between them. When confronted by her mother about the “cuentos,” Faride answers with enigmatic responses and existential questions.

-No son cuentos. Esta poesía la escribí hace cincuenta años. Es mía. No hago cuentos, nunca me aprendí uno.

-¿Me estás diciendo que son verdades, realidades?

-¿Qué es la verdad, mamá? ¿Qué son realidades?

-La verdad es la verdad, la misma que aprendiste desde niña. La realidad es que tú tienes veintitrés años. No puedes haber escrito nada cincuenta años atrás. (103)

Her mother attempts to answer Faride’s strange questions in hopes of pulling her daughter back into the world as other people understand it, but does not succeed. Faride has become so connected to her constructed, imaginary world that she is either incapable of, or resistant to, adapting to the world as understood by others. Her mother’s understanding of how a person behaves in daily life is contradictory to Faride’s behavior and experiences in her fantastical world. The expectations of her mother’s reality are simple: “¡La realidad es comer frijoles y plátanos, parir un muchacho, trabajar!” (103). Exasperated with Faride’s endless daily stories that cannot be understood by anyone around her, her mother attributes her delirium to Raúl’s failure to return. Faride’s parents

alienate her, even more than she alienates herself, by keeping the siblings away from her: “Nos apartaban de la mesa, nos hacían salir corriendo hacia la escuela, nos alejaban de ella” (104).

Faride continues to create fantastic stories, which she tells to her family. In one of these stories she is looking at a dissected bird. She describes it as a prehistoric bird, which comes to life and attacks her. In another bizarre example, she describes a small house that was given to her as a gift from her lover. Even though Faride’s parents keep her siblings from her, they frequently eavesdrop on their conversations. Her siblings overhear the conversation about the miniature house, so she describes it to them, elaborating about the small doors and the tiny contents of the rooms. Behind one of the doors she finds a poem: “Al abrir una puertecita, me encuentro con un poema de tres líneas y una pintura explicativos de la historia de ese año” as well as, “mil años de historia de la India en un millar de pinturas y mil poemas” (105). She tells her siblings that children from India learn from these miniature houses instead of books, which leave her siblings perplexed. This, like many of her stories, is interjected without any introduction or transition and is meaningless to Faride’s family. Neither can her stories be ordered chronologically, which creates a disjointed feeling within the narration. This technique helps emphasize the disjointed dual realities of Faride’s character.

Her lover from the glass house once again returns, and she shares this with her father and his friends while they are playing dominoes. Up to this point in the narration, she had only shared her fantasies with her family. Now she has blurted out one of her poems to her father’s friends. This occurrence convinces her parents to take action; gossip has begun to spread throughout the village, so they decide to seek help. Her

mother and father take her to a psychiatrist who cannot help her because he believes she is merely a talented writer who creates some original poems. Faride's character continues to unravel as the story continues.

Her dream-like state has almost completely overtaken her: "sus sueños fueron ganando terreno con el transcurso de los días. Por las mañanas se hacía difícil despertarla" (108). Faride is slipping into a permanent state of dreaming. Her days are a series of waking, eating, and returning to bed. She follows this pattern, according to her brother, so that she can "continuar el sueño interrumpido" (10). Out of touch with reality and with herself, she is in a constant state of alienation. She becomes a sleepwalker who cannot separate her dreams from her reality. Faride has trapped herself in an illusion that her dreams are real because of the circumstances that surround her. As a result of distorting what is real and creating an alternate reality, Faride begins to disintegrate as a cohesive personality. Her stories become more absurd and difficult to decipher. They reflect Faride's state of extreme alienation, which can be symptomatic of schizophrenia or neurosis. As Faride's personality fragments, her relationships also decompose, as do the stories that she uses to describe herself (Adams 13).

Faride's brother describes the continuing deterioration of his sister's behavior, noting that she stares blankly at her surroundings, walks inertly, and repeats her stories (108). Her brother also notes her two separate realities: "Ensimismada e inexpresiva, [Faride] tardaba hasta tres cuartos de hora en trasponer la franja divisoria de sus dos realidades" (108). Living within her two realities — this world and the world of her imagination — results in her inability to fully function in either one, as her mother notes: "si mi hija no estaba por entero en esta realidad, tampoco lo estaba en la otra" (110).

Faride does not connect to reality but seems to merely physically reside in the world as others perceive it. She prefers the world of her imagination as one that fulfills her and validates her identity. Faride's character, along with many of Hernández's characters, has enigmatic and enchanted qualities due to her choice to 'reside' in the imaginary world she creates. In comparison with the protagonist of *La última niebla*, Faride is a more mysterious person. Despite the fact that each character uses imagination and dreams as a medium to transport her from reality, Faride mentally distances herself further into her imagination and does not return. The characters move themselves beyond their mundane existences and identities to an alternate, imaginary sphere. Hernández's story concludes with a final exclamation from Faride that she has found a solution: she now knows "cómo recoger la sombra de las flores, cómo evitar que oculten el sol y cómo andar en transversal por los instantes" (110). This solution of course is nonsensical in the real world and applies to her other constructed reality within the enchanted glass house. She decides to leave her family's world to take up permanent residence in the glass house, where she can experience the fulfillment of her passions. In the end, Faride sleeps indefinitely, having left "este lado de la realidad" for her dream (110). Her heartbeat vanishes after six months of slumber and she is surrounded in a veil of pink.

Both Faride and the protagonist of *La última niebla*, experience alienation from their societies and families. According to Marjorie Agosín in *Las desterradas del paraíso*, Bombal's protagonists are "enajenadas y alejadas de todo contacto directo con la sociedad que las rodea" (12). Hernández's protagonists also appear mad and are distanced from the contact of others. Both heroines discussed here are motivated by a desire to be loved and to experience sexual passion. Both create imagined realities and

imagined lovers with whom they can fulfill these desires. Using her imagination and constructing fantasies are the keys for each character to more fully understand her individual identity. The characters are not capable of achieving an understanding of their existence through traditions such as marriage, maintaining the home, and caring for children. They yearn for a completely separate, fantastical world where they are free, autonomous beings. However, the outcome in both cases is neither autonomy nor freedom. Instead one character resigns herself to an unhappy existence, while the other withdraws so far into herself that she perishes.

The protagonists nurture romanticized illusions of who they want to be without being able to achieve this within their societies. The world of their imagination is the only place where they can realize a sense of self. It is only in the world of dreams that the characters achieve a sense of control and fulfillment. In actuality, they are alienated persons in their communities. Each character finds herself in conflict between the world of others and their constructed, imaginary worlds. The resolution of this conflict is different for each.

The protagonist of *La última niebla* increasingly detaches from her husband because he lets her know that she is not the wife he desires. She withdraws and escapes into the world of her imagination, thereby reinventing herself through fantasy. Faride detaches from her mundane life so that she can construct a more imaginative and creative space in which to exist. She separates herself from her family by inventing stories. Both characters alienate themselves from those around them, using a strategy of escape to achieve fulfillment of passion. Both characters attempt to re-invent themselves in their

imaginary worlds. Faride withdraws so far that she dies in the real world, whereas the protagonist of *La última niebla* resigns herself to an alienated existence.

CHAPTER III

NATURE'S ROLE

The role of nature and its relationship to one's essence has been frequently addressed in literature during the latter decades of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, naturalism, as a literary movement, portrayed the character of human beings as a product of their social environment and heredity. Naturalism developed out of realism which mirrored life with fidelity using realistic, believable methods (Cuddon 407-408). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, naturalism was a very popular trend in Latin America. During the twentieth century, nature, as it figured in literature, changed. The tendency to depict characters in a believable, everyday reality gave way to vanguardist movements. Writers began to experiment with the narrative form, opting to depict their subjects in a highly symbolic manner. One vanguardist tendency known as surrealism became popular and allowed writers to depict their subjects and reality through the lens of the subconscious mind. According to Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, surrealists concerned themselves with synthesizing the unconscious mind with the conscious mind through "dreams and hallucinations" (652-653). Writing by tapping into the subconscious mind, according to E. San Juan, Jr., through "dreams, fantasies, and irrational behavior" (40) was a revolution in literature. In San Juan's view, "surrealism exemplified the avant-garde view that wrestling with language generates the experience of illumination" (40). In the 1930s

many writers were disdainful of literal interpretations of texts and objects within texts. Rather, they preferred to focus on the poetic undertones and possible undercurrents. These poetic undertones surfaced as a result of juxtaposing the conscious and the unconscious mind, utilizing contradictions between madness and reason, dreams and action (San Juan 35). Surrealism offered the writer an opportunity to alter his/her understanding of reality by considering it from a unique angle. This technique is utilized in both Bombal's and Hernández's writings.

As mentioned earlier, Bombal is grouped with an earlier generation of surrealists. Hernández is a contemporary writer who shares some of Bombal's characteristics. Indeed, surrealist nuances can be seen in the work of both Bombal and Hernández. Both authors use objects as highly symbolic. Their protagonists are also depicted in a less than believable manner; reality is presented as subjective. Instead of an omniscient narrator, which was frequently used in the naturalism movement, each uses either an anonymous narrator or the inner thoughts of the protagonists to convey the plots. The world of dreams and imagination strongly influences Bombal's and Hernández's protagonists' creation of an alternate reality. The characters' interactions with the elements that surround them in nature form their interpretation of reality. Both Bombal's and Hernández's protagonists exhibit strong ties with nature. Nature is a primordial force for them, a place of origin and returns. In their natural worlds — in the country and outdoors — they are able to understand their identities. In regard to Bombal, Agosín asserts that, "existe en las heroínas una sensibilidad femenina que actúa en conjunción con la naturaleza y en una simbiosis muy especial vinculada a lo intuitivo y mágico de sus

seres” (“Aproximaciones” 194). This symbiotic relationship with nature is also prevalent in Hernández’s heroines.

In particular, the women in Bombal’s “El árbol” and *La amortajada*, and Hernández’s “Teresa Irene” and “Más allá” are all connected with the natural elements that surround them. The interior world of each of these protagonists is bound up with the elements that are in nature, forming an integral part of their sense of identity. The use of images such as earth, rivers, and trees metaphorically represent themes of self-awareness and liberation. Symbolically, natural elements are used as a means to transport the protagonists through a process of transformation and individuation.

“El árbol” and “Más allá”

“El árbol,” perhaps one of Bombal’s most well known stories, centers its narrative around the thoughts of an upper-class, Chilean wife, Brígida, who has just left her unhappy marriage. The story begins in a concert hall where she is listening to the piano music of Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin. She allows the music to transport her through a series of flashbacks directed by each musical piece. During these flashbacks we learn about her childhood, her marriage to Luis, and how she transforms from a stereotypical woman of her time to one who rebels against her circumstances.

The entire plot of the story is narrated through the contemplations of the protagonist as she views the world from the confined space of her home. Her enclosure is a result of society, according to Agosín, who suggests that, “efectivamente, la realidad de Brígida es una realidad confinada, determinada por una sociedad rígida y pragmática” (*Las desterradas* 50). The protagonist’s world is anchored in a loveless marriage to a much older man who disregards her as a person because of her age and immaturity. Other

members of the protagonist's community have called her "tan tonta como linda" (46), attributes that, as she looks back upon her life, she admits she has accepted for herself without question. When she asks Luis why he married her, he says it was "porque tienes ojos de venadito asustado" (48) implying her ignorance and innocence. While she is married to Luis, Brígida appears to be void of any sense of self. Instead, she conforms to what other people's perceptions are of her. Reflecting upon her marriage to Luis, she remembers lying in bed next to him feeling "como una planta encerrada y sedienta que alarga sus ramas en busca de un clima propicio" (48). This thirsty plant with outstretched arms in search of her own climate symbolizes Brígida's suffocated state. It also affirms her unfortunate position of dependence on Luis and suggests that she is lacking an identity of her own.

There are two spaces in which the story's flashbacks take place: the bedroom and the dressing room. In the bedroom Brígida repeatedly experiences a feeling of suffocation due to her unfulfilling marriage to Luis. The air in the bedroom is stagnant and stifling, so she seeks another area of the house where possibly she can breathe a little better. The dressing room is where Brígida takes refuge in order to contemplate her existence. Although the dressing room is another confined space, Brígida is able to look through the window and admire a beautiful rubber tree. Gazing upon the rubber tree Brígida is filled with a calming sensation. The narrator expresses her thoughts: "¡Qué agradable era ese cuarto! Parecía un mundo sumido en un acuario" (49). Her emotions while admiring the tree contrast with her emotions while she is in the bedroom, where she feels trapped and pessimistic. The dressing room is full of light and optimism. When she is in this room she experiences a connection with the tree outside her window; this room becomes for her a

place of refuge. The tree represents an outside world of possibilities for Brígida. The protagonist personifies the tree outside her window as friend and protector, and she identifies emotionally with the tree. Her ability to connect with the tree as if it were a person allows her to daydream. Brígida's imaginary interaction with the tree is a means of transport according to Joseph Campbell, who maintains that she crosses "from reality to fantasy on a bridge of dreams and day dreams" (qtd. in Adams 13). Her deep connection to the rubber tree allows her to construct an imaginary world. Bombal's use of the tree as a bridge to cross from reality to fantasy blurs Brígida's two 'worlds' making it difficult to distinguish one from the other. Brígida lives in the confines of her house, but exists more fully in her daydreams. While Brígida is in her dressing room gazing out at the tree for hours, she feels a greater sense of security and well-being than she does in her marriage. Expressing her inner thoughts, she says that, "una podía pasarse así las horas muertas, vacía de todo pensamiento, atontada de bienestar" (54). Her connection to the tree fills her with a mindless happiness. Brígida does not have to worry about what others think of her while she spends time staring out the window. Connected to the tree she permits herself the freedom to feel and dream.

Bombal's description of the tree as solace and release for the protagonist is very sensorial and poetic: "Cañan páginas luminosas y enceguedoras como espadas de oro, y páginas de una humedad malsana como el aliento de los pantanos; cañan páginas de furiosa y breve tormenta, y páginas de viento caluroso, del viento que trae el <<clavel del aire>> y lo cuelga del inmenso gomero" (53). This narrative technique gives the reader a sense of perceiving the world through the eyes of Bombal's protagonist. During her time in the dressing room looking at the tree and contemplating her life, Brígida begins to

complain about her marriage. She comes to view it as nothing more than a set of mundane obligations and customs. She reflects that, “tal vez la vida consistía para los hombres en una serie de costumbres consentidas y continuas” (49). Agosín perceives these complaints as a rebellious act, “en contra de este mundo organizado, pragmático y programado” (*Las desterradas* 53). Although others see Brígida as ignorant, she is not as foolish as she might appear. She acutely observes the society that she lives in and how men behave. She describes the roles of men as programmed acts that form a delicate and necessary cycle. If this cycle of customs and daily acts is interrupted, she believes that, “probablemente se producía el desbarajuste, el fracaso. Y los hombres empezaban entonces a errar por las calles de la ciudad, a sentarse en los bancos de las plazas, cada día peor vestidos y con la barba más crecida” (50). Clearly Brígida is not completely ignorant, but rather no one has given her the opportunity to express herself. Also, since she passed from her father’s house to her husband’s house, from one confined space to another, she has not experienced the world fully. Through her connection with the tree she becomes aware of herself and how others have simply passed over her as a contributing member of society. This awareness provokes a change in her actions toward Luis. She becomes aware of her inability to interact or communicate with her husband on any level. During the hours she spends staring at the tree, she sees that she has been incapable of communication. As she reflects on her marriage to Luis, she realizes that she could not even insult him: “en vano buscó palabras hirientes que gritarle. No sabía nada, nada. Ni siquiera insultar” (50).

After her frustrated attempts to communicate with Luis, she tries to manipulate him with silence. Her decision to stop speaking signals a change of behavior in Brígida,

and she discovers that she has influence over Luis by ignoring him. One evening while they are eating dinner, Brígida describes how she “comía frente a su marido sin levantar la vista, contraídos todos sus nervios” (51). Luis becomes furious and leaves the table and the house. Even though Brígida feels nervous opposing her husband, she has acted out of frustration and a need for change. After her silent meal with Luis, she thinks about leaving her marriage. However, she does not execute her actions; instead she takes refuge in the presence of the tree.

As time passes, Brígida’s marriage to Luis becomes more and more unbearable. He leaves her every day confined to their home. She sees her life as “mediocre” and “irremediable” (53). Looking once again to find comfort and solace in the tree outside her dressing room, she contemplates her situation. During this visit, the rain is pouring down and she describes how the tree seems to be receiving “serenamente la lluvia que lo golpeaba, tranquilo y regular” (53). Nature reflects her own emotional state and she finds comfort in this. In much the same way as the tree endures the pouring rain, she feels resolved to accept her mediocre life.

Brígida’s emotions are reflected in her perceptions of the tree outside her window. Nature allows her to perceive her life for what it is and what it could have been. While observing some children playing hide and seek in the large roots of the tree, Brígida hears laughter: “el árbol se llenaba de risas y de cuchicheos” (53). She senses the joy and delight that the children experience while playing and wishes to participate. She responds by banging her hands on the window pane and frightening the children.

With the progression of the story, the tree becomes increasingly more important. It continues to coincide with the emotional state of Brígida. With the arrival of autumn

and the changing of the tree's leaves, Brígida is filled with melancholy. Once again, the tree's appearance reflects Brígida's emotional state: "el árbol enrojecía, se ensombrecía como el forro gastado de una suntuosa capa de baile. Y el cuarto parecía ahora sumido en una copa de oro triste" (54). These rich and sumptuous colors of autumn seem to envelop Brígida in sadness. However, Brígida's melancholy has a sweet and peaceful side to it, one of "resignación, introspección y pasividad" (Agosín *Las desterradas* 51). In her passive state, she neither loves Luis nor suffers: "por el contrario, se había apoderado de ella una inesperada sensación de plenitud, de placidez. Ya nadie ni nada podría herirla" (54-55). Her peace and fulfillment are deeply connected to the rubber tree, and in this object of nature she can accept what she sees as her inevitable existence: "la vida sin esperanzas ni miedos" (55). Brígida decides to remain inside her dressing room, next to her window, gazing on the outside world that is becoming more and more real to her. Brígida is transforming into an individual being instead of conforming to what others want her to be.

In the final paragraphs of the story, as Brígida looks out her window, she can see with clarity of what is real when her precious rubber tree is chopped down. Her faithful friend and daydream are torn away, leaving her to face her circumstances. A transformation occurs with the tree's absence; her fantasy is also gone. She feels exposed: "le habían quitado su intimidad, su secreto; se encontraba desnuda en medio de la calle, desnuda junto a un marido viejo que le volvía la espalda para dormir, que no le había dado hijos" (56). Prior to this point in the story, Brígida had not considered whether or not she wanted children because Luis was old. Now that she has come face to face with reality and sees her life as it is, she seems saddened by not having an opportunity to

conceive children. This clarity of reality coincides with the description of the light: “una luz blanca aterradora,” “una luz cruda,” a light that burns truth into her being (55).

Brígida is now able to see —“y todo lo veía de esa fría luz” (55)—her marriage to Luis as harsh and cold. The narrator conveys her thoughts: “¡Mentira! Eran mentiras su resignación y su serenidad; quería amor, sí, amor, y viajes, y locuras, y amor, amor” (56).

No longer a child and no longer dreaming about a false existence, she takes control the only way she knows how, by leaving Luis. She makes the decision to pursue her desire for love and passion in her actual life and not only through her invented reality. She no longer obsesses over the contemplation of her existence. Her reflections serve as a culminating effect that ultimately leads to her ability to leave. Agosín affirms that, “la ayudarán a mobilizarse hacia una liberación” (*Las desterradas* 55).

As a metaphor or symbol, the rubber tree represents for the protagonist a different world of possibilities. The tree’s presence in her life allows her to substitute it for what her life lacks: “crecimiento y proliferación” (Agosín *Las desterradas* 59). The tree is for Brígida a faithful friend and someone with whom she can daydream. Its beauty captivates her and gives her an alternate place, in her dressing room, to experience her emotions. While she spends time in contemplation, she evaluates her identity and realizes who she could have been. Yet, while the tree is a part of her life, she resigns herself to her unhappiness. Only when her connection to the tree is broken, when it is chopped down, can she awaken from her daydream, separate herself from it, and become an independent woman.

In Hernández’s brief story “Más allá,” the protagonist, Elba, experiences a deep connection to a river near her village. Elba’s connection with an element of nature is

similar to Brígida's connection with the tree. While spending time with the natural elements that surround her, Elba is able to create an imaginary world. Her invented reality contrasts with her actual circumstances. The river and its islet become what Elba desires: a faithful friend, a place of refuge and protection.

Elba lives outside a small village, described by an omniscient narrator as a place in which, "la miseria y la moral pública han arrimado a chulos, prostitutas y limosneros" (45). Elba's position in society, while sharply contrasted to Brígida's upper-class position, likewise confines her to a future without promise or freedom. She lives in a village of prostitutes and beggars, trapped in the vicious cycle of a marginalized and destitute existence. Her harsh and undesirable reality drives her to seek constancy, love, and affection. In the beginning of the narration, Elba personifies the river as "su único amigo" (45). She imagines that the islet that she visits is a gift from the river. Her connection with the river begins as a platonic friendship. As Elba proves herself trustworthy to the river, the relationship grows. Elba and the river exchange laughter and flirtation, experiences that her lonely life has not allowed. Her mother, an apparent prostitute, often sends her out of the house while she receives customers. Once, a son of one such customer approaches her with vulgar flirtation. As a response to these sexual advances, Elba flees to find comfort in nature. Her friendship with the river blossoms just like the semi-opened yellow rose that Elba offers her faithful friend. In a very innocent fashion, the courtship between Elba and the river begins with simple caresses: she imagines that they have a physical relationship: "ella le acariciaba su lomo fluído, él le besaba la palma de la mano. Ella le introducía un pie, él la halaba con cuidado" (46). Elba and the river are involved in a sort of courtship that advances from a innocent stage to an

intimate, more meaningful connection between them. To Elba, the river is not like the men who visit her home. To her, the river has a deep and penetrating soul that shares its secrets with her; in return, Elba shares her secrets with him. Elba's senses are awakened and she is able to experience her own sensuality by bathing in the river. The river cleanses her and pacifies her sexual longings: "la limpió de sus inmundicias y pesadillas, le quietó las turbulencias de su sexo" (46). She can enjoy solace and comfort in nature; it is an illuminating experience that makes her feel transparent in the waters of the river.

Much like Brígida's personifications of the rubber tree as her faithful friend, protector, and a satisfying force, Elba's deep connection with the river transforms it into her "amante puro" (46) who satisfies her every need. The river provides solace and tranquility; its caressing waters help her to discover her own body. In her imaginary love affair, Elba experiences harmonious love with nature. Yet, this relationship imagined by the protagonist is exposed in its unreality, "cuando el huracán más feroz de cuantos se han conocido azotó despiadadamente la región" (47). The river has disgorged its contents onto the area where the prostitutes and beggars live. Demolished homes and uprooted trees create a devastating picture. Hernández's vivid and violent description in this passage sharply contrasts with Elba's peaceful perception of the river, emphasizing the unreality of her viewpoint. When Elba returns to the bank of the river she cannot recognize what lies before her. The narrator states that, "el río la ignoró por completo. Ella tampoco pudo reconocerlo" (47). Elba decides to end her imagined affair with the river and never returns. The destruction wrought by the hurricane strips away her fantasy in a manner similar to the felling of Brígida's tree in "El árbol." After the hurricane strikes, everything about Elba's existence is exposed. She lives in a destitute and filthy

region on the margins of society, without hope of a better future. At the end of “El árbol,” Brígida abandons her fantasy altogether. Elba also abandons her fantasy. Brígida assumes control of her circumstances by leaving her unhappy marriage and has attained a certain level of freedom. Elba, in the years that follow, escapes a marriage that is abusive and brutal. As a result of tireless abuse, “empezó a enamorarse del mar” (47). This final phrase suggests that she escapes by drowning herself. Thus it is through death that Elba ultimately finds liberation.

La amortajada and “Teresa Irene”

The last two examples examined here that highlight nature’s relationship with the protagonists are *La amortajada* and “Teresa Irene.” The protagonists of Hernández’s short story and Bombal’s novel share the ultimate goals of uniting with nature and existing eternally, beyond the natural world. The earth represents for these women not only a place of origin but a place of return, resurrection, and rebirth. In this supernatural union with nature, achieved through death, the characters are able to liberate themselves from their earthly realities. Death is the pathway that allows them to live as they desire and the only space offering escape from the confines of their social settings. Both Bombal’s Ana María and Hernández’s Teresa Irene are able to experience a new existence through death, an experience that transcends reason and provides an alternate space where their senses are fully realized and they are at last free.

In both “Teresa Irene” and *La amortajada* the protagonists undergo a process of incorporation with nature as a means of liberation. Teresa Irene immerses herself in the pool formed by the village river, and Ana María descends into the ground. Each protagonist takes a mythical and primitive journey back to the earth, a place that allows

and fosters regeneration, rebirth, and recreation of their existences. At the same time, their union with nature can be seen as a completion of the cycle of life. Agosín elaborates that uniting with nature by death can be viewed as creating or returning to a primordial space. She asserts that death is a “concepto de maternidad y su poder inagotable de regeneración” (*Las desterradas* 69). Agosín notes that, for Ana María, “la muerte es sinónimo de liberación y expansión” (*Las desterradas* 69). Teresa Irene likewise experiences liberation through death. Nature is a centerpiece in both stories. Each protagonist’s union with nature is synonymous with death, where peace, liberation and rebirth are possible.

La amortajada is told through the eyes of Ana María, the shrouded woman, during the twenty-four hours leading up to her burial. The perspective of the novel is unusual, since Ana María is deceased and also narrates the drama. The plot of the narrative follows a series of flashbacks inspired by the memories of the individual mourners who attend Ana María’s wake. The flashbacks are told in the past tense while the present tense marks the time leading up to her burial. While waiting for mourners, Ana María describes the murmuring of the falling rain, which brings a sensation of well-being and melancholy to the tone of the novel. She repeatedly describes the rain: “la lluvia cae fina, obstinada, tranquila” (97). The rain lasts throughout the evening and ceases with the dawning of the following day. One of the first mourners to visit Ana María is her first love, Ricardo. With Ricardo’s visit, we are taken on a journey to Ana María’s youth when she experienced her first love. Her description of nature coincides with her amorous emotional state. In a memorable meeting with Ricardo in the forest, the wind and a storm capture the emotions of the protagonist: “El viento retorció los árboles,

golpeaba con saña la piel del caballo. Y nosotros luchábamos en contra del viento” (103).

The ardent passion of her first love affair is mirrored in the elements of nature as she describes the scene. The wind symbolically becomes an obstacle which the couple’s love has to fight against. Ana María’s amorous encounter with Ricardo in the forest is mirrored in the storm that surrounds them. In one passage, the moon is highlighted, suggesting a supernatural connection with Ana María. After Ana María’s miscarriage, her grief coincides with her description of the waxing moon, that “[le] llenó de una congoja inexplicable que crecía junto con la luna” (108). In this scene, the full moon and the melancholic blue hue that envelops the trees and the house overwhelm Ana María with anguish. The elements captivate her and she imagines a relationship between these elements. As she is being transported in her coffin, she describes her surroundings, and as she looks up, each star seems to be falling as if responding to her call to descend. “El cielo, sin embargo, está cargado de astros; estrella que ella mire, como respondiendo a un llamado, corre veloz y cae” (150). Agosín regards Ana María’s strong connection with nature as a characteristic of Romanticism. Agosín also notes that the romantic feeling of the story is attributed to its depiction from Ana María’s perspective: “el sentimiento de la naturaleza y el paisaje se vincula al <<yo>> de la heroína” (*Las desterradas* 76). Also, because the protagonist sees natural elements as a reflection of herself, she ultimately desires to become one with the Earth. For Agosín, “Ana María posee un sentimiento de unidad metabiológico y ontológico con las formas de la naturaleza” (*Las desterradas* 76). The protagonist’s death enables her supernatural union with nature and becomes for her the ultimate act of living. Ana María observes that, “ningún gesto mío consiguió jamás provocar lo que mí muerte logra al fin. Ya ves, la muerte es también un acto de vida”

(151). Dying is a part of living, and becoming one with the Earth allows her to return to a magical new existence where she can be restored and reborn.

During the funeral procession the pallbearers lose their grip on the coffin and it momentarily touches the ground. Ana María expresses her desire to be left on the surface and not buried in the family plot: “¡Oh, si la depositaran allí, a la intemperie! Anhela ser abandonada en el corazón de los pantanos para escuchar hasta el amanecer el canto que las ranas fabrican de agua y luna . . . ¡Ah, si fuera posible!” (154). Ana María has no interest in Heaven, the conventional Christian destiny. Her destiny is connected to the earth where, as Ana María sees it, life beyond death resumes. Ana María opines that, “todo duerme en la tierra y todo despierta de la tierra” (163). Instead of being buried among relatives, she is anxious to descend into and unite with the earth. “En la oscuridad de la cripta, [Ana María] tuvo la impresión de que podía al fin moverse” (163). Her death and enclosure within her grave allow this liberating sensation, in contrast with what one might expect to experience inside a coffin.

During one of the flashbacks, Ana María notes that her physical environment had felt confining: “Así vivía, confinada en mi mundo físico” (109). In contrast, her present physical state inside her coffin makes her feel comfortable. Happily she proclaims, “¡Qué bien se amolda el cuerpo al ataúd!” (151). Ana María’s connection with nature is harmonious and Edenic, sensuous and fulfilling. She can feel the universe’s rhythm when in contact with nature; it is where she feels she belongs. Remembering her life, she sees how imposing and restrictive it was. Now that she is dead, she no longer desires to be a part of that world, the world of the living.

There are several instances throughout the novel that suggest that Ana María is more content in death than she was during her life. For example, while married to Antonio she views the daily tasks of combing her hair, speaking, and smiling as laborious (141). She is so depressed by her insufferable existence during her marriage that she seems relieved by death. When referring to her marriage to Antonio, the narrator affirms that, “era verdad que sufría; pero ya no la apenaba el desamor de su marido, ya no la ablandaba la idea de su propia desdicha” (146). She is more fulfilled in death than life and looks forward to her afterlife. This is evidenced by the repeated phrase: “No tentó a la amortajada el menor deseo de incorporarse” (151 and 163). Ana María feels that she has suffered enough having lived a life without passion, and in the end her only desire is to find her liberation in death.

As the narrative closes, the shrouded woman is placed into the ground and her body seems to sprout roots, as this passage illustrates: “nacidas de su cuerpo, sentía una infinidad de raíces hundirse y esparcirse en la tierra” (163). Ana María is relieved that, at last, she can realize a total union with nature and experience what she calls “la constante palpación del universe” (163). In her tomb she awaits a second death and her initiation into a world beyond death: “la muerte de los muertos” (163). The notion of the death of the dead implies that Ana María will achieve eternal existence beyond this natural world, and, within this space, will be fully able to realize her life. She is united with the universe and allowed an opportunity to be reborn.

The emphasis on death as integral to one’s life-cycle is likewise central to Hernández’s short story, “Teresa Irene.” In the prologue, the author hints at how life and death bring resurrection and rebirth: “Años los hay muertos o cuasimuertos. Hay

asimismo lapsos de resurrección, y renacimiento que duran años” (16). Hernández, like Bombal, explores what lies beyond life and death. Her perspective on how an individual experiences life and death, can be seen in many of the protagonists of her stories. Teresa Irene, like Ana María, experiences liberation through death.

Teresa Irene spends so much time and is so strongly connected to the village's pool that she physically transforms. Her character begins as a little girl with odd behavior and becomes a nomad who is regarded as an enigma. Teresa Irene is perceived by her community as a foreign being. She disappears often without any visible provocation and spends her time next to the pool. She speaks very little but stares with disconcerting eyes that have every color of the rainbow. She remains childlike well into adulthood.

Completely misunderstood, she experiences alienation and painful isolation from the people who surround her. Her only friend is her older sister, Ana Inocencia, but Teresa Irene is eventually abandoned by her as well. When Ana Inocencia reaches puberty and notices that her sister has not, she mocks Teresa Irene by saying, “no se te ven pelos ni tetas” (23). Teresa Irene does not and cannot relate to the people who surround her. Her existence only becomes valid when she unites with nature through death.

When Teresa Irene is young, she is noticed by people because of the color of her eyes. Her eyes refract every color of the rainbow: “en sus ojos todos los colores, granos de agua y luz; el arcoiris en ellos” (19). Her physique is waif-like and lacks womanly curves. Her physical underdevelopment, combined with her affinity for disappearing into the pool, provoke numerous rumors in the community: “Corrió la voz de que sus senos manaban agua”, “En vez de sangre menstruó agua tibia”, “En vez de vellos en las axilas y el pubis, hebras de musgo tenía” (23). Teresa Irene becomes, in the view of others, a rare

and mystical being. Visitors from the area come to stare at such an exquisite creature. This irritates Teresa Irene, so she begins to disappear for entire days and go down to the pool. Submerged all day long in the deepest part of the water, she admires the nature that surrounds her. She admires the tall spikes of the enormous pines, and the beautiful irises, leaves, and flowers floating atop the water. She sees the multiple facets of the color green refracting in the water and feels the soft breeze of a nightingale's wings (24-25). She desires the company of people but knows it is impossible; due to her appearance, they would stare at her. Teresa Irene decides to remain in the water and view the world through a filter: "perdurar en el agua," and "retornar a los cristales del agua y ver al mundo filtrado por ellos" (24).

By submerging herself in the water, Teresa Irene begins to transform into a different person. The first evidence of her transformation appears in her eyes: "en este tiempo sus ojos se amortiguaban en el negro" (24); this marks a separation from mundane reality. Her eyes are no longer a myriad of colors that reveal a "luz desnuda" (19), but instead resemble a "finísima pedrería" (25). She has made herself impenetrable to others, no longer a creature of superstition at which other gape, but her own person. Instead of trying to live within her community, she lives in the wild. Giving up food, walking barefoot through the brush, and groping through the air like a blind person, Teresa Irene has become, according to others, "la materialización de algún delirio" (25). Teresa Irene goes through a process of physical decomposition, becoming more and more like water: "adelgazó hasta casi desaparecer; su piel acuosa y sus manos tanteando el aire como una ciega" (25).

After her final disappearance, Teresa Irene is discovered again in the depths of the pool by her family. When they find her dead body surrounded by lilacs and crystalline waters, the image is peaceful and fantastic: “en el lecho había un tatuaje morado de dama dormida. Los largos cabellos desviados a la derecha, como si una corriente invisible los arrastrase” (26).

Her family leaves her to rest where she belongs, with the water. Teresa Irene has become one with the water. By uniting with nature, she has achieved an ultimate act of living. Within the enchanted space of the pool she is immortalized; the pool becomes a hallowed space for the community. By her death she achieves freedom and fulfillment that in life were impossible. Her mother’s final remarks affirm that, “Teresa Irene sólo puede apreciar el mundo a través de los cristales del agua” (26). In this space, where Teresa Irene achieves union with nature, she is, according to Paravisini-Gebert, “at last happy and fulfilled in her underwater grave” (985).

Each protagonist takes a mythical journey back to the Earth. The Earth is a place that nurtures and allows regeneration, rebirth and, recreation of their existences. Nature is the axis in both narratives. For both Ana María and Teresa Irene, union with nature creates a space of their own where liberation is achieved.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The narratives by Bombal and Hernández explored in this study all put forth a notion of “self,” as portrayed through the protagonists of their works, that is neither static nor stable, but rather something that evolves. Both authors explore the “feminine consciousness” of their characters by using dreams and fantasies to recover, recreate, and redefine their identities. Both authors create alternative spaces for the lives of their protagonists. Agosín sums up Bombal’s writing: “por medio de la intuición poética, por medio de un desbordado lirismo imaginativo, sus personajes buscan alternativas: huyen de todo lo lógico, racional y establecido hacia los confines de la fantasía, de la imaginación, del delirio donde pueden ser, sólo en ese espacio propio, libres” (*Las desterradas* 213). Hernández, likewise utilizes these same characteristics allowing each character the creation of an alternate space or imagined reality as a reaction to her exterior world.

Bombal’s protagonist in *La última niebla* and Hernández’s protagonist, Faride, endure alienation which distorts their sense of self. Searching to recover and recreate this sense of self, they withdraw from the world as others see it and dwell in the imaginary realm of their dreams. The protagonist of *La última niebla* distances herself from her marriage and flees mentally. The mist acts as an alienating element, which distorts and engulfs what is real, making it difficult to distinguish what is real from what is imagined.

Faride, as a result of her alienating circumstances, creates an imaginary realm, thereby existing in dual realities that are in constant conflict. Both protagonists reject the realities in which they live, and fantasize love affairs with imaginary lovers to enrich their unsatisfying lives. The protagonist of *La última niebla* eventually abandons her fantasy and accepts her unhappy life, but continues to be alienated from herself because she cannot live as she desires. Faride, on the other hand, mentally distances herself further and further until she dies. Both characters alienate themselves using an escape into the world of their imagination.

Brígida and Elba also withdraw from their circumstances and escape into an imaginary realm. Each protagonist becomes deeply connected to nature while spending time communing with natural elements—Brígida with a rubber tree, and Elba with a river. Brígida uses her connection to the tree as inspiration to daydream and exist in an alternate space of reality. She sees the tree as a faithful friend, refuge, and protector. While she is contemplating her existence, what is real and what is fantasy becomes confused, making it difficult to distinguish between the two. When the tree is chopped down it strips away the fantasy and Brígida is able to see her life for what it is. Once the tree is gone, along with her daydream, she takes control of her life by leaving her unhappy marriage. Likewise, Elba finds solace and comfort in the river near her village. She imagines the river to be her faithful friend and lover. She also invents an alternate space of reality where she can exist and take refuge from her undesirable life circumstances. Yet, when a hurricane destroys the islet where she found refuge, she is exposed to the reality of her life. Her fantasy is stripped away in a similar fashion to Brígida's and she abandons her daydream. In the end she also takes control and flees her

abusive marriage but ultimately finds true liberation only in death. For both Brígida and Elba, their relationship with nature helps them escape into an imaginary world of daydreams but also helps them achieve freedom.

Ana María and Teresa Irene also interpret reality in connection to the natural elements that surround them. Nature is used as a place of origin and helps each character understand their identities. Ana María no longer wishes to be a part of the world of the living, but desires to become one with the Earth. Teresa Irene desires to become one with the water. Both characters are liberated from their earthly realities, and through their deaths can achieve a new existence. Ana María and Teresa Irene achieve a supernatural union with nature, through which both protagonists achieve an existence beyond the natural world. In death and union with nature, they can fully experience peace, happiness, and liberation.

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VITA

Tess Ladd-Hill was born in Madison, Wisconsin, on February 11, 1976 the daughter of Rebecca Jean Albrecht. After her freshman year of high school she went on a trip to Lima, Peru the summer of 1990 to work with children, which forever altered her world perspective and future career choice. After attending Edgewood High School in Madison she attended Madison Area Technical College and later completed her Bachelor of Arts at University of Texas at Arlington in December 2003, cum laude. During her time at UTA she studied abroad in Salamanca, Spain the summer of 2002. In the years that followed she entered the Spanish Graduate program at Texas State University-San Marcos in 2005. She was employed at the school as a Teaching Assistant in the subsequent 2 years teaching beginner level Spanish.

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