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The Deconstruction of Feminine Archetypes in Mariana Silva Yrigoyen's *Interior F*

ABSTRACT

This article investigates from a feminist perspective the process of the deconstruction of archetypal representations of women in *Interior F* (2002) by Mariana Silva Yrigoyen. The play establishes a hypertextual dialogue with classical mythology, through the figures of Cassandra and Electra, as well as with Federico García Lorca's *Yerma* (1991). *Interior F* not only denounces the social constructs that oppress female characters during Peru's internal armed conflict, but also seeks to reconstruct a new social and cultural model of women by empowering its protagonists and attributing to them qualities traditionally associated with men.

KEYWORDS

Peruvian theatre; feminism; deconstruction of the myth; feminine archetypes; Mariana Silva Yrigoyen; Federico García Lorca; infertility

1. Introduction

This study aims to analyse the intertextual value of *Interior F*¹, a drama by Mariana Silva Yrigoyen, especially with regard to the construction of the female character. Mariana Silva Yrigoyen is a Peruvian scriptwriter and playwright who represents a feminist perspective of theatre. She has written scripts for several series, soap operas, documentaries, and romantic comedies². Her career as a playwright gained momentum in 2002 with the staging of *Interior F*, which, as the very author indicates, was her first major play (as cited in Wałach, 2023, p. 86). It voices a deep concern for the issues related to the situation of women in Latin America and particularly in Peru. In her subsequent works (*Sobre lobos* [About Wolves], 2013 and *Lo salvaje* [Wildness], 2018), the same preoccupations, i.e. domestic

¹ *Interior F* was first performed in 2002. As the text of the play has not been published, this study is based on a manuscript provided by the playwright.

² Highlights include the documentary *Zulen y yo* [Zulen and I], about Peruvian feminist Dora Mayer; and Peruvian blockbusters including the two-part *Locos de amor* [Crazy in Love] and the comedy *Encintados* [Impregnated], the latter of which won awards from the Peruvian Ministry of Culture and Ibermedia.

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violence, male domination in a patriarchal world, the subjugation of women to their partner's expectations, abandonment, and a desire to be a mother versus a forced abortion are reiterated. Frustrated motherhood is a constant in Silva Yrigoyen's theatre, becoming the backbone of *Lo salvaje*. Finally, the feminist character of the author's artistic creation is evident in *Bicentenaria* [Bicentennial] (2017), a performance in which two hundred women participated to give an account of over two-hundred-year history of perpetrating violence against women in Peru.

2. Intertextuality and the evocative force of myth in the process of deconstructing traditional archetypes

The presence of intertextual relations in *Interior F* is not an isolated case in Silva Yrigoyen's theatre³, although intertextuality in this drama undoubtedly functions as the organising element of the dramatic structure. The term was coined in 1969 by Julia Kristeva who, in turn, drew on the concept of Bakhtinian dialogism. In her interpretation, Kristeva (2024) concludes that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (p. 64). This assumption gave an important impulse to the development of intertextual studies, generating a great diversity of definitions and reformulations (Duszak, 1998, p. 219; Gutiérrez Estupiñán, 1994, p. 144). In the literary field, Gerard Genette's (1997) invaluable theoretical contribution is worth mentioning. He coined the term *hypertextuality*, understood as "any relationship uniting a text B ([...] hypertext) to an earlier text A ([...] hypotext)" (p. 5) through a transformation. *Interior F* makes use of the configuring force of myth, understood as "the substrate of our civilization" (Lévy Strauss, 2021, p. 20). Mythical thinking is what explains phenomena, initially incomprehensible to a human being, which, over time, become archetypes. As Luisa Martínez Falero (2013) suggests, the rewriting of myth involves the decontextualisation and recontextualisation of archetypes or their constituent mythemes, enabling new interpretations of traditional figures within a specific textual corpus (p. 488). Eco (2023), in turn, maintains that understanding the cultural role of myth requires identifying the unconscious symbolisation underlying mythification, followed by the exposure of intentional persuasive mechanisms that obscure the true motivations behind its construction (p. 254). Demythification, in this sense, entails the dissolution of institutionalised archetypes (p. 249).

Taking all the above into consideration, it is hypothesised that *Interior F* aims to deconstruct traditional archetypes of women by adopting a feminist point of

³ The author is drawn to indigenous culture, as well as to the symbolic power of the totem, which is especially visible in *Sobre lobos* and *Lo salvaje*.

view. In any case, the playwright's aim does not seem to be solely to denounce those social constructs that oppress women, but, above all, to be oriented towards a pragmatist perspective (Rorty, 2003, p. 252) that not only criticises the old paradigm, but also proposes an alternative future. Therefore, the aim of this study is to unveil the gender worldview present in patriarchy (Lagarde, 1997, p. 14), as well as the degree of transformation of the aforementioned feminine archetypes in order to provide a new social and cultural model of women. Following the theory of the different levels of myth (Herrero Cecilia, 2006, p. 63), we can conclude that *Interior F* maintains a hypertextual relationship with the mythical story of the Trojan War and a literary myth stemming from *Yerma* by Federico García Lorca. *Interior F* appears to align with the paradigm of a culture of use, or a culture of activity, which, as Nicolas Bourriaud (2005) argues, characterizes contemporary art. Through the appropriation and recontextualization of past cultural forms, the play redefines the female archetype. By taking the Trojan War as a point of reference, Silva Yrigoyen attempts to paint a bleak picture of one of the darkest periods in Peruvian history, that is, the times of Shining Path terrorism. According to the Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (2003), between 1980 and 2000, around 69,280 people died or disappeared as a result of the internal conflict. Women, in particular, suffered systematic sexual violence and were forced into new social roles as heads of household amid displacement and poverty (Alvites Alvites & Alvites Sosa, 2007, p. 131). The second thematic axis revolves around the concepts of maternity, abortion, and infertility in the context of male domination.

3. Trojan War versus internal armed conflict in Peru (1980–2000): deconstructing the archetypes of Cassandra and Electra

Shining Path [PCP–SL] is a faction of the Communist Party of Peru, founded in 1969 by Abimael Guzmán (1934–2021), the ideologue of this revolutionary organisation of Marxist, Leninist and Maoist inspiration, which was endowed with a national doctrine known as the Gonzalo Thought (Spyra, 1996, p. 23). In 1980, Sendero Luminoso caused a long-lasting internal conflict by engaging in combat. From the 1980s onwards, the Shining Path gained ground, seizing new territories in order to encircle the cities of the Peruvian coast and spread panic among the inhabitants by means of terrorist attacks directed against all those institutions which, in their opinion, supported capitalism: the state authorities, the forces of law and order, as well as various national and foreign organisations and companies. Paradoxically, the communist struggle ended up reinforcing capitalism, as Federici (2012, p. 66) explains, because violence, integral to the process of primitive accumulation, produces displacement and saturates the labour market. This condition enables the subjugation of migrant populations, whose precarious status renders them especially vulnerable, while also limiting

women's opportunities for paid employment and sustaining their economic dependence on men.

The diegetic time in *Interior F* corresponds to the first two decades of the internal armed conflict. The terrorist era not only forms the backdrop for the drama but also interconnects the experiences of the four protagonists. In contrast to Attys, the three "presencias" [presences]⁴ (Silva Yrigoyen, 2002, p. 1) of Cassandra, Electra, and Yerma are immersed in memories that are evoked in reverse order, to eventually return to the present in the final scene. The play thus takes the form of an extended subjective interiorisation that presents a chain of fragmented stories. These refer to the moments of maximum tension in the lives of the characters. Hence the occurrence of the title, which alludes to the inner world of the women.

The rewriting of the Trojan War myth establishes a special relationship between Cassandra and Electra by placing them on two opposing sides. Cassandra is the younger sister of one of the leaders of the Shining Path, responsible for numerous massacres of the civilian population, whereas Electra is the eldest daughter of a commander of the Peruvian Armed Forces who was assigned to eradicate terrorism. Taking into account the above, the hypertextual relationship shows a clear resemblance to the classical versions of the myth in which Paris, despite the warnings of his sister Cassandra, unleashes the war between the Greeks and the Trojans. As far as Silva Yrigoyen's Electra is concerned, the analogy between the girl's father and King Agamemnon should be emphasized: they both were assassinated, which made their daughters seek revenge.

3.1. The inside/outside dialectic and the family as an ideological apparatus

In *Interior F*, the division into two opposing camps seems to be enforced only by kinship relations, which explains the subordinate position of women, as well as the primary role of the family as an Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 2003, p. 25) that reproduces the norms and prejudices of patriarchal society. As Kate Millett (2000) points out, "Patriarchy's chief institution is the family" (p. 33). Male domination, as understood by Pierre Bourdieu (2000), underpins the social order, particularly in the attribution of roles and activities to each sex, consistently reinforcing the privileged status of men (p. 11). It is deeply rooted in Peruvian society, seen as an androcentric structure that uses symbolic violence (p. 28) to perpetuate women's inferiority and social exclusion. In Silva Yrigoyen's play the social construction of male and female bodies revolves around the dichotomy of outside/inside or, what amounts to the same thing, public/private. While men take on noble leadership roles, women's roles are limited to doing household chores or performing caring activities.

⁴ All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

The textual material of the drama is composed of a series of monologues that often take the form of an interpellation to an absent character who is perceived as a reference figure in the lives of the protagonists. Not surprisingly, it is a male character (father, brother or boyfriend) who abandons his relatives or partner to start a new family or to carry out an important mission. Regardless of the reason for leaving home, the lack of a father figure leads to the total disintegration of the family. Females suffer physical abuse, economic hardship, or partial maternal deprivation due to their mother's depression or alcoholic illness. Electra's mother, for example, despite being well off, is emotionally affected by her husband's continuous infidelities. Meanwhile, Cassandra's mother's depressive state is caused by the terrorist activity of her son who "ha reventado el país con sus bombas" [has blown up the country with his bombs] (Silva Yrigoyen, 2002, p. 3) and who has become "la pesadilla de esta ciudad" [the nightmare of this city] (pp. 15–16). In one of the attacks, he almost killed his own sister. Finally, Yerma's mother is an alcoholic, unable to raise a child alone or even to take care of herself. Yerma dreams that someday her father will come and rescue her from that house full of violence and abandonment.

In the three stories mentioned above, the same pattern can be observed, the only difference being that the characters belong to different social classes, which in the case of Cassandra and Yerma, both raised by single mothers, implies greater exposure to child abuse. The dismal economic situation of single mothers is due to the consequences of the internal armed conflict, during which discrimination and the gender pay gap are further aggravated. Violence in rural populations, perpetrated by both sides of the conflict, causes large waves of migration to coastal urban areas that are not prepared to receive such a large number of people. The displaced face problems of housing, unemployment, and extreme poverty (Montoya Rojas, 1997; Spyra, 1996, p. 33), as well as the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups who, lacking the resources to overcome the bureaucratic and legislative tangle, turn to the black market (Soto, 1991, pp. 12–16). The high unemployment rate in men of working age makes it impossible for women to access the labour market, which has a particular impact on the situation of single mothers, who are forced to seek protection from a man. In *Interior F*, Cassandra's mother's boyfriend is perceived as both an abuser and the breadwinner: "Cassandra: No necesitamos más hombres en la casa. [...] No me gusta Eduardo. [...] Y yo no soy su apachurrita y no quiero que en las noches me dé besos por todas partes y me diga mi apachurrita, con su olor de vinagre" [Cassandra: We don't need men in the house anymore. [...] I don't like Eduardo. [...] And I'm not his baby girl and I don't want him to kiss me all over at night and call me his baby girl, with his vinegar smell.] (Silva Yrigoyen, 2002, p. 7). In this way, the conviction is reiterated that marriage or informal relationship is a kind of economic alliance in which the man appropriates the woman in exchange for ensuring the subsistence of the family.

3.2. Essentialist definitions of masculinity and femininity

In the light of the above, *Interior F* presents the family as a place of oppression that reduces women's role to reproduction, care and housework. Since gender is socially constructed through relations of power, Bourdieu (2000) argues that masculinity functions as an unmarked universal norm, against which femininity is defined as its negative counterpart through a system of binary oppositions; an arrangement that, according to Braidotti (2004), implies the inferiority of women (p. 16). Several researchers and institutions (Beauvoir, 2016; Calvo, 2024; Cixous, 1995; Connell, 2020; Millet, 2000; MIMP, 2016; Ruiz Bravo, 1999;) study the attributes with which men and women are usually defined. *Interior F* scrupulously reflects this dialectic by contrasting the figure of Electra's father with that of her mother. The man is shown as an embodiment of virility. He is a national hero who risks his own life in defence of democratic government. He is almost always absent, but he watches over the safety and well-being of his family. Even the merits of Electra's father justify his dubious moral conduct, as the man does not even try to hide his extramarital affairs, which seems to complete his image of manhood. This moral duplicity is a mitigating factor reserved only for men. Electra's father is presented to us as a cultural subject (Cros, 2003, p. 12) who, by internalising patriarchal ideology, exhibits traditionally masculine traits: strength, intelligence, competence, efficiency, and aggressiveness. This vision of masculinity is in sharp contrast to the feminine imagery, characterised by passivity, seclusion in the private sphere, sacrifice, tenderness, fragility, ignorance, uselessness, and docility.

3.3. The deconstruction of the archetypes of Cassandra and Electra

Apart from the recontextualisation of the classical myths of Cassandra and Electra, it should be noted that these protagonists retain in *Interior F* some of the fundamental features of their mythological correlates. At this point, the reformulation of Cassandra's mythical curse is noteworthy. Although the protagonist is said to be a clairvoyant, her prophecies are ignored, so that she has no choice but to accept what the future holds for her. At various points in the play, Cassandra has presentiments of what is going to happen to her brother, who was arrested in 1992 along with Abimael Guzmán and other members of the terrorist leadership. Guzmán's capture causes the ideological orphanhood (Santillán O'Shea, 2017, p. 9) of the organisation, which to this day is reduced to small fractions. This arrest is a milestone in the fight against terrorism, as it tips the balance in favour of the victory of the state authorities⁵. The news provokes great excitement among the protagonists, but the celebration is overshadowed

⁵ This was an unexpected turn of events, even for the authorities themselves (Paredes, 2017, p. 22), given that in 1992 the possibility of the triumph of the social revolution in Peru was being considered (McClintock, 1994, p. 243; Montoya Rojas, 1997, p. 287).

by Casandra's premonition that a corruption and human rights violation scandal involving several officers of the Peruvian Armed Forces will soon be exposed. The various massacres perpetrated by the army and the Colina Group, a death squad responsible for multiple murders, kidnappings, and disappearances, including those that took place in La Cantuta and Barrios Altos, come to light⁶.

Cassandra's prophecy is confirmed in the news that reveals the identity of the scapegoats, including Electra's father who, not wanting to take responsibility for his actions, commits suicide in prison. Electra does not believe the official version of events, as she suspects that her father has been betrayed and killed by the army, with the alleged involvement of his wife, who, moreover, soon marries a member of the current government. As we can see, up to this point the hypertext retains the essential elements of the classical versions of Sophocles or Euripides. Electra turns away from old friendships and, sacrificing her own psycho-physical well-being, vows to take her revenge on all those guilty of her father's death. In a speech to her younger brother, Electra confesses the following: "No soy más que el cadáver de tu hermana. [...] He tenido que abandonar todo lo que yo era. Tuve que sacrificar, sacrificarme. [...] Yo tenía que eliminar al opresor ¡porque fui la hija de un rey!" [I am nothing but your sister's corpse. [...] I have had to give up everything I used to be. I had to sacrifice, sacrifice myself. [...] I had to eliminate the oppressor because I was the daughter of a king!] (Silva Yrigoyen, 2002, p. 19).

What differentiates this hypertext from the various versions of the classical myth (Sophocles; Euripides) is the form of revenge, as well as the person empowered to execute justice. In Sophocles' play, Electra is shown as a weak and passive woman who awaits the arrival of her brother Orestes so that he can exact revenge for the murder of Agamemnon⁷, whereas in *Interior F*, it is Electra who gains access to the bank accounts of her mother and other corrupt politicians in order to expose them. It is then that she discovers that her father's name also figures in the web of corruption within the Fujimori regime. Regardless of the outcome, Electra assumes the typically masculine attributes of aggressiveness, strength, intelligence and, above all, efficiency. Likewise, Cassandra is shown as a successful journalist and an independent woman who does not bow to men. Both protagonists exemplify the ability to reinvent themselves and to actively shape their own futures, aligning them with the concept of the "third woman" (Liptovsky, 1999, p. 218) which reflects the evolving position of women within contemporary societies.

⁶ Alberto Fujimori and Vladimiro Montesinos evade responsibility for human rights violations by accusing a group of military officers who, after Fujimori's second presidential re-election, were acquitted of all charges under the amnesty law of 1995 (Quiroz Norris, 2013, p. 464).

⁷ In Euripides' version, Electra plays a more active role, as she encourages her brother to take his revenge at the moment when he considers the possibility of leaving Clytemnestra alive so as not to bear the guilt of being a matricide.

4. Maternity versus abortion and infertility

There is a clear intertextual relationship between García Lorca's *Yerma* and Silva Yrigoyen's *Interior F*. It becomes evident from the very first lines of the latter as they reenact a dialogue between the protagonists of the former, Juan and his wife: "Juan: [...] Cada año seré más viejo. / Yerma: Cada año... Tú y yo seguiremos aquí cada año..." ["Juan: [...] I get older every year and that's all. / Yerma: Every year ...Just the two of us year after year..." (García Lorca, 2006)] (García Lorca, 1991, p. 60). Meanwhile, in *Interior F*, these lines are pronounced by Yerma and taken up by all the protagonists: "Yerma: Cada año seré más vieja, pero seguiré aquí cada año. / Casandra: Cada año seré más vieja... / Electra: ...pero seguiré aquí cada año" [Yerma: Every year I get older, but I'll still be here every year / Cassandra: Every year I'll be older... / Electra: ...but I'll still be here every year...] (Silva Yrigoyen, 2002, p. 1). This is not the only example of an unmarked quote in the Peruvian author's drama. In addition to the intertextual use of quotation, the two plays share the same symbolism with regard to the concept of sterility. In *Interior F*, infertility is expressed through dryness and its equivalents: barren womb, withered flesh, thirst, and stone walls; on the other hand, the main symbol of fertility is water, reinforced by the appearance of other terms, such as flowers or wind:

Yerma: [...] Yo no quiero quedarme seca. Después no. Después va a ser muy tarde. Yo pienso en el hoy. Yo no puedo pensar en mañana. No aquí. No en este país. Aquí está prohibida la palabra futuro y yo tengo sed y quiero agua [Yerma: [...] I don't want to become barren. Not any longer. It will be too late. I think about today. I can't think about tomorrow. Not here. Not in this country. Here the word future is forbidden and I am thirsty and I want water.] (Silva Yrigoyen, 2002, p. 16)

Likewise, in both plays, sterility is perceived as a curse (García-Posada, 1991, p. 13). This is due, in Lorca's tragedy, to social repression, and the rigid Christian moral code, whereas in *Interior F*, it is one of the consequences of clandestine abortion, a widespread practice in Peru due to the criminalization of pregnancy termination.

According to the estimates presented by Sandoval Paredes (2005, p. 44) and Ferrando (2006, p. 29), at the beginning of the new millennium, more than 400,000 illegal abortions were performed in Peru each year (p. 44). Among the main causes of this practice, Romero Bidegaray (2002) highlights economic precariousness, instability in the couple's relationship, the threat of abandonment if the woman does not have an abortion, and the stigmatisation of single mothers⁸.

⁸ Despite the fact that abandonment is a crime defined in Article 150 of the Peruvian Penal Code, López Bravo (2021) points out that it is necessary to prove that the pregnant woman is in

Yerma in *Interior F* dreams of being an exemplary mother. However, when she becomes pregnant, she endures the accusations of her boyfriend who doubts his paternity. Finally, in order to keep her partner, Yerma undergoes an abortion, after which she feels sharp pangs of remorse for having killed her own child. A coerced abortion causes her deep guilt, as it feels like a loss of her femininity, given that motherhood is seen as a woman's primary social role (Beauvoir, 2016, p. 477).

5. Symbolology of the mirror

Silva Yrigoyen insists on the need for women's empowerment through collective action. She plays with the need to recognise oneself in the other person through the symbolism of the mirror. This idea refers to the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage, during which infants between the ages of six and eighteen months learn to recognize themselves in a mirror (Lacan, 2003, p. 108). Cassandra emphasizes the importance of self-assertion as a means to eliminate uncertainty and strengthen both love and self-respect: "Es tiempo de que me encuentre sola frente al espejo y busque mi propio amor" [It is high time I stood alone in front of the mirror and tried to find self-love.] (Silva Yrigoyen, 2002, p. 22). However, the protagonists, having endured severe criticism throughout their lives, feel the need to assert themselves within the female collective. Hence the reply, "te espejo" [I mirror you] (Silva Yrigoyen, 2002, p. 23), pronounced by Yerma, which serves to underline the importance of being reflected in another woman who, according to Graciela Strada (2007), constitutes "un punto de amarre de su yo evanescente" [a mooring point of her evanescent self] (p. 157).

The action in *Interior F* is performed verbally as a kind of therapeutic process in which the protagonists not only become aware of their own emotions but also manage to let go of their past traumas. This process is followed by a spiritual cleansing ritual known as the blossoming bath, which is typical of Andean culture. The main function of this ritual is the purification of the soul, since "la flor es una imagen del 'centro' y, por consiguiente, una imagen arquetípica del alma" [The flower is an image of the "centre" and, therefore, an archetypal image of the soul.] (Cirlot, 1992, p. 207). Although the blossoming bath can take different forms, at its foundation lies the idea of spiritual regeneration (González Mariscal et al., 2022, p. 37).

6. Final considerations

As we have seen, *Interior F* is an example of analytical drama, whose communicative force is due to the existence of a network of hypertextual relations through which the playwright manages to dismantle and recontextualise the archetypes of

a critical situation without precisely determining the scope of this formulation (p. 6), which means that verdicts, in many cases, are not favourable for victims living in informal relationships.

Cassandra, Electra, and Yerma in order to denounce the symbolic violence with which patriarchy oppresses women in contemporary societies. Likewise, in the rewriting of these characters, Silva Yrigoyen uses traditionally masculine attributes to present a new image of women, neither free of aggressiveness, nor deprived of intelligence, independence, or efficiency. From the pragmatist perspective, the protagonists are depicted as strong and courageous women who, having learned a bitter lesson, free themselves from toxic relationships with men.

Mariana Silva Yrigoyen raises the issue of the helplessness of single mothers, child abuse, and the proliferation of high-risk clandestine abortions that women resort to, among other things, out of fear of being abandoned. The drama takes the form of an extensive interiorisation which favours the confluence of different symbols referring to Lorca's poetics. In this way, the playwright perceives the curse of infertility as a direct consequence of illegal and unsafe abortion, as well as of economic precariousness, which limits women's access to paid employment, and the stigmatization of single mothers. It should be noted that a coerced pregnancy termination can have serious consequences for a woman's physical and psychological health. In many cases, women experience a profound sense of guilt, stemming from the inability to exercise the greatest social privilege historically reserved for them: motherhood.

Finally, the play's open ending, preceded by a dialogue that uses the metaphor of the mirror, highlights the need for women's empowerment. The drama raises the idea that women must assert themselves as social subjects. To this end, the protagonists of the drama undergo a spiritual cleansing ritual and support one another in reaffirming their identities.

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