



**SILENCED VOICES OR SILENCING THE VOICES: A FEMINIST READING  
OF ELENA GARRO'S *TESTIMONIOS SOBRE MARIANA* THROUGH  
IRIGARAY, CIXOUS, AND CRENSHAW**

**VOCES SILENCIADAS O SILENCIANDO LAS VOCES: UNA LECTURA FEMINISTA  
DE *TESTIMONIOS SOBRE MARIANA* DE ELENA GARRO A TRAVÉS DE IRIGAY,  
CIXOUS Y CRENSHAW**

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**Abstract:** «I am only memory and the memory that one has of me» (Garro, 1969: 11). Elena Garro's most celebrated work, *Recuerdos del porvenir*, opens with this sentence, which leads us to think that memory and imagination play a very important role in her works. This article looks at the narrative techniques used in her novel *Testimonios sobre Mariana* (1981) through the memory—or rather the «imaginary»—of two male characters: Vincent and André. To do this, I employ Luce Irigaray's «Male and Female Imaginary» (1985), and Hélène Cixous's «Écriture féminine» (1976), in order to analyse how Garro—by evoking the memory of two male characters—criticizes the «Patriarchal Language System» (Cixous, 1976), thus using that very language system. Mariana's identity has been constructed by the male figures present in her life, depending on their desires to «colonize» or «pacify» her body or her own life. Nonetheless, as the novel develops, it becomes evident that these male figures ultimately fail to remember her as they are evoking their «memory» or «imaginary» to remember her and construct her identity through their own testimonies, since each of them can only project his own desires and anxieties onto her, thereby erasing her subjectivity instead of recovering it. Garro, by letting male characters (re)construct the life and identity of the female protagonist, criticizes the «Male language system», an action which leads to the development of the «Écriture Feminine» in her work.

**Keywords:** Elena Garro, intersectionality, écriture féminine, feminist narratology, memory.

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**Resumen:** «Yo solo soy memoria y la memoria que de mí se tenga» (Garro, 1969: 11). La obra más célebre de Elena Garro, *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, comienza con estas líneas, lo que nos lleva a pensar que la memoria y la imaginación desempeñan un papel muy importante en sus libros. Este artículo analiza las técnicas narrativas empleadas en su novela *Testimonios sobre Mariana* (1981) a través de la memoria —o, más bien, el «imaginario»— de dos personajes masculinos: Vincent y André. Para ello, utilizo el concepto de «imaginario masculino y femenino» de Luce Irigaray (1985) y la «Écriture Féminine» de Hélène Cixous (1976). Este artículo analiza cómo Garro, al evocar la memoria de dos de los personajes masculinos, critica el «sistema lingüístico patriarcal» (Cixous, 1976), por medio del uso de ese mismo sistema lingüístico. La identidad de Mariana ha sido construida por las figuras masculinas presentes en su vida, en función de sus deseos de «colonizar» o «pacificar» su cuerpo o su propia vida. Sin embargo, a medida que avanza la novela, se hace evidente que estos personajes masculinos fracasan en recordar y construir su identidad a través de sus testimonios, ya que cada uno solo puede proyectar sus propios deseos y ansiedades sobre ella, borrando así su subjetividad en lugar de recuperarla. Garro, al dejar que los personajes masculinos (re)construyan la vida y la identidad de la protagonista femenina, critica el «sistema lingüístico masculino», lo que termina llevando al desarrollo de una «Écriture Féminine» en su obra.

**Palabras clave:** Elena Garro, interseccionalidad, écriture feminine, narratología feminista, memoria.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Elena Garro's works have come into the light for academic discussion, even though that, for the major part of 20<sup>th</sup> century, only Latin American «boom» male writers have been mostly the focus of attention. Garro (1916-1998) was a trailblazing Mexican journalist, playwright, and author whose writings questioned social and political standards, as well as literary conventions. Garro has emerged as one of Mexico's most innovative and rebellious voices. Her writings present themes such as memory, injustice, or the underrepresented voices of women and indigenous cultures, by means of fusing historical critique, magical realism, and existentialism. Her most famous work, *Los recuerdos del Porvenir* [*The Recollection of the things to come*] is considered the precursor of magical realism, although she herself negated the label, due to the commercial value attached to it. In this book, she portrayed history as cyclical and memory as fragmented, topics that would become recurrent themes in her later works.

Garro challenges the idea of a single, objective reality through fragmented perspectives in her novel *Testimonios sobre Mariana* (1981), a work that is known for its exploration of memory, truth, and subjective perception. Multiple characters give conflicting testimonies about Mariana; a mysterious woman whose life and death remain unclear. In this

novel, Garro develops a fragmented, non-linear structure, reflecting Garro's interest in how memory and storytelling shape reality. Firstly, we hear about Vicente, her lover, a sensitive man who—fascinated by Mariana—pursues her and wants to save her from both the toxic environment in which they find themselves, and from the selfish and humiliating relationship in which she is trapped. Then, we hear about, Gabrielle, a close friend to Mariana's husband, Augusto. As Gabrielle is close to Mariana and Augusto for her work, her voice is slower and more distant, more analytical. And, at last, we meet the young André, a relative of a friend of Mariana, who is likewise enchanted by Mariana, albeit in a less destructive and possessive manner; and who—just like Vicente—clings to a notion of salvation, emotional debt, and immense love that may have just existed in his memory. The book is called *Testimonios sobre Mariana* because Mariana's own voice is never heard: she is presented through the speech of other characters, and in honour of the unjust reality, perhaps this is the most appropriate form of portraying her, as we live in a world where women are still in a constant struggle to find their place and their voice, in that very social reality, Mariana, is constrained by both gender and class oppressions, and the chance to speak is never granted for herself.

In this article, I will be analysing *Testimonios sobre Mariana* to learn how the narrative techniques employed in it help to bring forward the dominant patriarchal discourse of the time. Throughout the novel, not even once we get an insight into the life of the protagonist through her own voice, whereas the people involved in her life usually talk about her: we get the perspective of a lover and a friend, but never of the woman herself. I will also explore how this novel critiques the patriarchal control exerted over women's narratives through a «Patriarchal Language System», as highlighted by Hélène Cixous (1976: 6), and how it reasserts female agency through the «Écriture Féminine». Mariana's class status also determines the treatment that she receives from others, especially from her husband (Augusto), reading it through the perspective of *intersectionality*, as theorized by Kimberly Crenshaw ([1989] 2018: 61). And, finally, how her identity is mediated by the «Male Gaze» through Luce Irigaray's concept of «Specularization», (1985: 102) the differentiation between «Male» and «Female Imaginary», a line of thought that she has developed in response to—her former teacher—Lacan's definition of *Imaginary* (Hendrix, 2019).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Garro's work is considered the precursor of magical realism by her biographer Patricia Rosas Lopátegui (2002). Silvia Santaolalla González also asserts that, during the Latin American

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Boom, important feminine literary figures were not fully recognized, and hence they did not receive the importance they deserved, then rendered invisible by the academy and the publishers, in contrast to their male counterparts (Santaolalla González, 2023: 61). Nevertheless, she reiterates that this wasn't due to a quality disparity, but instead to the sociocultural context at the time, clearly dominated by the patriarchy. In this context, she compares viability between the works of Gabriel García Márquez and Elena Garro, while giving a thorough insight into the opinions of other writers about both of them (2023: 62).

Susana Perea-Fox contends that writing becomes a significant medium for protesting and expressing the dissatisfaction with society (2016: 99). For instance, women writers—who are members of groups that were then marginalized—have a different perspective on the oppression, and—through their art—they symbolically break the silence that they were obliged to endure—along with other marginalized people—. Garro demystifies patriarchal and social norms while fusing several literary styles which included poetic prose, narrative innovation, and subjects such as folklore and social critique. The author has faith in the capability of the written word to improve society: «I secretly thought that a form of “poetic justice” could save the poor, the native people, the marginalized, and the forgotten from his own community» (Garro, in Oviedo, 2001: 266). Garro condemns both the social institutions that support these abuses and the exploitation and victimization that these people endure.

Much has been written about Garro's major works, such as *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, *La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas*, and *Ines*. Sandra Cypess' writes that Garro's portrayal of women critiques the traditional assumptions of the «Patriarchal culture»: she highlights how Garro's protagonist in *La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas* (Laura) does not end up choosing the man who represents the “Hispanic way of life”, but instead decides to go back to the Indigenous spouse and the Indigenous traditions. This is a choice that departs markedly from the general literary portrayals of the period, and thus disrupts the nineteenth-century nationalist currents—despite the text's twentieth century publication—that were shaped by Eurocentric ideals (Cypess, 2013: 19).

An essential framework for comprehending the gendered political environment in which Elena Garro lived, wrote, and eventually became marginalized, is provided by Ana Gabriela Cano's contribution to the volume *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (2007). Cano's historical research sheds light on the patriarchal structures of post-revolutionary Mexico that determined women's participation in public life, alongside the rigid ideological bounds that dictated acceptable female behaviour and dissent—even if

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the book does not just focus on Garro—. Cano's work places female intellectuals—such as Garro—in a political context where female agency was both mobilized and restrained. It shows how women who defied prevailing narratives were frequently portrayed as abnormal, insane, or politically hazardous. Due to Garro's criticisms of authoritarianism and her non-conformist public persona immediately clashed with the gendered moral order that Cano portrays and criticise: this contextualization is crucial for understanding Garro's subsequent demonization in the media, and her tense relationship with state power. Therefore, by offering the socio-political context required to comprehend both the processes of Garro's silence and the radical potential of her literary and political interventions, *Sex in Revolution* enhances the study of Garro's works.

Most of the research conducted on them has principally been observed in the light of a feminist reading. This is especially evident in analyses of her novel *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, where the portrayal of women trapped in cycles of male tyranny and social passivity amid post-revolutionary Mexico and during the Cristero wars—as presented in her book *Los recuerdos del porvenir*—. On the other hand, some scholarly work also revolves around her narrative techniques, but keeping in mind the patriarchal domestic spaces, such is in *La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas*. About *Testimonios sobre Mariana*, there is not so much academic work, but there is some related to transgression and identity. In her work «Testimonios sobre Mariana: La representación y la otra mujer», Rebecca Biron briefly tackles how the narratives produced for women, by women, or over how to fight for women's own control of representation, are still broadly functioning within the patriarchal paradigm: «La literatura feminista entiende la representación como una actividad política; es política en el sentido de que valora las multiples realidades, las creaciones, la subjetividad de las mujeres» (1995: 161). Her work focuses for the major part on the representation of women and not on the narrative techniques employed.

### 3. EVOKING THE «FEMALE IMAGINARY» AND MEDIATION OF THE IDENTITY BY THE «MALE GAZE»

Cixous introduces the idea of «Female Imaginary» to refer to the way women are now taking back the language system previously enforced by the dominant patriarchal structures:

Things are starting to be written, things that will constitute a Feminine Imaginary, the site, that is, of identifications of an ego no longer given over to an image defined by the masculine, but rather inventing forms for women on the march, or as I prefer to fantasize, «in flight»,

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so that instead of lying down, women will go forward by leaps in search of themselves (1981: 52).

The deliberate object of the imagining awareness, whether it be an object in the mind,—daydreams, evocation of absent individuals, etc.—, or outward items that are the result of the imagination—paintings, novels, etc.—is what Sartre defines as the *imaginary* ([1940] 2010: 190). When Irigaray expands the definition of imaginary to include both mental functions and cultural productions characterized by the imagining function, she is referring to elsewhere, the displaced/non-central literary spaces as the realm of the in-between; or, instead, what mediates and is exchanged at the individual or cultural level—thus, she appears to be keeping in mind the phenomenological definition—. Love, God—or another transcendent principle—, art, thought, poetry, and language are among those cultural products. She also adds an additional qualification: the phenomenological imaginary is sexed, meaning that it can be either a *female imaginary*—marked by the morphology of the female body, and characterized by plurality, non-linearity, fluid identity, etc.—or a *male imaginary*—bearing the morphological marks of the male body, whose cultural products are characterized by unity, teleology, linearity, self-identity, etc.—(1985a: 119). Her use of the imaginary is comparable to that of other proponents of feminine or woman’s writing, which further reiterates the idea of a performative idea of the «feminine».

This is what Garro does in *Testimonios sobre Mariana* (1981), evoking this «Female Imaginary», but through the Male Imaginary in the form of Vicente’s and André’s narratives—therefore, in a critical and deconstructive way—. The following quote illustrates this point. In one of the encounters of Vicente and Mariana, we can see how he is chasing her, as if she were a prize which can’t be «won»:

Mariana empezó en ese bosque ligeramente borrado por la bruma. Más tarde la vi muchas veces en las esquinas de mi ciudad y corrí tras ella solo para perderla entre la multitud. ¡Soy un tonto! No advertía que llevaba los dos mocasines puestos y que ella se hubiera presentado con un pie descalzo, como en la noche del pacto. ¡Miento! No hubo pacto. Solo un juego que ella inventó. Guardo también su promesa escrita: «Te esperaré en el cielo sentada en la silla de Van Gogh». No hablo en orden. ¿Cuál es el orden con Mariana? ([1981] 2021: 13).

For Vicente, who sees through the lens of the Male Imaginary, Mariana is an unfathomable being, something or someone that can’t be achieved: he is evocating her through his memory—during his two visits to Paris, when he could be with her—. He is enchanted by her simplicity, her docility, and her needs to be saved from her loveless and toxic marriage. As the novel starts, we immediately get a glance into this male imaginary: «Sí, Mariana era la simpleza misma, la docilidad. ¡Mira qué engaño! La primera vez que la vi fue

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en una fotografía que nos mostró Pepe a su regreso de París» (2021: 13). Therefore, «those components of the mirror that cannot reflect themselves» is one way according to which Irigaray defines the female imaginary (1985b: 151). According to this author, the relationship between the sexes has historically been conceptualized in terms of polarity and opposition, which ultimately leads to a hierarchy in which one sex is either superior or inferior to the other. As a result, even while she discusses female identity and its different degrees, this identity is not described in the same way as male identity. On the one hand, feminists' defence of women as women is still politically necessary to combat patriarchal oppression, which specifically despises women for being women. However, identity itself is a creation of the masculine imagination. And this imagination is what Garro projects when she lets Mariana's identity to be constructed by men, which reinforces the fact that Mariana, considered the «other» sex here, does not have a voice *vis-à-vis*, nor an identity created by Mariana's own voice, and neither opinions of her own, but rather an identity which is being constructed by other male figures, further reiterating the dominant patriarchal discourse that shows how (male-like) society helps «(re)creating» the identity of the «female».

Irigaray provides some examples of how a female and a male imaginary would be different. The characteristics of a male libidinal economy are as follows: there is no reciprocity or exchange outside of an economy of the same kind; there is no permeability or fluidity; and there is only quantitative—more or less—difference. Identity—quantitative or possessive—and non-contradiction dominate its syntax, namely a dualistic opposition, such as matter-energy, subject-object, etc. (Irigaray, 2002: 312-313). Rather than acknowledging *difference* as something non-hierarchical, the male imaginary relies on resistance to structure its relations. While «it does not oppose a female truth to male truth», a female imaginary is distinguished by its difference (otherness) and resistance to the male economy (Irigaray, 2002: 314).

Quería herirme y yo solo deseaba acostarme con ella. Caminamos por el bosque y su familiaridad con el verde la integraba a las viejas culturas europeas [...] Me intimidaba esa muchacha y la contrariedad de no haberme acostado con ella lo convirtió esa tarde en la criatura que hubiera deseado encontrar al principio de mi juventud [...] No encontré la respuesta. Mariana era lo contrario de Sabina en belleza y en edad. Sabina pertenecía a mi mundo, formaba parte de mi pasado y dibujaba mi futuro. Mariana, con su cuerpo y su risa de muchacha, era solo un presente intenso [...] No sabía nada de ella, era la viajera imprevista, la desconocida sin pasado y sin futuro, tenía algo cinematográfico en su belleza [...] Tenía algo artificial, era como si no existiera de una manera perdurable (Garro, 2021: 27).



In the above-mentioned quotes, we see Mariana's identity being formed and mediated by the male gaze: in Vicente's imaginary, we see his constant desire for her—not being able to sleep with her—and his need to be in control of her body. Simultaneously, he is comparing the two female figures of his life: his spouse (Sabina) and Mariana. We see the quantitative aspect here: a comparison in terms of more or less, based on how Mariana's beauty is different than that of his wife, and wherein Mariana's identity is being mediated as something to be possessed, to the point that he says that «she had something artificial, as if it didn't exist in a lasting way» (2021: 27). For him, she is an adventure, and since he doesn't know anything about Mariana, her identity is artificial. Through Garro's writing, we get an insight into this male gaze, where the existence of the «other» is hierarchical. Garro herself does not create a separate language for «Female Imaginary»: instead, she uses the «Male Imaginary» to represent it. As Irigaray herself maintains, it is incorrect to conceptualize the female imaginary: women are ensnared in a system of meaning that supports the (masculine) subject's auto-affectation, and to assert that the feminine may be represented as a notion is to permit oneself to be enmeshed once more in a system of «male» representations. Unless a woman is giving up her sex and wants to speak like a male, there is no need to develop another conception of it, if the issue is truly one of questioning «femininity»: «I believe that men are adequate for the development of a theory of women. The idea as such would not exist in a woman's language» (1985b: 122-123).

What Irigaray does is criticising the «Patriarchal Language Systems», which has further reinforced the male-female hierarchy, canonizing works only produced by male writers. Likewise, Garro critiques this patriarchal language system by employing the same language to do so. In the latter part of the novel, André also talks about his desire to sleep with Mariana, and how this would be like an «adventure». His incessant desire to have her, so much that all of their meetings are solely in his memory. If she doesn't sleep with him, he immediately calls her «ingrate»: in the below-mentioned quote, André's intentions can be seen very clearly. He asks questions from Mariana as if he owns her body, to the point that he says that her actions are just provocative:

- ¿Es tu amante? [André]
- No... — contestó después de unos instantes de excitación.  
Me confesó que le hubiera gustado afirmar lo contrario, pero Mariana no se había acostado con él ni con nadie durante los tres meses del verano.
- ¿Es solo una provocadora? Pregunté con cierta intención en la voz.
- ¡No seas ridículo! (Garro, 2021: 275).



#### 4. «ÉCRITURE FÉMININE» AND «FEMALE AGENCY»

Hélène Cixous in her essay «The Laugh of the Medusa» writes:

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement (1976: 39).

In the same essay, she introduced the term «Écriture Féminine», which describes a distinctively feminine writing style, marked by textual interruptions like pauses, silences, puns, fresh imagery, and so on (40). Centuries of suppressing the female voice, which now speaks in a borrowed language, is the reason for its eccentricity, incomprehensibility, and inconsistency. It is shown in literary texts that, by eliminating all repressions, undermining and subverting all meanings, logic, and the closure of the phallogentric language, we are able to open up into a joyful free play of meanings that privilege fluidity over fixity, multiplicity over linearity, and the body over abstract reason. In the context of Cixous, this is not merely a theoretical claim but a performative aspect of her own writing. Her works, such as *Inside* (1986), *Stigmata* (1998), and *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (1990) enact the «Écriture Féminine» through its fragmented structures, sudden shifts of voice, dream-like associated logic, and dense corporeal imagery, dismantling narrative coherence in favour of affect, rhythm, and bodily intensity. In this context, Cixous urges women to write and attributes the power of stopping women from writing to the «capitalist machinery», which refers to the publishing houses or academic corporations that only have supported the canonical male writers throughout history.

She further argues that men continue to dominate the conversation regarding their sexuality, and also possess a pass at being able to express through writing a significant amount of this dynamic of classical canonical literature. Much of what they have articulated arises from the dynamic of activity versus passivity, reflecting the power struggle linked to —an imagined—mandatory masculinity that aims to invade and conquer, alongside the resulting notion of woman as an unexplored territory, or rather «dark continent» to penetrate and «civilize» or «pacify» (1976: 42). This consideration of women as an unconquered or unexplored territory has been widely seen throughout Garro's work: specially through Vicente's and André's constant desire to sleep with her or become their lovers, even if she is married or Vicente has a spouse. He wants her to bear him a son, and when she refuses to do it for the first time—and later on, when she gets pregnant with his child—he wants her to keep this child, even when she refuses to do so. Similarly, in André's case we see that he

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barely knows anything about her: he only has an idea about her through his cousin, Bertrand, who is also in love with Mariana, and—like André—he has barely any idea about her life. This is due to their incessant desire to save her, to stop her from ruining her life if she stays with her husband and does not have his child. They simultaneously call her «loca» (crazy), and also try to protect her «from herself». None of them want her to have any other lovers, and they constantly ask her if she has any relationship with other men, or who she sleeps with. Garro, with her writing, has tried to show their desire to «colonize» Mariana's body by giving us a peering into their imagination, their heads, and through their own testimonies. She is, at the same time, using the prevalent male language system, but also criticizing it by the act of utilizing it.

To talk about the male writing, Cixous further contends that there exists a thing as «marked» or «male» writing, which until now, has been run by a libidinal, cultural, political, and typically masculine economy. She suggests that this is the space wherein the suppression of women has been continuously reinforced, either knowingly or unknowingly, in a way that is alarming since it is frequently concealed or embellished with the alluring features of the narrative. This place has dramatically amplified all indications of sexual conflict, in which women have never had the opportunity to voice their thoughts (Cixous, 1976: 47). In the novel, this exact situation plays out: Mariana's voice is absent, but there is a widespread presence of male voices, instead of Mariana's. In the case of Vicente:

Antes de terminar diré que después de mi charla con Augusto miré las fotografías de Mariana y en todas, salvo en una, su diminuta imagen ha desaparecido. Solo me queda aquella en la que está sobre la nieve, pero ahora no carga sus esquís sobre los hombros ni sonríe. Tampoco me da la espalda, ha vuelto a mirarme y su figura pequeñísima agita la mano en señal de despedida antes de desaparecer para siempre y dejarme solo una cartulina grisácea, como lo hizo en las demás fotos [...] Dudé. Y ahora sé que Mariana tampoco me espera en el cielo sentada en la sillita de Van Gogh... (2021: 119).

And in André's: «¿Sigues enamorado de Mariana? —me preguntó hace muy poco mi primo Bertrand. / —Ahora no puedo dejar de amarla nunca. Le dije sin más explicaciones. / Sonrió, pero algo en mi actitud le dijo que no debía hacerlo» (336). Cixous claims that a woman must write on her own, as this represents the creation of a novel form of rebellious writing that—when her moment of freedom arrives—will enable her to enact the necessary transgressions and changes in her narrative, initially at two interconnected levels, corporeal and societal (1976: 56). At first, by expressing herself through writing (individually), a woman can reclaim the body that has been stripped away from her, transformed into an unsettling foreign entity on show—the sick or lifeless figure, which frequently reveals itself to be the

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unpleasant partner, the source and site of restrictions—. If one restricts the body, one simultaneously restricts breath and voice, so if one gains control of their own body, one can stop restricting their voice as well. Secondly, when women finally choose to write their own story—and hence, history—. This unleashes a powerful gateway into history, where women who have traditionally been oppressed write and create an upheaval from within. So, by the act of writing, she creates a weapon for herself. To willingly become both the instigator and the recipient, claiming her own rights within every symbolic framework and political process. Thus, when Garro creates a writing style of her own by projecting the personality of Mariana through the testimonies of Vicente and André—rather than Mariana getting her own voice—this feature may be connected with Cixous’ theses. Firstly, through their very own narratives, we get to see that the two men didn’t get to pacify the life of Mariana or her body as by the end of the novel, none of them have any idea about her whereabouts. Hence, by themselves, they accept that they did not get to control her the way they wanted. And secondly, through Garro’s work we get to see the female agency that she has shown indirectly by not letting Mariana give in. Thereby, creating a sort of agency of her own—and through her writing—.

Cixous expands on Irigaray’s critique by showing how such specular constructions are maintained and normalized within patriarchal language itself. Irigaray shows how the feminine is constantly produced within the coordinates of the masculine imaginary, fixed as an image, organized through comparison, and circulated as an object of desire. According to Cixous, the discursive processes that keep women from writing about their own bodies, stories, and subjectivities are the same mechanisms that—as Irigaray exposed—restrict the feminine to a system of representation controlled by masculine desire. Therefore, the transition from Irigaray to Cixous is an intensification rather than a change in emphasis: Garro’s depiction of Mariana as a figure mediated through masculine memory, not only reveals the workings of the male imaginary, but also lays the foundation for comprehending how this imaginary becomes ingrained in language, making Mariana’s silence structurally inevitable. In this way, Cixous’s need for a feminine writing style appears as an essential reaction to the representational dead ends that Irigaray points out.

## 5. INTERSECTIONALITY: INTERSECTION OF CLASS AND SEX

Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality*, which refers to a theory that looks at how different social categories—like race, gender, class, and sexual orientation—intersect to produce distinct experiences of privilege and discrimination (2019: 141). She developed this

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theory, mainly to conceptualise the struggle of black women and how their struggle was different from that of white women, as a black woman has to go through two different types of oppression, then combined at a higher level: one, due to their race; and another, due to their sexual preference, such as being a bisexual or a queer woman. However, this theory can be used for describing the oppression faced by the women from the Global South and women belonging to a lower class, as they face two kinds of oppression: one due to her sex; and another, due to her social class. Crenshaw argues:

The focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination. I suggest further that this focus on otherwise-privileged group members creates a distorted analysis of racism and sexism because the operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon (2018: 14).

Mariana doesn't belong to the same class as her husband, neither do his friends, nor the intellectually stimulating people they are surrounded with:

En el restaurante Mariana se aburría. Volví a mentirle a Sabina y riendo ocupé un espacio vecino al de la muchacha. Augusto y mi mujer hablaban sobre la arquitectura moderna, que podía resumirse en dos palabras: socialista y funcional.  
—No estoy de acuerdo. No somos insectos para que nos encierren en hormigueros o colmenas —dijo repentinamente Mariana.  
— ¡Cállate! —ordenó Augusto (2021: 15).

At times, when she wants to give her opinion on something, her husband makes her shut up, or her responses are met with ensnaring comments from other people. She ignores all the remarks and acts as if she doesn't exist, like she is just mixed up with the background: and that is, precisely, how the testimonies of others describe her.

No pensé que a mi regreso a París vería a Augusto y a Eugenia, una compatriota de la pareja, mientras Mariana permanecía invisible. Pepe me había dicho: Augusto tiene las amantes más variadas [...] Eugenia arrastraba su visón plateado como se arrastra un viejo trapo usado y cuando hablaba de Mariana decía: la loca. Romualdo nos explicó que Mariana servía de tapadera a su marido, acompañaba a la pareja y ya muy tarde la depositaban en su casa para que durmiera unas horas (2021: 33).

Augusto, her husband, constantly has other lovers and they also show hostility towards her. At one point, when one of his lovers asks him why doesn't he divorce her, he immediately replies that, unfortunately, he's like Sartre and believes in responsibility: Mariana is so poor that if he divorces her, she would end up begging:

—¡Augusto! ¿Por qué no te divorcias? ¿Solo porque Mariana te dio una hija para amarrarte? Toda la mesa fijó los ojos en la anfitriona, que en ese momento sostenía un tenedor que iba a llevarse a la boca. Augusto declaró solemne:  
—Desgraciadamente soy como Sartre y creo en la responsabilidad. Mariana es tan pobre que si me divorcio terminaría pidiendo limosna (2021: 36).

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What Mariana is facing here is *intersectional oppression*: firstly, because she is a woman; and secondly, because she belongs to a lower class than those around her. However, what becomes evident is not that the characters themselves perceive Mariana's situation through an intersectional lens, but that the narrative shows how the men around her construct a discourse based on "saving her". They overhear comments about her social position and reframe these as evidence that she requires their protection, thereby reproducing a hierarchy in which they position themselves as the «saviour» of the «other». During the testimony of André, we get a closer look at it:

Fue a mitad del otoño cuando oí en una fiesta que se hablaba de Mariana: «Esa loca no deja de perseguir a Augusto», aseguró Guy Lammont [...]

—Ella y su hija vagabundean por los cafés —terció la vieja Judith Tessier.

—Quiere la posición y el dinero de Augusto, es pobre como una rata —agregó Guy sin darme la oportunidad de intervenir en la conversación dirigida para un público más amplio (2021: 303).

Silvia Federici's analysis in *Patriarchy of the Wage* adds a crucial economic layer to Mariana's marginalization, demonstrating how gendered oppression is inseparable from the material structures that sustain capitalist and patriarchal power. Federici argues that the wage system historically devalues and renders invisible the reproductive and affective labour performed by women, reinforcing a hierarchy in which femininity is equated with dependence, possession, and economic vulnerability (2021: 36). Through this lens, Augusto's insistence that divorcing Mariana would leave her «pidiendo limosna» [asking for alms] is not simply an expression of cruelty, but also a mobilization of the economic logic that Federici describes: Mariana's material precarity is weaponized to justify her continued subordination. Her lower-class background thus becomes not only a social marker, but also an economic mechanism that intensifies her gendered silence. Federici's framework reveals that Mariana's inability to speak or act with autonomy stems not merely from patriarchal representation, but from structural conditions that deny her access to economic agency, legitimizing the paternalistic «saviour» fantasies of the men around her.

## 6. CONCLUSION

*Testimonios sobre Mariana* illustrates how the narrative form itself turns into a battlefield of ideologies, with issues of power, gender, and class ingrained in the storytelling process. Garro reveals how women's identities are continuously mediated, twisted, and colonized by the masculine fantasy, denying Mariana the expression of her own voice, and instead filtering her

existence through the testimony of Vicente, André, and others. However, this silencing is not passive: rather, it serves as a vehicle for Garro to critique the patriarchal linguistic system from within, exposing the inconsistencies present in narratives that are projected by men, by reducing women's subjectivity to an object of comparison, desire, and speculation. Besides, Irigaray's theorization of the male and female imaginary exposes the structural inadequacy of patriarchy and the inability of patriarchal discourse to portray female agency. In addition, Crenshaw's intersectionality paradigm emphasizes how Mariana's oppression is not limited to her gender but is also exacerbated by her class, placing her on the fringes of both power and speech.

Garro's portrayal of Cixous' «Ecriture féminine» sheds more light on the contradictory ways in which fragmentation, silence, and absence can serve as a kind of resistance. Garro creates a disruptive writing style that alludes a feminine way of expression without really embracing it, by adopting patriarchal terminology while also highlighting its limitations. This is how *Testimonios sobre Mariana* reimagines narrative as a disputed space where silence can echo with meaning and absence can symbolize rebellion, also criticizing the canonical systems that deny women narrative authority.

Ultimately, by portraying the testimony as erratic, filtered, and insufficient, Garro challenges the reader's dependence on authoritative voices. Mariana's absence serves as a reminder of the numerous women who have been silenced, whose tales defy patriarchal modes of representation, rather than just silently taking the erasure that they had to endure. By doing this, Garro establishes a literary space that affirms the potential for other imaginaries in which women's agency is neither completely absorbed nor forgotten, while also bringing attention to the violence of (male) silencing.

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