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Proper Names as Narrative Gaps: a Deconstructive Reading of Rosario Ferré and García Márquez

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*Proper Names as Narrative Gaps: a Deconstructive Reading of
Rosario Ferré and García Márquez*

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
Foreign Languages and Philosophy

By

Dora Suarez

Under the mentorship of Dr. Toby Graves

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that language in general, and proper names in particular, are surreptitious examples of narrative gaps. In this way, in the context of literature, the narrative gaps enclosed in proper names enable the audience to become an active participant in a type of *writing* that exceeds the limit of the specific literary text at hand. In deconstructing the way in which proper names and nicknames are used by Rosario Ferré and García Márquez, this exposition shows how names, as conveyors of different identities, systematically enable an exercise of *différance*: they distinguish subjects while postponing an actual description of their individuality. This emptiness of ultimate meaning, however, has been disguised through the means of further narrative gaps (such as “prostitute,” “wife,” or “husband”) that transfer the responsibility of assigning *meaning* onto the shoulders of the readers. In order to understand the implications of this assertion, this work reflects on the nature of *reading* and *writing*, as well as the differences that, apparently, keep literature and reality apart. Finally, by engaging the ideas of John L. Austin and Jacques Derrida, this paper aims to contribute to an understanding of how literary works (such as the ones analyzed here) may challenge the notion of authorship altogether by forcing the reader to complete a textual reality that does more than map preexisting circumstances, it actively writes them.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank my “family.” And the reason why I am placing this in quotation marks is because I would like this term to mean something different from what it usually means. I would like “family” in this context to mean all of those who have granted me the honor of “listening,” and who have actively participated in the journey that the writing of this thesis represented. I believe neither of us are the same after the many conversations that accompanied the making of this piece, and I am deeply thankful for that.

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Part 1 – Introduction:

*Discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language and speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe - Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge**

The goal that Michel Foucault set for himself was that of investigating the production of knowledge, “its formation, dispersion, transmission, and permanence in terms of ‘anonymous rules’” which he considered to be extremely precise and specialized (Said 28). In doing this, Foucault opened a Pandora’s Box insofar as issues pertaining to the definition of authorship, power, and subject became a never-ending puzzle that obstructed the possibility of offering a conclusive explanation of how *knowledge* comes to be. In this sense, understanding how a verbal cluster becomes part of a discursive layer, whose purpose is not only to express what an individual thinks but also to affect and endorse a certain practice and its common articulation, became essential to the process of elucidating *meaning* (29).

Foucault’s explorations on the nature of language as a product and enabler of power put him in line with the concerns of his compatriot Jacques Derrida. Both Foucault and Derrida seek “a continuation of philosophy means for other ends” (Guttin 289), and, as a consequence, they both prompted their audiences to question the semantic unit of

books, while encouraging them to understand all texts as exercises of “inconstant epistemological judgments” (Said 30). By adopting this position, both thinkers aligned themselves with Heidegger, who, as part of his contributions to the development of hermeneutics, asserted that all knowledge rests “always already” upon interpretative historical presuppositions, which are often “just as a person’s eyeglasses [...] typically ‘invisible’ to the extent that they function silently and unnoticeably, and become objects of attention perhaps only when they happen to break” (Coker 252).

And yet, we cannot do without our “eyeglasses.” We need language. This is a fact that neither Foucault nor Derrida questioned. What we do not need, or, perhaps, what we cannot afford, is to take texts, the product of language, at their “face value.” In this way, understanding the “more” that Foucault refers to in the quote I cited at the beginning of this section prompts us to analyze the extra load carried by discourse. Yet, this revaluation, this encountering with a new way of looking at discourse cannot take place outside the realm of text. Even if we ought to *deconstruct* what is given to us, we will invariably build a new form of text by reinterpreting reality. As Derrida famously asserted: “there is nothing outside the text” (Derrida 163). This is why for deconstructionists, all contexts are always text, and all texts are to become context.

Following the steps of deconstructionists, this paper argues that language in general, and proper names in particular, are surreptitious

examples of narrative gaps. To this extent, in the context of literature, the narrative gaps enclosed in proper names enable the audience to become an active participant in a type of writing that exceeds the limit of the specific literary text at hand. In deconstructing the way in which proper names and nicknames are used by Rosario Ferré and García Márquez, this thesis argues that names, as conveyors of different identities, systematically enable an exercise of *différance*: they distinguish subjects while postponing an actual description of their individuality. This emptiness of ultimate meaning, however, has been disguised through the means of further narrative gaps (such as “prostitute,” “wife,” or “husband”) that transfer the responsibility of assigning meaning onto the shoulders of the readers. In order to understand the implications of this assertion, this thesis reflects on the nature of reading and writing, as well as the differences that, apparently, keep literature and reality apart. Finally, by engaging the ideas of John L. Austin and Jacques Derrida, this work aims to contribute to an understanding of how literary works such as the ones analyzed here, may challenge the notion of authorship altogether by forcing the reader to complete a textual reality that does more than map preexisting circumstances, it actively writes them.

Part 2 - Theoretical Framework

Why Deconstruction?

As explained in the previous section, the aim of deconstructing is not to destroy but to dismantle in order to expose the responsibilities attached to the production of *meaning*. As a strategy of reading, deconstruction aims at unraveling and building over the contradictions of every text. Hence, instead of aiming for truth, unity, or meaning, a deconstructive reading focuses on absence of presence, loopholes, and free play of signifieds. Consequently, deconstruction suggests that every reading, every interpretation in a way invests members of the audience with the “author-function” (as understood by Foucault) insofar as readers are responsible for the text they build out and pass along into the context that defines and is defined by the text *produced* by them (Foucault 118-119). However, while Foucault in his acclaimed piece “What is An Author” mainly discusses authorship in terms of the function that the term serves within a community, in this thesis I am attempting to focus on the dynamic that precedes any collective negotiation of meaning. In this sense, the author described by Foucault and the writer(s) discussed in this piece do not engage in the same kind of project. While the concept of “author,” as described by Foucault, is to be understood as an inherent mode of discourse that is conceived with the purpose of limiting a “proliferation of meaning” and, as such, has a direct effect on society (Foucault 118), the “writers” discussed in this analysis (and who are mistakenly considered to be just readers) act for the most part privately, while moving back and forth across the larger picture that we come to call context. From this it

follows that while authors play an important role as members of interpretive communities, writers (as described in this analysis) operate at a more basic level: they are the real creators of *meaning*, insofar as they are the ones who “execute” the text by bringing it to life in their minds. Only later, writers (these being first-writers or posterior ones –readers-) take the challenge of joining others in order to negotiate a reading that is going to be shared by the community. Nevertheless, at first glance, every writer is alone with the text. And what she does with it is an act of writing (or re-writing in the case of readers) which is intrinsically private. To understand the responsibility of the Foucauldian “author” we are to consider the ways in which every text changes its society, while to understand the meaning of writers as presented in this thesis, we are to reflect on the ways in which each reader changes the text that is given to her by other writers.

To this effect, using Ferré’s and García-Márquez’s texts as examples, this thesis deconstructs proper names in order to show their value as narrative gaps that challenge the traditional notion of authorship while enabling a playing of *différance* (as defined in the next section). In this way, writers engage in a dissemination of their identity while crafting a text, given that those who will read their work in the future will never be able to apprehend the ultimate “meaning” of their message, and will therefore be called to inscribe a certain “meaning” to the text in order to be able to make “sense” of the story. In order to expose how these dynamics take place in the production of literary texts, my analysis will draw heavily from the philosophical approach to language and discourse proposed by Jacques Derrida, and the way in which linguistic exercises attempt

to disguise the dislocation and intentionality that characterize our cultural practices. In doing this, I will address how apparently well-defined characters are ultimately empty shells whose function is to engender different associations, and, as a consequence, enable a wide range of interpretations that invariably result in a new instance of writing that can only be executed by readers.

***Understanding the Means and the Ends of Deconstruction:
Logocentrism, Différance, Supplement, and Trace***

Derrida claimed that traditional philosophical issues are indecidable in principle (Coker 290), insofar as they are based on an approach to reality that lies on the assumption that *being* is to be understood in terms of *presence* (what is by opposition to what is not). This predisposition to ground all knowledge (and truth) in the specific certainty provided by presence (“metaphysics of presence”) informed the approach to knowledge of a variety of schools of thought, such as foundationalism, essentialism, rationalism, and representationism. According to Derrida, the metaphysics of presence is related to a longing for “an immediate access to meaning” which motivates the idea that grasping *presence* is an unequivocal manner of accessing *truth*, what it *is* (266). In addition, Derrida asserted that this assumption that *presence* can unequivocally convey *truth* is the reason why, throughout history, Western philosophers in particular have placed great emphasis on the importance of oral speech in contrast to the “delayed” value of written discourse (267). This idea that language, and in particular oral

speech, is not a mediator of meaning but an immediate facilitator of it is known as “logocentrism.”

However, for Derrida, linguistic formulation is never completely adequate. Despite the illusion that it is possible to attain access to pure meaning (especially through speech, which has been traditionally considered as the primary and immediate expression of thought), Derrida asserted that such an enterprise is impossible, as linguistic signs are not “transcendental signifiers” (namely, self-signifying units of meaning) but agents of deferral (*différance*). In other words, given that verbal meaning is constantly built upon the use of other signifiers, whose meaning is not simultaneously present (e.g., the understanding of the term “mistress” requires a previous *knowledge* of concepts such as “marriage,” “wife,” and “husband,” and the way they limit and extend the meaning of each other), it is clear that language cannot provide the basis for any absolute-unchangeable externalization of “pure meaning”. Any message, oral or written, conveyed by the means of verbal clusters that are demonstrably unstable and which lack ultimate grounds (given that they are always susceptible to recontextualization) cannot facilitate a pure and final experience of any pre-linguistic experience of meaning. Moreover, according to Derrida, we do not even have a reason to believe that such *essential* form of pure meaning can, in any way, be accessed by human beings. We never experience the *content* of such mental states without the aid of language (Coker 266). In this manner, text and context are inherently interwoven with each other.

If we agree with Derrida, it is obvious that we constantly apply a curbed

way of relating and reflecting upon the world, for he made it obvious that using language to understand our surrounding imposes a necessity to prioritize presence over absence, which immediately forces us to adopt an approach to reality that is always defined by a “principle of opposition,” that is, the idea that reality can only be grasped in terms of dichotomies such as presence/absence, truth/falsehood, self/other, etc. Yet, Derrida tells us, such is our way of thinking, and therefore, we can only hope that the study of its characteristics (which is in itself based and structured upon the linguistic system that it attempts to question) will help us to gain a more vast understanding of the “essential peculiarities and limitations of human thought” (Guttin 291).

To assist in this process, Derrida attempted to facilitate a new way of reading, which he called “deconstruction.” The purpose of deconstruction is to show the ways in which language inserts contradictions and ambiguity into all texts, and that this unavoidably results in the inability of readers to fully comprehend any given text. To this extent, all discourse implies a lack of ultimate meaning, which is only concealed by a series of choices performed by its receptacles while engaging with the text. In light of this, deconstruction takes advantage of concepts such as *différance*, *supplementation*, and *trace* in order to explain how we arrive at the *production* of textual meaning. Deconstructionists assert that all texts become ultimately ambiguous and dependent on the unstable external and internal relations that constitute them. Therefore, the notions of *différance*, *supplementation*, and *trace* are essential in order to understand how the meaning of a text is never a coherent unit but rather a collection of shifts and

breaks that ultimately prove the attempt to unify or limit the text within the boundaries of a singular interpretation, futile.

Derrida's *différance* alludes to the instability that characterizes the binaries' opposition, which constitutes the basis of all logocentric discourse. The term has two basic connotations: difference and deferral. The first, refers to the inherent distinction that exists between any pair of binaries and the "reality" that they are supposed to describe (this is why even an apparent understanding of the dichotomy presence/absence does not grant us a full understanding of the phenomenon "existence"). The second connotation alludes to the constant deferral that takes place every time we try to unequivocally attribute self-sufficient meaning to a term. According to Derrida, what actually takes place is a constant exercise of deferral by which we contrast words and define them by opposition (this is why to understand the adjective "blue" we need to know the definition of color and the particular characteristics that permit us to distinguish blue from green and violet). However, we never arrive at an ultimate-pure-isolated meaning, and therefore, the only thing we can do is to keep resorting to this exercise of difference and deferral in order to shape a new message every time we attempt to communicate. In being constant, this exercise perpetuates the simultaneous active/passive nature of *différance*, active insofar as it never ends and passive insofar as it is the only possible "state." Yet, Derrida claims that even the term *différance* is caught in the inadequacy of logocentric discourse, and, as a product of such, it can be used as an instrument to understand the limitations of such type of discourse, but not to overcome it (298-299).

Likewise, the term *supplement* is also a Derridean concept that refers to two different connotations. On the one hand, it refers to an inessential addendum, or extra, that is not necessary in nature. On the other hand, it can also allude to a crucial addition, meant to solve an essential incompleteness in that to which is added. Derrida believes that this term can be key to understanding the way in which the two elements that constitute every binary we use to construct meaning relate to each other. According to Derrida, in the context of binary oppositions, the second term is always considered to be a (inessential) supplement of the first one, and this is why “presence” acquires a better connotation than “absence,” and “speech” is better than “writing” (302). However, Derrida considered this overvaluation to be an artificial distinction that does not capture the “real” function of the second term. Therefore, it is the purpose of deconstruction to show that the supplement (second term) is actually an essential component of reality, insofar as it remedies a lack or insufficiency of the first element.

By trace, Derrida refers to that which is not a presence but rather “the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself” (301). A trace is therefore that tangible element that encompasses that which is accessible (the signifier) but which, at the same time, refers us to the absences that surround its meaning. In this way, the trace “woman” unavoidably forces us to think of those conditions that have to be met for a human being to be labeled this way, and, at the same time, it also requires that we know well those characteristics that should not be present for this person to be considered a “woman”.

These are the basic neologisms-assumptions embraced by deconstruction. Yet, it is important to remember that all experience, for deconstructionists, is always

available in textualized form. In this way, discourse is not just an isolated occurrence of speech or writing, but the *trace* (in the Derridean sense) of an ideology that defines and confines the way in which members of society think and act. Therefore, de-constructing, as a means of literary analysis refers to the process by which we construct a new reality by re-situating what is given to us. This is precisely the task this thesis undertakes while deconstructing the ways in which Rosario Ferré and Gabriel García Márquez construct and deliver the identity of their characters.

Part 3- Authors and Texts Chosen

A principal point addressed in this paper is the dynamic that takes place between what I will be calling “first-writer” (these being the ones who proceeded to write a first draft of the literary text) and readers, or “posterior-writers.” And it is precisely in order to lay bare the subliminal ways in which first-writers and posterior ones interact and switch roles that I have chosen to deconstruct a short story by Rosario Ferré and a novella by García Márquez. Ferré wrote “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” (“When Women Love Men”) in 1977, while García Márquez published *Memorias de mis putas tristes* (*Memories of my Melancholy Whores*) in 2004. Therefore, both texts belong to a period in history where the role of the Latin American “macho” as well as the traditional “values” that for centuries attributed a “conventional” (passive) role to women began to be questioned. Yet, it is interesting to explore the *terms* within which this questioning takes place. Is the *language* involved in this discussion an enabler of replacement or an agent of recycling? In deconstructing both texts, this analysis will focus on the ways in which readers partake in the re-construction of *meaning* in order to render the stories legible. While carrying on with analysis, we will pay special attention to the dynamics that mix together the literary universe and “the real world,” in order to decipher how the discourse that serves as context for each text shapes and is shaped by the “message” produced by different readers.

Each of the writers chosen plays a different role in the context of the socio-historical setting of Latin American discourse. Rosario Ferré, a Puerto Rican writer born in 1938 from a wealthy and influential family, has shown from a

very early stage a concern for exposing female stereotypes, and the ways in which women, in the context of patriarchal societies, are systematically subjugated regardless of racial or socio-economic differences. In her acclaimed essay titled “The Writer’s Kitchen,” Ferré claims she writes as a way to destroy and construct her-self, in an attempt to grow and change through the pieces she produces. In stating this, Ferré shares her “faith” in the transformational power of words, which, according to this writer, have granted her a “unique identity” which “owes its existence only to [her] own efforts” (Ferré 227).

Examples of some of the pieces that better illustrate this exercise are Ferré’s “La muñeca menor” (“The Youngest Doll”), “Maldito Amor” (“Sweet Diamond Dust”), “Amalia,” and, of course, “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” (“When Women Love Men”). The way in which Ferré captures the common experience of the female oppressed has granted her the admiration of critics who highlighted the writer’s ability to create harmony out of dissonance (Fernández Olmos 43). In this sense, and despite her outspoken interest in annihilating herself and the world, Rosario Ferré emerges as a skillful negotiator of *meaning* who understands how to breach the apparent discord that keeps every day experience and literary creations apart.

In “When Women Love Men,” Ferré describes the way in which two women cope with the death of their mutual lover. One of these women is the widow of the deceased while the other is his former mistress. In his will, Ambrosio (the unfaithful husband) disposed that the house he used to share with

his respectable wife was to be shared by both women upon his death. This last wish not only resulted in a very intimate quarrel between the two women, it also triggered a quest for self-understanding which each of the female characters undertook alone, and which Ferré transmits to the audience by means of very intense monologues. Described as “one of Ferré’s most pitiless probes into feminine psychology” by the editors of *The Oxford Book of Latin American Short Stories*, this story fits the scope of this project well as it is my goal to show that Rosario Ferré, in actuality, does not really have the last word when it comes to writing this story. We as readers do.

García Márquez, on the other hand, is a very “masculine” writer insofar as he crafts texts where male characters always remain in the spotlight. Born in Colombia, in 1927, García Márquez became famous with his 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and has since produced a prolific amount of short stories, essays, and novels. A common motif of his writing is the association of “potency” (as the opposite of sexual impotency) with agency and success (Hart Molen 1) as illustrated, for example, by *El otoño del patriarca* (*The Autumn of the Patriarch*), *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (*Love in the Time of Cholera*), and “Muerte constante después del amor” (“Death Constant Beyond Love”).

Memorias de mis putas tristes (*Memories of my Melancholy Whores*) is not an exception. This novel describes the vicissitudes of a mediocre journalist who, on the eve of his ninetieth birthday decided to give a present to himself by spending the night in the arms of a fourteen-year-old virgin, even though this would initiate the maiden in the arts of prostitution. In the midst of this adventure,

the main character finds himself divided between love and lust, potency and impotency, and ultimately between life and death. I argue that the kind of death García Márquez's narrator faces is intimately related to the will of his readers, who, much more than the first-writer, possess the ability to render his existence irrelevant.

Deconstructing these stories should present us with an opportunity to reconstruct the ways we read them, not publicly but privately. At this level, this paper argues, the utterance of a word becomes the execution of a choice, and therefore, the idea that words always lack *meaning* become questionable. In order to discern how the two texts analyzed here prompt us to make our own choices in order to produce a specific reading, we should now proceed to the textual analysis.

Textual Analysis: “When Women Love Men” by Rosario Ferré

“Conocemos sólo en parte y profetizamos sólo en parte, pero cuando llegue lo perfecto desaparecerá lo parcial. Ahora vemos por un espejo y oscuramente, mas entonces veremos cara a cara” – San Pablo, primer epístola a los corintios.

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully.” - 1 Corinthians

Proper Names and Identity as Forms of Text

The fact that Rosario Ferré chose to introduce this quote at the beginning of “When Women Love Men” reveals that this story deals with fragmented understanding (*perception*) and mirrored images. *Perception* plays an important role in the purpose attributed to mirrors, and Ferré takes advantage of this connection in order to write a story whose narrative force is driven by the interplay of binaries, such as the ones inscribed in the idea of totality-partiality, and the two sides of a mirror, which always provide a fragmented *perception* of the object lying on the other side.

In the context of “When Women Love Men,” the narration becomes in itself a mirror through which the three main characters of the story interact with the society that engendered them and builds itself upon them. On its surface,

oppositions are generated by the means of juxtapositions and contrasts, such as the ones that keep the two Isabels fusing together while attempting to annihilate each other, and function as the driving force of the story: “De esta manera habíamos alcanzado [...] casi una armonía perfecta entre los tres. Yo, que la amaba cada día más y más, comencé a mortificar mi carne [...] para hacer que ella volviera al camino del bien” (Ferré 39). In this way, the narration becomes a puzzle that follows the female characters through their quest to achieve the capture (appropriation) of the *other* Isabel. However, the characteristics of the *other* are hardly inherent to the individual but mostly a result of the assumptions and expectations society has imposed upon her. Therefore, throughout the unfolding of the story it becomes obvious that each Isabel is mostly a product of what their social environment requires her to be, as illustrated by the following passage “Tú fuiste el culpable, Ambrosio, de que no se supiera hasta hoy cuál era cuál entre las dos, Isabel Luberza recogiendo dinero para restaurar los leones de yeso de la plaza [...] o Isabel la Negra, preparando su cuerpo para recibir el semen de los niños ricos” (Ferré 24). It is in this sense that the story is built upon a commodification of identity that compels each woman to convince the male figures around them that she is the real Isabel, the one that can better please and serve them.

Proper names play a major role in this realization. In the context of “When Women Love Men,” names function as artifacts of the process of objectification and individualization that surrounds the establishment of identity, as something attributed by others. Therefore, proper names function as a very particular type of

text and become the facilitators of experience (*perception*) by acting as a *trace* of the existence of others. Names are what allow outsiders to refer to a certain subject. With this in mind, this analysis deconstructs the way in which names are used in the context of “When Women Love Men” to establish hierarchies and assign identity.

The act of naming as an act of territorialization: Ambrosio as assigner of meaning

Naming is in itself an act of *supplementation* as names convey a substitution (of presence) and an addition at the same time (we know a person *is*, even when we do not yet know her name; in this sense, learning a name means learning an additional piece of information about a given individual). In this way, names undermine the importance of experience (the fact that the object named may have changed over time) for the sake of facilitating recognition, as they serve the purpose of specifying identity by fixing it. In doing so, names become an instance of territorialization, an effort to conquer and define for the sake of communication. In the context of “When Women Love Men,” names assign value and, in doing so, they affix an identity. Yet, as the story progresses we discover that these assigned identities deeply trouble the way in which the main characters interact, as they are condemned to fulfill an image that depends on the way others see them. Consequently, the names of Ambrosio, Isabel Luberza, and Isabel la Negra, all become agents of *differentiation* and *supplementation*

whose main purpose is to facilitate a certain classification of the characteristics they incarnate.

From the beginning of the story, the narrator engages three subjects in her account. The more particular of these characters is Ambrosio, the unfaithful husband, who, despite being dead seems omnipresent due to the constant mentioning of his *name*. The remaining two characters, the wife and the lover of Ambrosio, are both called Isabel, signaling the fact that they are condemned to share much more than a first name. The two Isabels are only distinguishable from one another because of race and socioeconomic differences which, of course, are also parts of their names (“la Negra” and “Luberza”). However, in the course of the narration these differences become less relevant than the fact that neither of them is male, which translates into a common lack of autonomy. Both women are depicted as Ambrosio’s property, and as such, they are deprived from wholeness (they are not independent but live as satellites of Ambrosio) illustrating the social belief that only a man can utterly complete a woman.

Additionally, the fact that throughout the story only Ambrosio is afforded a unique name, grants the husband the status of a fixed *presence*. The fact that other young males are mentioned vaguely, in passing, implies that their *presence* is not as stable or important as Ambrosio’s, who is seen by others (such as his friends who trust him with the initiation of their sons, or the two women who are defined by their role in his life) as an assigner of identity. According to Helene Cixous, this role is vital in the context of phallogentric (male dominated) societies, which depend on hierarchical oppositions, such as “man-woman,” “self-other,”

“wife-mistress,” and which impose the need for an “assigner” (of meaning) and a “receptacle” (38). In the context of Ferré’s story, the establishment of Ambrosio as a provider of meaning, and point of reference, is enabled through the deference conveyed by Ambrosio’s name.

In reading “When Women Love Men” we observe that all passive receptacles are deprived of a distinctive proper name. As a result, they become *supplements* that can easily displace and replace others, but which are ultimately interchangeable. This assumption is supported by their lack of a singular name. This description applies to the two Isabels but also to the wealthy young men that frequent Isabel la Negra, given that neither of them is considered as a memorable lover. Only Ambrosio, the patriarch assigner of meaning, is irreplaceable: “Porque nosotras, Isabel Luberza e Isabel la Negra, en nuestra pasión por ti Ambrosio, desde el comienzo de los siglos nos habíamos estado acercando [...] purificándonos de todo aquello que nos definía” (Ferré 23). In this manner, the *name* of the main male character, the only man who is afforded a proper name in the context of the narration, becomes the *trace* par excellence insofar as its mention extends the presence of the deceased beyond his death, and in doing so allows him to continue to affect the lives of those who survived him.

One mirror – two Isabels

The other main characters of the story are the widow and former mistress of Ambrosio, the two Isabels. There are many ways in which Isabel Luberza and

Isabel la Negra appear to be two sides of the same coin. So much so that in several instances their voices become one: “Nosotras, tu querida y tu mujer, siempre hemos sabido que debajo de cada dama de sociedad se oculta una prostituta [...] Porque nosotras siempre hemos sabido que cada prostituta es una dama en potencia (Ferré 23). Yet, the proclamation of the similarities that could bring them together is always undermined by the acceptance of their differences. The labels assigned to each woman, which range from “lover” to “wife, and from “prostitute” to “lady,” not merely describe but assign social roles. Likewise, the proper names assigned to each character, in effect, enact a specific (racial and class based) understanding of their identities. In this way, each Isabel is “trapped” within the name that captures her place in society. Yet, when we learn that Isabel la Negra yearns to live in the house of Isabel Luberza (Ferré 30) while the latter cherished the scandalous Cherries Jubilee fingernail polish used by the former (Ferré 26), we realize that both women feel profoundly incomplete as they both feel that they are missing a part of themselves that is being played by the other woman. Consequently, each Isabel longs for the annihilation of the other as a *separate* being.

***The Appropriation of the Other –Rivalry, Possession and the act of
naming***

In “When Women Love Men” the annihilation of the rival that each Isabel longs for has very special characteristics. It entails fusing with the other:

Porque nosotras, Isabel Luberza e Isabel la Negra, en nuestra pasión por ti, Ambrosio, desde el comienzo de los siglos, nos habíamos estado acercando, nos habíamos estado santificando la una a la otra sin darnos cuenta [...] De tal manera que al final, cuando una de nosotras le ganó a la otra, fue nuestro más sublime acto de amor. (Ferré 23-24)

However, it is still annihilation, since there can only be one Isabel to emerge from their struggle. Insofar as both females are restrained to function in a world where phallogentric values force them to refer to men as the source of meaning, it is not surprising to observe that their interpersonal relations are consequently pervaded by a sense of rivalry. In imitating the values embraced by males like Ambrosio, their goal in life become seizing, not sharing.

Consequently, throughout the entire narration, both Isabels continuously struggle to incarnate the signified of the noun “woman.” In doing so, they remain halted in a confrontational mindset where each of them covets the characteristics of the other that attracted Ambrosio in the first place. The rationality of this behavior lies in the fact that the phallogentric discourse that characterizes patriarchal societies depends on hierarchical oppositions (man/woman, master/slave), which impose the need for an “assigner” (of meaning) and a “receptacle” (Cixous 38). And even though women are expected to occupy the latter role in their interactions with men (as females have been traditionally associated with “passivity” while their male counterparts are considered “givers” par excellence), they are still forced to compete with each other in order to be granted the privilege of entering the established binary: man/woman,

husband/wife, father/mother. However, this is only an “internal” antagonism affecting the way in which females relate among themselves, and which does not affect the way in which women relate to men. That is, as passive objects, females are to subject themselves to the standards of men, as they are the ones in charge of defining the desirable characteristics they expect to encounter in a “real” woman.

Yet, Rosario Ferré’s story never offers a definite definition of what a woman wants to be, must be, or is actually expected to be. The narration concludes by erasing the differences that justified the quarrel that took place in public, but leaves the audience with the responsibility of explaining what they “witnessed” while reading the story. Moreover, given that this “evaluation” has to occur privately, each reader has an opportunity to “act” upon the text, before the piece itself has an opportunity to “act” upon the individual reader.

Textual Analysis: *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* by García Márquez

“Es imposible no terminar siendo como los otros creen que uno es.” – García Márquez, citando a Julio César

“It is impossible not to become what others believe you are.” – García Márquez, quoting Julius Caesar

Proper Names as Supplements of Identity

In analyzing García Márquez’s novella, it is possible to identify some of the same themes used by Rosario Ferré. *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* is also built upon the commodification of identity and the interplay of fragmented understanding (which prompt the main character to claim that “es imposible no terminar siendo como los otros creen que uno es.” (García Márquez 93)).

Therefore, this story also serves as an example of how proper names (or nicknames) can be used to enable external objectification as they *supplement* an identity. At first glance, however, *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* does not exhibit the same pattern of knowledge/identity assignment depicted by Ferré’s story, as its narrator, in describing his life and habits, presents himself as a mere “receptacle” of the circumstances that surround him. Yet, a deconstructive reading of the story, by engaging with the way in which names and the act of naming are used in the narration, reveals that this text is also based on the embrace of the same patriarchal understanding of the world that underpins “When Women Love Men.” In deconstructing *Memories of My Melancholy*

Whores, we observe that the narrator embraces the “traditional” roles assigned to the male-female, and wife-prostitute dichotomies, and takes for granted that “female identity” is a form of *text* (an affixed, recognizable characteristic) to be defined by masculine figures.

The fact that the narrator of *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* is not yet dead establishes some differences between his character and that of Ambrosio in “When Women Love Men.” The ninety-year-old, nameless narrator is still actively undergoing the life experiences that he is crafting in his memoirs. He, therefore, seems to still have a choice about the way in which he relates to others. Yet, in reading García Márquez’s novel, we find that the narrator systematically attempts to disguise his responsibility in the construction of a type of lifestyle that (conveniently) allows him to routinely rent human bodies for his own pleasure, while denying these women any further identity but that of “putas” (whores). This deferral of responsibility can be detected in the way in which the narrator refrains from assuming a fixed identity on his own, and only describes himself through the nickname that his community assigned him. In this way, he appears to be a receptacle that simply perpetuates an understanding of reality handed down to him, either by madams, such as Rosa Cabarcas, or by culture, of which his extensive library serves as a sample.

This apparent lack of agency that characterizes the male character seems closely related to his lack of financial success, given that he describes himself as a physically and socially ill-favored character, who has never been married nor wealthy. A clear connection seems to exist between economic buying power and

respectability, which only reinforces the way in which patriarchal values (namely, the idea that men are to support and protect women) play in the story. In this way, he lacks the status Ambrosio enjoyed in “When Women Love Men.” As head of household and provider, Ambrosio acted as the center par excellence of all the women in his life. In contrast, the narrator of *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* sees himself as a trivial man who has no real impact on the life of others.

Yet, the nickname by which others refer to him, “the scholar,” unveils a contradiction between the way in which the narrator conceives himself and the way in which the world sees him, between his intellectual insight and his sensory experience. In this sense, this alias reveals that while internally the narrator is mainly defined in terms of his physical unattractiveness, externally, it is his erudition that distinguishes him in the eyes of those who know him. As a result, we learn that his community considers him to be a conveyer of culture and knowledge, despite the narrator’s effort to present himself as a passive witness of a social reality he has not helped to build.

How to do things with names: the making of a “scholar”

In order to understand the kind of *knowledge* that has formed the identity of “the scholar,” it is necessary to learn about those “others” who have contributed to his formation. For this enterprise as well, a careful deconstruction of the use of proper names throughout the story becomes handy. Everything the narrator “knows” was learned through the library he inherited from his snob mother, or through the surreptitious life he experienced after his 9-5 job was

over. Then, the narrator would spend his time visiting as many brothels as there were available in his city. The fruit of such visits was going to be a voluminous record that “the scholar” kept in order to track the names, age, and place of the different amorous encounters that his money afforded him.

This record shows an interesting attempt to affix the memories of the women he rented. He collected names as a form of souvenir. At the same time, the names recorded by the narrator, by enabling a potential rewriting of his past, function as a means of *supplementation*, as they *replace* and *add* to the nature of the original experiences. The recording of these names *replaces* the actual event just as any memory, or photograph does: it evokes the experience without being the experience in itself. The *addition* comes in the form of the attribution of a false “identity” given that, as the narrator himself recognizes later in the narration “whores” have different *names* for different clients (García Márquez 57).

Therefore, keeping track of the *names* of the prostitutes he has “loved” through his life has no other value than allowing “the scholar” to assign them an identity that it is not theirs. Still, this identification is necessary for the narrator to be able to assign these anonymous prostitutes a place in his *Memoirs*. In this sense, it does not matter who these women are, but what matters is *whose* they are.

In reading *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, it also becomes clear that all-powerful characters possess a distinctive name. And the narrator seems clearly intimidated by them. Characters such as Rosa Cabarcas, Florina de Dios, Damiana, Casilda Armenta, Castorina or Ximena Ortiz have very concrete personalities, which are shown through their interactions with the narrator. All

these women have demands that they expect “the scholar” to fulfill. Rosa Cabarcas, for example, is a madam who requires the narrator to pay for the services of her workers (García Márquez 22), while Florina de Dios, the narrator’s mother is depicted as a figure of authority who had a vast influence on his education (García Márquez 37). Likewise, Damiana, as somebody who fell in love with the narrator, rejected his money after being raped by him at a very early age because she expected a different type of commitment from him (García Márquez 42), and Ximena Ortiz demanded “the scholar” to marry her before he could enjoy her body (García Márquez 38). Even Casilda Arementa, a former prostitute the narrator casually meets after many years of not using her services, expects the narrator to perform, just as he used to (García Márquez 96).

Only “Delgadina” is presented as an exception. The virginity of the fourteen year old prostitute that Rosa Cabarcas offers to the narrator on his ninetieth birthday, opens a universe of possibilities for the man. She serves as a *tabula rasa* insofar as she has no identity (“the scholar” explicitly declines to learn her birth name when Rosa attempts to disclosure it), and no expectations for him. Her lack of agency is symbolized by her mutism throughout the story, which at first is just a consequence of the fact that she is asleep during her first encounters with the narrator and eventually becomes a requirement he imposed upon her, in order to preserve the “purity” of their idyll. In deconstructing the significance of this requirement, we realize that her silence is used as an ultimate symbol of her objectification, which imposes a complete invasion of the little girl

self that not only allows for her physical penetration but also enables her disempowering as an autonomous human being.

As a result of this “invasion,” the young virgin loses any autonomy over her life; she becomes a something that “the scholar” can shape as he pleases. This is why, in the old man’s eyes “Delgadina” has no name, no past, and no voice. Her entire self is usurped by the fantasies of “the scholar” who, eventually, succeeds in presenting himself as the savior of this young soul. Yet, this “salvation” only translates in the fact that now the young girl will not longer have to rent her body to multiple old-men, it will be enough to reserve herself for “the scholar.” At no point the narrator considers the fact that, perhaps, the so called “love” “Delgadina” is claimed to feel for him (love that, pertinently, is not enunciated by the young girl as it is Rosa Cabarcas, the madam, who informs “the scholar” about the feelings of “Delgadina”) is nothing more than a rationalization of the subordination that has been imposed on the fourteen year old.

In this sense, the conclusion of *Memories of my Melancholy Whores* is nothing but a display of *différance* as understood by Derrida insofar as its significance unavoidably depends on the understanding of “love” that the reader embraces (García Márquez 109) There is a deferral of *meaning* that is subliminally imposed upon the audience, who is forced to look elsewhere in order to “make sense” of a message that is re-written by each reader. To this extent, the characters depicted by García Márquez function as empty shells enabling the outline of a story that becomes mutable in nature in order to become readable.

Part 5 – The Role of Performativity and Context

Proper Names as Narrative Gaps

This comparative analysis is based on the assumption that there are common strategies at work in the literary pieces being discussed. These strategies, as previously stated, involve “the commodification of identity and the interplay of fragmented understanding.” Phrased in this manner, it may be tempting to assume that these tactics can be analyzed or understood by exploring the motivations that inspired the writers to engage certain assumptions, or to build a specific type of story. However, in pursuing such an analysis we would be incurring the “intentional fallacy” (which warns critics about focusing on the intentions of a writer instead of evaluating her work on the basis of its “value”). This fallacy entails the idea that, when it comes to evaluating a literary piece, there are questions that cannot simply be answered by means of the writer. This paper endorses this understanding of written works, and, in doing so, it prioritizes an exploration on the reason why, as readers, we can *understand* the meaning conveyed by a literary work written by others in a different context. Hence, the assumption of this analysis is that readers play an active role in the commodification of identity that takes place in both texts while also engaging in an interplay of fragmented understanding. Consequently, in the last section of this work, we will explore the ways in which readers are required to partake in the writing of Ferré’s and García Márquez’s texts.

In deconstructing the way in which names are used by Rosario Ferré and García Márquez, we have encountered that they, as conveyors of different

identities, systematically enable an exercise of *différance*: they distinguish subjects while postponing an actual description of their individuality. This emptiness of meaning, however, has been disguised through the means of further narrative gaps (such as “prostitute,” “wife,” or “scholar”) that transfer the responsibility of assigning identity onto the shoulders of the readers. In this way, readers learn that Isabel la Negra is a “prostitute,” but they do not learn from Ferré’s story what this means. It is the reader’s decision to think of this character as a “whore” or as an “entrepreneur.”

This decision is possible because authors are unable to fully define their characters. Insofar as characters depict living beings, they possess an inherent complexity that cannot be fully captured by the (first) person writing the text. Just as in “real life” where individuals tend to develop different opinions of the people they meet, readers too readily “classify” fictional characters based on their own expectations. And it is to enable this process, this transference of roles, that writers need narrative gaps. A narrative gap is considered to be a device that allows readers to fill in (*supplement*) portions of the story that are not provided by the writer. Usually, this term is used to describe contributions the audience makes with regard to events (internal or external) that are assumed to have taken place in the context of a text. In this analysis, however, I am proposing that, language in general, but names in particular, are surreptitious examples of narrative gaps. In this way, in the context of literature, the narrative gaps enclosed in proper names enable the audience to become an active participant in a type of *writing* that exceeds the limit of the specific literary text at hand. In order

to understand the implications of my statement, it is necessary to reflect on the nature of writing-reading as well as the differences that apparently keep literature and reality apart. By engaging the ideas of John Austin and Jacques Derrida, this paper aims to contribute to an understanding of how literary works, such as the ones analyzed above, may challenge the notion of authorship altogether by forcing the reader to complete a textual reality that does more than map preexisting circumstances, it actively writes them. In prompting such a reading, all literary texts build their own context as they build themselves. In order to clarify how this process works, we are first to draw from John Austin's work on *performative* language, and Jacques Derrida's reflections on the meaning of *context*. At the same time, we are going to test our conclusions by using them to reflect on the way we read "When Women Love Men," and *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*.

John Austin and the Literary Work as an Exercise of Performative Language

In *How To Do Things with Words*, the British philosopher John Austin introduces a significant distinction between what he describes as "constative" statements and "performative" utterances. While the first, according to Austin, can be classified as true or false statements that merely describe or report an observable situation, the second ones cannot (Austin 5). *Performative* sentences, therefore, present a very special characteristic, says Austin: they do by saying. (Austin 6). In his opinion, the uttering of certain words is a "leading incident in the

performance of [an] act” (Austin 8). And yet, Austin does not go as far as to claim that the act of uttering is in itself enough to make something happen. Instead, he goes on to clarify that the action (enabled through the *performative* locution) may require certain conditions to be met in order to be fully realized (8). Only then, claims Austin, is pertinent to classify a *performative* as a “happy” utterance (14). Thus, while a *performative* locution cannot be classified as “true” or “false,” it may be evaluated as “happy” or “unhappy.” For example, merely expressing “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth” does not have a real impact if the person making such a claim is not the one in charge of naming the boat, or if the boat already has a name (9). In such a case, my attempt would be deemed as “unhappy.”

Hence, the act of naming (clearly a *performative* utterance insofar as it facilitates an experience that cannot be qualified as “true” or “false”) must be evaluated in conjunction with those circumstances that allow those involved in the use of the name in question to understand its meaning. There is no point in assigning a name if nobody else is going to be able to understand the role that a name is to play. In this sense, names have to be negotiated by those who choose them and those who agree to use them. And the situation becomes even more blurry when the process of naming takes place in the literary realm.

The intention of this paper is to problematize our understanding of the act of writing-reading by proposing that the construction of fictional characters, in the context of literary works, entails an exercise of performativity that is executed at different levels, and which brings about a transgression of the traditional roles assigned to the writer and the reader. This is possible because, in the context of

literary pieces, the first-writer (i.e., Rosario Ferré) is “giving birth” to a character that does not exist in the real world (i.e., the world where the work is to be read). As a result, “fictional” characters, such as Ambrosio or Isabel la Negra are neither inherently “true” nor “false.” Insofar as they exist (just because they have been created through the voice of the first-writer), they are the product of a *performative* act. However, the mere will of the speaker (this being the first-writer), does not in itself guarantee the success of the utterance. In other words, even if a writer creates a certain character “on paper,” this character is not “alive” until the audience “adopts” such character by admitting that her existence “makes sense” to them. In this way, we may say that a “fictional” *performative* utterance is a “happy” act, as defined by Austin, when it gives life to a character capable of reaching such a state of independence from her first-writer that it becomes an “independent” subject. In other words, it has to be possible for the reader (who, in actuality is nothing more than a posterior-writer) to feel that he “knows” this character without the mediating presence of the first-writer.

In this manner, there is a breakdown of reference between the idea the writer had in mind while creating a character and the idea the audience embraces while reading the text. This is evidence that the enunciation of proper names enacts a narrative gap that requires the participation of the reader. To such a degree, the act of reading necessarily entails a will to re-write the text, by filling the gaps the writer left blank while describing the characters that carry on the story. There is so much that readers are not told with regard to the past of the individuals they meet throughout the text, and yet, the audience needs to assume

they “know” them in order to understand the text. It is in this way that readers make a decision every time they encounter a new character, and, in doing so, they proceed to “read” the text by rewriting it.

These decisions, however, do not take place in a vacuum. They are aided, and guided, by the will of the first-writer, who sets certain parameters based on how the reader is to conceive the fictional character. It is in this way that proper names, just as Austin’s *performative* utterances, *do by saying* insofar as they prompt the reader to conceive a person with certain characteristics (such as a ninety-year-old bachelor), that is going to be called in a specific manner (i.e., “the scholar”) throughout the narration and which did not exist before the writing took place. To such extent, the introduction of a character is “the leading incident in the performance of [an] act” (Austin 8).

Tracing performativity in “When Women Love Men” and Memories of My Melancholy Whores

Given that the names used by Rosario Ferré and García Márquez do not have referential meaning, they enact a negotiation of identity, that is, a certain agreement among writers and readers with regard to the finite number of interpretations that a certain identity can have. In order to understand the assumptions that limit this agreement, we analyzed the ways in which identity is assigned in both texts. As a result, we realized that identity is a feature attributed from outside (by others), and that it did not need to be a reflection of the character’s will. In addition, the literary analysis discussed above exposed the

fact that only the powerful (such as Ambrosio or “the scholar”) have the privilege to define identity, while the non-powerful (namely, women) are condemned to embrace the role attributed to them in order to succeed in their given environments.

Within the texts, therefore, there is a commodification of identity insofar as interpersonal relations are consistently described in terms of an economic exchange that assigns each part specific roles: that of the assignor and the receptacle. If the latter wants to have any kind of agency, she is to please the former by fulfilling her role properly. At the same time, the authority and power of the assignor depends on the willingness of the non-powerful to accept his will. In reading “When Women Love Men” and *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, we experience identity as the byproduct of this dynamic of power relations: men define women, and women define men by letting them define what femininity is. *Performative* acts, therefore, take place at several levels during the writing process of these pieces given that not only the first- writers, namely Rosario Ferré and García Márquez do (create) by saying (while introducing new characters into the narration), but also the characters themselves give the illusion of engaging in *performative* acts, when they assign identity in the context of the narration. In the examples used above, these “fictional” performative acts occur not only when men name women, but also when women adopt the names (and the roles) that Ambrosio and “the scholar” have assigned them. To test the significance of this assertion, it is enough to imagine what would have happened (or what our reading would be) had the two Isabels rebelled against the authority

of Ambrosio, or had “Delgadina” told “the scholar” her real name. If such would have been the case, the audience (posterior-writers) would encounter a situation where the *performative* act of naming (and its subliminal assignation of identity) as practiced by the main male characters in both stories would have resulted in an “infelicity” (Austin 14). That is, if the circumstances were not appropriate, these performative locutions would have been “unhappy” (Austin 14). This does not mean that we would be in a position to deem the attempt to assign names (and identity) as “false,” given that Ambrosio would still be calling his two women “Isabel” and the scholar would probably insist on thinking of his virgin bride as “Delgadina.” However, these acts would have been interpreted as a failed attempt to possess the subjects being defined by such names.

This distinction we just discussed, namely, the distinction that is to be established between the *performative* utterances performed by the first-writer of a literary piece and the “fictional” *performative* locutions executed by the characters of a story, refers us, once again to the exercise of *différance* that underpins the act of writing-reading. *Différance* is present every time readers embrace the illusion that the identity of the characters they encounter through the text is established within the literary text. In this way, there is a deferral of responsibility that allows “readers” to avoid their final responsibility as posterior-writers of the literary pieces they read. This is why readers do not normally believe they function as writers of the texts they encounter.

Yet, this is a misguided understanding of “reading.” Precisely because of the written nature of literary works, they are expected to survive their writers.

Consequently, it is not possible to claim that the reason why a character such as Isabel Luberza “makes sense” is because we know what Rosario Ferré meant when she created her. The reason why these characters “exist” is because readers accept the challenge to fulfill the narrative gap such a name represents, and have decided who Isabel Luberza really is.

Jacques Derrida on the Meaning of Context

Yet, it is a legitimate question to ask: why is it that readers do not consider themselves to be posterior-writers of pieces they consume? Why is it that they tend to assume that the characters they meet within a literary text are already finished products created by the first-writer? In order to elaborate a response for these questions, we will engage the ideas that the French philosopher Jacques Derrida proposed with regard to the nature of context, and how it affects the dynamics of reading and writing.

According to Derrida, writing entails that the person who writes releases a message that is “cut off from him and continues to produce effects beyond his presence and beyond the present actuality of his meaning” (Derrida 87). Yet, this “meaning” only makes sense when its “sense” is, at least potentially, intelligible to an external other: “A writing that was not structurally legible – iterable- beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing” (90). In saying this, Derrida is ratifying the former negotiation of meaning we discussed above, namely, that readers and writers have to be able to understand each other on a certain level. In addition, Derrida makes specific claims to establish language,

and, in particular morphologic symbols, as the main conveyors of negotiable meaning. In this regard, the “laws of writing” as described by Derrida mandate that the signs that make writing possible, and communication attainable, have to be repeatable and citable.

Derrida’s take on the importance of the iterability of the sign provides an interesting framework for the analysis of the dynamics that misguide readers into believing that “meaning” is a finite message handed down from (first) writers to readers. In exposing our expectations with regards to the “repeatability” of linguistic signs, Derrida is providing an interesting starting point to use when analyzing the concept of “identity.” According to him, “a written sign [...] is therefore a mark which remains, which is not exhausted in the present of its inscription” (Derrida 92). In the context of literature, proper names become such marks and therefore are subjected to the same incompleteness any other sign is. As a consequence, they are also susceptible to what Derrida calls “the phenomenon of the crisis of meaning,” insofar as they are cut off from any referent. It is precisely because of this lack of referent that proper names, as conveyors of a certain identity, are to be understood as instances of *performative* language.

In this regard, it is interesting to think of the ways in which proper names, (just as signs, according to Derrida) can “engender infinitely new contexts” (97). An example of this is illustrated by the way in which, independently of whether our reading of Isabel Luberza or “the scholar” matched with the ideas of Ferré or

García Márquez, those characters are to stay with us. Regardless of what the first-writers do, they cannot “kill” the characters they have conceived.

They have created something through language and undoubtedly acted upon the world in a manner that is not merely descriptive. In that way, the utterance of performatives in the context of literature represents a very particular type of occurrence, given that, as long as there is some potential reader for the work of the first-writer, this one can rest assured that the act that inspired his locution will be a “happy” one. His characters will survive him, not because they are his, but because through narrative gaps they can live without him. In this way, fictional characters, conceived through a performative utterance of a first-writer come to exist in the blurry free zone we call “context.”

In this way, while Derrida tells us that context is “the set of presences which organize the moment of its inscription” (Derrida 92), I would like to argue that “context” is nothing more than a potential infinite interplay of fragmented understandings that come together to facilitate a communally constructed “meaning.” Context, therefore, becomes a free-zone where the literary and the material world store their common references. This is the realm where readers learn to establish differences between what it “means” to be a prostitute and what it “means” to be a wife, even though, in reading “When Women Love Men” such a distinction becomes blurry. This is also the universe that establishes the difference between a “scholar” and a “pervert,” between a man who learns from others and a man who actively sets negative examples for others to follow. In adopting one definition over the other, readers reshape what Derrida calls “the

moment of [the sign's] inscription." This choice implies that every reader travels back and forth between text and context, between the fictional and the material world, between the roles of reader and writer. In other words, when a reader decides that the narrator of *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* is indeed "a man in love," this reader is validating patriarchal values by avoiding to engage with the multiple ways in which "the scholar" objectifies "Delgadina." It is important to notice that this interpretation is not imposed by García Márquez. There is the possibility of writing a different story by deconstructing the way in which, while reading, we prioritize certain expectations over others (namely, the idea that all women want to have somebody to care for them, despite the motivations that inspire such interest).

In the case of "When Women Love Men", we observe how this communication between first-writer and posterior ones (namely, the readers) is facilitated through the deferral of meaning that takes place when Ferré describes Isabel la Negra as a "prostitute." It is precisely this iterability of the sign, to use Derrida's terminology, that (mistakenly) allows her readers to think of Ferré's locution as *constative* instead of *performative*. Because she is not inventing the term "prostitute," readers gain a sense of familiarity that misleads them into believing that in thinking of Isabel la Negra as a "whore," they are not saying anything the first-writer (namely, Ferré) did not say already. In this way, readers conceal the fact that they have no way to know what referents Rosario Ferré had in mind when she created the characters of "When Women Love Men." By assuming that there is only a writer but many readers, the audience declines to

acknowledge that the act of reading involves the necessity to make choices in order to find *meaning*. Instead, it is claimed that *meaning* is established between the first-writer and the context in which the writing-reading takes place.

Conclusion:

Austin's performative utterances refer to those situations where speaking does much more than describing a situation that can be evaluated as true or false. The *performatives*, as Austin calls these locutions, refer to those opportunities where by saying or in saying something we are doing something. Based on this interpretation of the term, we can see that the characters described in the fiction pieces here analyzed in themselves represent examples of performative occurrences: they have been created by a locution, they exist because Rosario Ferré and García Márquez pronounce them alive. However, given that, according to Austin, the mere utterance of the performatives is not enough to guarantee the fulfillment of the acts that these forms of speech attempt to enable, there are other requirements that need to be met for the performatives to have effect. If these conditions are not satisfied, we may say instead that the utterances are "unhappy," as Austin claims that performatives are never to be evaluated in terms of whether they are true or false, but in terms of whether they encounter some "infelicities" or not. In this manner, the "success" or effectiveness of the original writing performed by Rosario Ferré and García Márquez intrinsically depends on whether the circumstances surrounding their occurrence (namely, the context in which they are to be read) validate them. This validation, this paper argues, is a re-writing of the original text, disguised under the label of "reading." Readers, therefore, necessarily complete a text by assigning ultimate *meaning* to the characters that first-writers can never fully describe. Many other elements present in literary creations, such as places and events, are

“experienceable” occurrences for readers, insofar as these are signifiers with concrete signifieds. Characters, however, are not. Therefore, characters are not “true” or “false” predicaments. They are the product of a performative venture carried on by what we had come to call the “first writer” of a text, namely, the person who took the initiative to bring “Ambrosio” or “Delgadina” to life. Yet, these characters would not be said to “exist” if readers were not able to appropriate them, in order to decide how to interpret the significance of their actions. In this way, readers fill a narrative gap every time they meet a character and manage to make sense of her without the support of the first-writer. Such a leap entails an almost unconscious act of rewriting, which makes readers posterior-writers by default. And it is through this transgression of roles that readers and writers become the makers of a context that makes the frontiers that keep literature and the everyday world apart obsolete. Insofar as first-writers create their characters while trying to anticipate a kind of reader that will be able to understand them, they engage in a “reading” of their audience. At the same time, readers (posterior writers) assume the task of deciding what a text is saying, and in doing so write their own versions of the text. And they both have to deal with the limitations imposed by their contexts.

In this thesis, I have, to a certain extent, followed the ideas of Jacques Derrida in order to define “context,” and have concluded that a “context” is defined by the potential infinite interplay of fragmented understandings that, for the sake of “communication” (that is, in order to preserve the iterability of the sign), have to come together in order to negotiate a certain “meaning.” To a

certain extent, contexts do succeed in establishing a certain horizon of intelligibility to be shared between first and posterior writers. However, when it comes to “understanding” characters, context cannot attribute nor define what is to be considered as “proper” meaning. Only readers do, and, in order to do that, they inevitably become posterior-writers. This is how *performativity* finds its place in literature.

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