



Article

Can the Fetus Speak?: Revolutionary Wombs, Body Politics, and Feminist Philosophy

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Abstract: Ariel Dorfman's *La última canción de Manuel Sendero* (*The Last Song of Manuel Sendero*) and Carlos Fuentes's *Cristóbal Nonato* (*Christopher Unborn*) explore conception, gestation, and birth as points of origin for humanity and citizenship alike by giving voice to life/lives that cannot speak for itself/themselves. Dorfman and Fuentes employ metafictional techniques and postmodern aesthetics, interrogate history in order to express their political commitments to rights, resistance, and revolution, and link textual production and human reproduction in order to posit national futures. Reading these works through a feminist lens, I weigh the poetic and philosophical implications of telling a story from the point of view of gametic, embryonic, or fetal, but decidedly male, narrators against the symbolic exclusion and silencing of mothers that bear them. When rendered a biopolitical frontier in symbolic or actual terms, the pregnant body poses particular philosophical quandaries that require further investigation. As such, this essay weaves together discourses on poetics, philosophy, and politics in order to uncover the perplexity that the pregnant mother, as figure for the nation, induces.

Keywords: feminist phenomenology; feminist philosophy; maternal body; pregnant body; pregnant subject; fetus; fetal subject; fetal person; personhood; metaphor; Ariel Dorfman; Carlos Fuentes; Chile; Mexico; postmodern aesthetics; biopolitics; metaphysics; metaphysical metaphor

Ariel Dorfman's *La última canción de Manuel Sendero* and Carlos Fuentes's *Cristóbal Nonato*¹ explore conception, gestation, and birth as points of origin for humanity and citizenship alike by giving voice to life/lives that cannot speak for itself/themselves (Dorfman 1982; Fuentes 1994). Dorfman and Fuentes employ metafictional techniques and postmodern aesthetics, interrogate history in order to express their political commitments to rights, resistance, and revolution, and link textual production and human reproduction in order to posit national futures.² Reading these works through a feminist

¹ I have chosen to use the official translations of these novels, since both Dorfman and Fuentes have authorized and collaborated in their production. See Ariel Dorfman, *The Last Song of Manuel Sendero* (Dorfman 1987) and Carlos Fuentes, *Christopher Unborn* (Fuentes 1989). When referring to the characters in these novels, I use the original character names. Please note that there are moments when both authors take the liberty to change the structure and content of their prose in the English translation. I have tried to remark on any substantial changes made in the footnotes.

² For an analysis of pre-modern, modern, and postmodern elements in Dorfman's novel, see McClellenn, *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures* (McClellenn 2004). See also Lois Baer Barr's *Isaac Unbound: Patriarchal Traditions in the Latin American Jewish Novel*. Barr categorizes Dorfman's novel as postmodern, given its "self-reflectiveness, allusiveness, and intertextuality" (Barr 1995, p. 136). For a discussion of Fuentes's postmodern tendencies in *Cristóbal Nonato*, see Raymond L. Williams, "Fuentes the Modern; Fuentes the Postmodern" (Williams 2002). In an interview with Claudia Fermán, Fuentes describes his relation to postmodernism: "Frente a Derrida, yo coloco siempre a [Mijail] Bajtin (1895–1975) y la posibilidad de la heteroglosia, de la multiplicidad de sentidos, metas y orientaciones del lenguaje, y a los reformadores tipo [Jürgen] Habermas (1929). Estas últimas son las posiciones a las que acerco más, y que se basan en la pregunta y la reflexión de si es posible tener un proyecto de liberación renovado [...], un proyecto de liberación que incluya la gran diversidad de las culturas del mundo que empiezan a aparecer, entre las que nos incluiríamos nosotros" ((Fuentes 1996, p. 99); "Opposite Derrida, I always place Bakhtin (1895–1975) and the possibility of heteroglossia, of the multiplicity of the senses, goals and orientations of language, and reformers like Habermas (1929). The latter are the

lens, I weigh the poetic and philosophical implications of telling a story from the point of view of what Djelal Kadir characterizes as “testicular, *phallopaeon*, or intrauterine,” but decidedly male, narrators against the symbolic exclusion and silencing of mothers that bear them (Kadir 1993, p. 107). When rendered a biopolitical frontier in symbolic or actual terms, the pregnant body poses particular philosophical quandaries that require further investigation. As such, this essay weaves together discourses on poetics, philosophy, and politics in order to uncover the perplexity that the pregnant mother³, as figure for the nation, induces.

1. Conceptions of Fetal Personhood

The “gestational structure,” to borrow Lois Baer Barr’s term, of the novels of Dorfman and Fuentes privileges the development of their unborn male narrators, with the maternal body as the gestating screen onto which they project their visions for their nations (Barr 1995, p. 142).⁴ According to Barr, Ariel Dorfman’s novel is structured so that “[t]he total number of chapters titled *Adentro* and *Afuera* is nine—the nine months of gestation. The five parts of the novel refer to conception, the three trimesters of pregnancy, and birth.” (ibid, p. 142). The five parts listed above are subsequently divided into “*Adentro*” (“*Inside*”) and “*Afuera*” (“*Outside*”), signaling two different perspectives on the Pinochet dictatorship and the national imaginary: the point-of-view from inside the confines of the womb and within the physical boundaries of the country and the point-of-view of exiles and others that live outside of the Chilean border. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus primarily on the first major plot of *La última canción de Manuel Sendero*, which occupies all of the sections titled “*Adentro*” and recounts the legend of the Manuel Sendero’s last son(g), in which his future and hypothetical children dream a different ending for their dear progenitor, an alternative future in which he survives and is able to save his wife and son from the evil ploys of *el caballero* (the Gentleman). Kimberly Nance aptly describes the narrative that occupies the space of the “*Inside*”: “The novel’s primary narrative alternates between the voice of the fetal grandfather and a first-person plural that turns out to represent an alliance of the unborn, unconceived, exiled, and dead” (Nance 2006, p. 52). These fetal versions of the story of Manuel Sendero’s last son(g) are communicated in utero and later ex utero by Manuel Sendero’s unborn son, who is nameless, except for the first-person plural narrator’s reference to him as *el abuelo* (Grandfather) and by the other allied residents of Doralisa’s body and members of the fetal “intelligence” network. The audience is comprised of “hijos míos, nietos de mis amígdalas, biznietos que se quedan boquiabiertos y umbilicales a mis rodillas” (Dorfman 1982, p. 18);

positions I relate to, and are based on the question and reflection of whether it is possible to have a project of renewed liberation [...]. a project of liberation that would include the great diversity of the cultures of the world that are beginning to appear, among which we would include ourselves”).

- ³ Throughout this article, I use various terms to refer to the metaphysical metaphors present in these texts. I use “maternal body” when the context privileges the biological processes of conception, gestation, and pregnancy; “maternal-fetal relationship”, when my analysis relies on the ways in which the mother and fetus can be linked existentially, phenomenologically, empathically, and physiologically as what Sara Heinämaa would refer to as a “the communicative couple of the fetus and the pregnant mother” (Heinämaa 2014, p. 42); “pregnant subject” when I want to emphasize the agency, experience, and subjectivity of the referent; and “pregnant mother” to invoke the attendant socio-cultural, political, historical, religious and philosophical discourses that project meaning and significance onto this figure. According to Florentien Verhage, “in our philosophical, medical, and everyday imaginings and discourse we are often forgetful of the subjectivity of the pregnant and birthing woman”, and I am trying to be cognizant of this in my self-conscious use of these different terms, which are undoubtedly interrelated discourses about a particular embodied subject and her experiences (Verhage 2013, p. 301).
- ⁴ McClennen remarks on this structure in *Ariel Dorfman: An Aesthetics of Hope*: “Given that *The Last Song* narrates frustrated reproduction, the use of a birth metaphor to structure the novel serves to further complicate an interpretation of the text. At one level the structure suggests the process of writing the novel as similar to that of the act of giving birth. In addition, the novel likens the development of social struggle to that of childbirth. The birth of a just society, Dorfman suggests, requires similar acts of love, patience, strength, and courage to that of giving birth” (McClennen 2009, pp. 197–98). For a reading of Fuentes’s novel as “an allegorical representation of national consciousness in the process of gestation” and its use of metafictional techniques, see Santiago Juan-Navarro, “The Dialogic Imagination of Salman Rushdie and Carlos Fuentes” (Juan-Navarro 1993, p. 307). For a discussion of the many literary forebears of *Cristóbal Nonato* and a more extensive explanation of the role of the metaphor of reproduction and its connection to textual creation, see Kadir, “Fuentes and the Profane Sublime” (Kadir 1993).

“you kids, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, you kids sitting here openmouthed and umbilically at my feet” (Dorfman 1987, p. 10), which situates the reader as a typical child listening to the story of how they were (not yet) born.

We soon learn that, in order to cope with the disappearance of her husband (Manuel Sendero) and with his internment in a concentration camp, Doralisa (*el abuelo's* mother), as a participant in a drug test being conducted by *el caballero's* company, agrees to take a pill that will induce a perpetual state of sleep. As “the military leader who represents absolute power” (McClennen 2009, p. 202) and, more specifically, Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet, *el caballero* assures Manuel Sendero that:

Su mujer se iba a despertar cuando, a juicio de la empresa, se hubiera alcanzado un resultado satisfactorio. Mientras tanto, la futura madre y el presente feto, aunque no se la nombra explícitamente por disposición del Ministerio de Salud, quedando comprendido en la frase: “y otros residentes en el cuerpo de la madre”, gozan de un estatuto de garantías. (Dorfman 1982, p. 33)

[His wife was going to wake up when, in the judgment of the company, a satisfactory result had been achieved. Meanwhile the future mother and present fetus, which, although it is not explicitly mentioned in the proposal from the Ministry of Health, is also covered under the contract by the phrase *and other residents of the mother's body*, enjoy the benefits of a Statute of Guarantees. (Dorfman 1987, p. 30)]

Referring to these women as *bellas durmientes* (“sleeping beauties”), *el caballero* explains that, in a sense, they are “working” by remaining passive and sedated, but we are never privy to their perspectives firsthand, so it is difficult to verify his statement with any certainty (Dorfman 1982, p. 42; Dorfman 1987, p. 42). As he is being gestated, *el abuelo* stages the first fetal rebellion, which fails once Pamela, his love interest, is unable to resist birth any longer; therefore, *el abuelo* becomes the spokesperson and liaison for a future fetal rebellion since “[e]ra el único no nato de la historia que había conseguido dominar el misterioso arte del espacio exterior. [...]era el único nacido del universo que todavía recordaba y vivía hacia atrás, [s]e había quedado atrapado en esa realidad intrauterina” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 137); “[h]e was the only unborn person in history to have mastered the mysterious art of external space. [...]H]e was the only born person in the universe who still remembered and lived looking backward to the womb; [he] had remained psychologically trapped in that intrauterine reality” (Dorfman 1987, p. 170)). In this narrative thread, Dorfman constantly replays a scene of a man on a bicycle being chased by the police; whether Manuel Sendero is on the bicycle or not, whether he is singing or not, whether he is shot or escapes, whether his wife Doralisa and his son survive or not all become issues of grave importance to those who retell it. Since the story is told primarily from the point of view of *el abuelo* and the other fetuses, the reader, in order to take the fetal perspective seriously, must (even if temporarily) believe in the survival of Manuel Sendero’s son(g).⁵

Like Dorfman, who structures his novel from conception to birth, Fuentes’s novel spans nine months of his principal character’s gestation (1991–1992).⁶ Cristóbal is conceived by his parents, Ángel and Ángeles Palomar, on the shores of Acapulco (on the day of the Christian Epiphany) in order to win a national contest by giving birth to a son whom they must name after Christopher Columbus (Cristóbal Colón), in honor of the quincentennial of Columbus’s arrival in the New World.⁷ The winner

⁵ McClennen reflects on this instability and accompanying uncertainty that Dorfman’s novel causes for the reader: “The classic literary metaphor of linking storytelling and human reproduction, though, is frustrated by Dorfman since, even though the writer has been able to produce a novel, the novel itself implies that what has been produced has only a very tentative chance of survival” (McClennen 2009, pp. 199–200).

⁶ It should be noted that although the novel is divided this way, as Debra A. Castillo observes, “one third of the way through the novel, Cristóbal has advanced no further on his nine-month journey than he had at the first prologue, in the first paragraph of the novel” (Castillo 1991, p. 11).

⁷ The contest stipulates that the winner’s last name should be a derivative of or share semantics with Columbus’s name, which means “dove,” and this is replicated in Cristóbal’s future last name Palomar, which means “dovecote”

“será proclamado HIJO PRÓDIGO DE LA PATRIA” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 13); “shall be proclaimed PRODIGAL SON OF THE NATION” (Fuentes 1989, p. 6)) and become a symbol of Mexican power.⁸ This contest is part of a larger series of diversions that are supposed to distract the Mexican citizens from already extant political corruption, the government’s disappearance of “problem” citizens, and the worsening economic crisis; moreover, in the contest’s rhetoric, reproduction and desire are co-opted in the name of national duty: “¡A procrear, pues señoras y señores! ¡Su placer es su deber y su deber es su libertad! ¡En México todos somos libres y el que no quiera ser libre será castigado!” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 14); “So, ladies and gentlemen, let’s get procreating! Your pleasure is your duty and your duty is your freedom! In Mexico we are all free and anyone who does not want to be free should be punished!” (Fuentes 1989, pp. 6–7)). Although we receive this narrative through Cristóbal’s perspective, the plot is a pseudo-*bildungsroman* of his father’s individual development as a “rebelde conservador” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 424); “conservative rebel” (Fuentes 1989, p. 397)). In addition to the political and sexual revolution that Ángel experiences, there is also great socio-political turmoil that has severely altered the geography of Mexico—indigenous peoples are even further displaced for the sake of tourism, another earthquake strikes Mexico City, excess governs the Mexican nation in the forms of garbage, greed, wealth, poverty, and violence, and the situation at the borderland has become so dire that the border itself secedes from both the United States and Mexico. Ángel manages a group of misfits, who create a band called “Los Four Jodiditos,” or The Four Fuckups, (including Huevo (Egg), Huérfano Huerta (Orphan Huerta), Jipi Toltec, and Niña Ba) in order to mete out “justice” to the corrupt. Los Four Jodiditos try desperately to con, swindle, humiliate, and even murder those politicians who live extravagantly while the rest of the population suffers in abject poverty. Their operations, however, are often misconstrued debacles, covered up by official government rhetoric, or situated in alignment with an already-established government agenda. Those with political power and military force reveal their intentions to push eugenicist policies on the Mexican people. For instance, Don Homero supports mass sterilization as a solution for “controlling” what he considers to be the growing population of undesirables: “a los escorpiones se los mata, como dijese Horacio el poeta, ab ovo, o sea en el huevo, antes de que puedan dañar, y a los cuervos en sus nido, antes de que nos saquen los ojos” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 189); “we have to kill these scorpions, as the poet Horace says, ab ovo, that is, in the egg, before they can do any damage, and destroy the crows in their nest before they peck our eyes out” (Fuentes 1989, p. 172)). Likewise, Reverend Royall Payne, who patrols the border for President Reagan, invokes the rhetoric of population control: “no hacemos niños mientras todos estos morenos crecen y crecen y cruzan y cruzan y acabarán por juntarse con nuestras propias hijas y madres y esposas” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 524); “we aren’t having kids but all these greasers grow and grow and cross over and cross over and they’ll end up coupling with our own daughters and mothers and wives” (Fuentes 1989, p. 493)). Payne proposes a sterilization of and a genocide against Mexican men, to “matarlos en la semilla de su padre antes de que entren en el vientre de sus madres” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 524); “kill them in their father’s seed before they enter their mother’s belly” (Fuentes 1989, p. 493)) because “no es lo mismo matar a un niño en el vientre de su madre que matar a un mexicano adulto y bigotudo de estos para impedirle que procrea” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 524); “[k]illing an unborn child is not the same as killing a grownup Mexican with a mustache to keep him from procreating” (Fuentes 1989, pp. 493–94)), as if the latter act were “less offensive” than the former.

in Spanish. It is no coincidence that Cristóbal Palomar is conceived on the Epiphany, which, in Christian tradition, is “[t]he festival commemorating the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles in the persons of the Magi” (Epiphany 2017, n.p.). See Michael Hardin for a reading of Cristóbal as “heir apparent to the conquerors and colonizers, Colón [Columbus] and Cortés before him” (Hardin 1996, p. 30) and Alicia Rivero-Potter’s essay, “Columbus’ Legacy in *Cristóbal Nonato* by Carlos Fuentes,” for a reading of Cristóbal in terms of the historical figure of Christopher Columbus (Rivero-Potter 1996).

⁸ Like the wayward son who squanders his inheritance but returns to a forgiving father, Kadir characterizes *Cristóbal Nonato* as “a genealogy whose congenital identifying mark has to be the circuitous waywardness, the dilatory wandering whose circumlocution and digressive restlessness seeks after the name” (Kadir 1993, p. 103).

As a literary scholar, I am interested in the metaphysical metaphor⁹ as one of many precise locations where literary analysis and philosophy can meaningfully interact and bear intellectual fruit. In this article, I analyze Fuentes and Dorfman's maternal-fetal metaphors for their metaphysical properties. In other words, I ask what does each maternal-fetal metaphor reveal about the presumed nature of the maternal body (and, by extension, the pregnant subject), what are the resultant philosophical and political implications of such a figuration, and how these metaphysical metaphors can reveal each author's position on intersubjective ethics. In both novels, the state-sponsored existential threats against the unborn and the systematic violence against their pregnant mothers persist as another form of colonization. I would argue that both Dorfman and Fuentes co-opt the experiences of conception, gestation, and birth from their silent/silenced female characters (as pregnant subjects) in order to privilege the perspective of their gametic, embryonic, and fetal narrators (as authorial subjects) for their own political ends, which are not, in and of themselves, without merit.¹⁰ Indeed, the fetal narrators¹¹—who are also situated as innocent victims—reclaim the womb as their rightful territory, condemn the state for its threats against the unborn and their mothers, and reconfigure the womb as a sanctuary and revolutionary space for the nation's hopes for the future. By rendering the womb as a national space and the fetus as emblematic of the future citizen, the maternal body becomes the necessary precondition for their very existence, the fetal narrators/narratives are only imaginatively "possible" within the context of a maternal medium.

According to Kimberly A. Nance, "The publication of *La última canción de Manuel Sendero* and *Cristóbal Nonato* (and Diamela Eltit's *El cuarto mundo*) within a few years of each other may reflect each writer's sensitivity to what amounted to a fetal Zeitgeist" (Nance 2006, p. 53).¹² This "fetal Zeitgeist" to which Nance refers, is occupied with questions of fetal personhood, a concept that is useful for understanding the prevalence of fetal narrators in literature of the 1980s. "As a result of reproductive imaging technologies, the commodification of babies, and other social changes," Lynn Morgan argues in "Fetal Relationality in Feminist Philosophy: An Anthropological Critique," that "the attribution of personhood (what I call 'social birth') can now precede biological birth. The result is a new, unprecedented category of fetal persons [...]" (Morgan 1996, p. 59). With the aim of protecting life itself, religious, political, and medical pro-life discourses have transformed the unborn child into a symbol of humanity, the future citizen, a fetal person with legal rights for whom they can advocate.¹³

⁹ In the introduction to their essay collection, *Coming to Life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Mothering*, Sarah LaChance Adams and Caroline R. Lundquist observe that "philosophers have often treated [women's experiences] dismissively or used them opportunistically as metaphors for metaphysical concepts" (LaChance Adams and Lundquist 2013, p. 3). Here, Adams and Lundquist critique an uncritical and unreflective use of the experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering as illustrative of other processes, such as artistic creation, knowledge production, and philosophical thought, itself. Their volume posits feminist phenomenology, which "emphasizes the importance of the experience of the situated, embodied subject" (ibid., p. 13) as a means to critique the problematic and often fallacious premises on which metaphysical metaphors of the maternal body rely. Indeed, Adams and Lundquist argue that "such 'feminine experiences as pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering have the power to radically challenge and in many cases undermine conventional, often fundamental beliefs about the nature of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity, humanity's relationship to the natural world, and the nature and purpose of ethics, to name just a few" (ibid., p. 15).

¹⁰ In "The Language of the Fathers: The Conquering and Colonizing Tongue of *Cristóbal Nonato*," Michael Hardin gestures toward this paradox in Fuentes's project: "[t]he question which ultimately must be asked is whether Fuentes is critiquing the phallogocentrism of the masternarrative, or unwittingly participating in it" (Hardin 1996, p. 42). Amy Novak takes a stronger stance on Dorfman in "Gendering Trauma: Ariel Dorfman's Narratives of Crisis and Reconciliation," where she claims that "As [Dorfman's post-coup literary texts] oscillate between a critique of the sadistic positioning of women in masculinist narratives and a continued reduction of them to desired objects, the silent female figures of the domestic space rupture both the authoritarian discourse of the public sphere and the anti-authoritarian narrative practices of the novels themselves" (Novak 2007, p. 297).

¹¹ Please note that for the sake of readability, I have, for the most part, used the word "fetal" to refer to these intrauterine characters, as it is difficult to determine with exact certainty the stage of development that corresponds with each moment in the text.

¹² For my analysis of fetal narrators in Diamela Eltit's *El cuarto mundo*, see "Deauthorizing Anthropologies and 'Authenticating' Landscapes in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Diamela Eltit's *El cuarto mundo*" (Sparling 2011).

¹³ In "Making Fetal Persons: Fetal Homicide, Ultrasound, and the Normative Significance of Birth," Catherine Mills "examine[s] the social and political implications of a machinery that produces the fetus as a person," which she characterizes as "ha[ving] something of this performative force", namely that "in being called a person, the fetus is made into a person, such that

In the same year, in “Embryologies of Modernism,” Susan Merrill Squier articulates an important literary trend in beginning in 1980:

[A] parallel explosion of global interest in embryology embodied in a number of fictions exploring fetal life [emerged], from Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Ariel Dorfman’s *The Last Song of Manuel Sendero*, and Carlos Fuentes’s *Christopher Unborn* to Kenzaburo Oe’s *A Personal Matter* and Pascal Bruckner’s *The Divine Child*, each of which can be understood as drawing on embryological models to articulate a new, national fetal subject. (Squier 1996, p. 151)

However, the emergence of this “new, national fetal subject” also relies on visual technologies that make its representation possible; as Alice E. Adams warns in *Reproducing the Womb: Images of Childbirth in Science, Feminist Theory, and Literature*, “the history of the intelligible fetus begins with the mother’s retrospective erasure” (Adams 1994, p. 154). In this seminal work, Adams locates the residue of the maternal body in technologically produced fetal images and reincorporates it into the practice of medical imagining:

The physician reveals the “intelligible” fetus by first making the womb “sensible”, or available to sensory apprehension. No matter how intently the eye focuses on the figure of the fetus, it is comprehensible only in relation to its background; even when it is represented as pitch-black space, some trace or recollection of the womb remains to interact with the image of the fetus. (ibid., p. 155)

Certainly, there is a violence in “the mother’s retrospective erasure”, a fact that is obscured in medical discourse and in the popular use of the products of medical imaging as a rhetorical device that “speaks for itself” (ibid., p. 249). Whereas representations of the fetus in the visual field have often resulted in a conclusion of a maternal-fetal relationship characterized by opposition, the history of medicine, as Adams observes, likewise has offered few cooperative metaphors to explain the maternal-fetal relationship.¹⁴

Some physicians describe the fetus as a parasite who takes over the mother’s body; others describe it as a prisoner of the mother’s psychological and physical pathology. Prisoner, parasite, philosopher, astronaut, hermit, patient—all the identities ascribed to the silent fetus have this in common: they are based not on a model of cooperation or union between mother and fetus but on a model of maternal-fetal opposition. They all ascribe to the fetus a degree of intention, a modicum of mature consciousness, and an awareness of self and other. Whether subordinate or superior, invader or captive, the fetus is always alienated from its immediate (maternal) environment. (ibid., pp. 143–44)

Popular film has also participated in reproducing and reinforcing such alien and alienating bodily configurations. Kelly Oliver, in charting the genealogy of filmic representation of pregnancy in the United States, maintains that: “[w]hether the fetus is imagined as an alien, a monster, as devil, as spaceman, it has become an icon that represents our fears of an abject other within that threatens our identity as human and at the same time has become definitive of human life, the most innocent and pure

the name person ‘retroactively constitutes its reference’ (Žižek 1989, 95)” (Mills 2014, pp. 90, 96). In “The Myth of Fetal Personhood: Reconciling *Roe* and Fetal Homicide Laws,” Juliana Vines Crist explains how legal definitions of personhood operate in the U.S. “The fetus, like the corporation, is not entitled to protections because of what it is innately. Instead, the law recognizes that there is a natural person, the mother, who has fundamental interests at stake. Her rights are invested in another entity, the fetus. The law gives that entity juridical personhood to ensure that the rights of the mother may be secured, just as the law gives the corporation juridical personhood to protect the rights of the shareholders” (Crist 2010, p. 865).

¹⁴ In fact, as Adams reminds us, the fetoscopy that results in photographic images of the fetus usually occurs when women are having an abortion or the fetus is being examined for some kind of defect. While these images are often used to represent a kind of universal humanity, “there is a crisis going on with this fetus that is not inscribed in the photograph” (Adams 1994, p. 141), namely a crisis in health or imminent death.

citizen in need of legal protection” (Oliver 2013, p. 248). Indeed, these oppositional representations of the maternal-fetal relationship often situate the fetal person as antagonistic to and alienated by their mother or as an exemplary, innocent minority and subject to their mother’s will. This, in turn, limits the fetal person’s possibilities, and by implication, those of the pregnant subject, for a livable future.

In “Fetal Voices: Speaking for the Margins Within,” Susan Merrill Squier responds to what she describes as the recurring trope of “fetal images and voices, split off from the gestating woman and womb” (Squier 1991, p. 17) in the late twentieth century:

[N]o longer are the fetus’s interests conceived of as linked to those of the mother; now it is argued that fetal rights must be defended against the mother’s—by outside, even state, intervention if necessary. This new focus on the fetus apart from the mother is fueled both by such technological advances in obstetrics and gynecology as ultrasound fetal monitoring and fiber optics and by the resurgence of the Right to Life movement and its base of support in the New Right. (ibid., pp. 17–18)¹⁵

Ultimately, Squier, interrogating the impulse and trend of speaking for the fetus in political and/or fictional terms, cautions “[w]e must be aware of the difference between articulating their positions and speaking—as we seem increasingly willing to do—for the fetus”; “rather”, Squier implores, “we must explore liminality and ambiguity, must both doubt and permit the possibility of fetal speech” (Squier 1991, p. 28). Squier’s point is especially salient in the case of *The Last Song of Manuel Sendero* and *Cristóbal Nonato*, for to “doubt and permit the possibility of fetal speech”, is to suspend our disbelief in the fetal narrative, to entertain it as a real possibility, but also to hold that in tension with the awareness of how the fetal voice can be co-opted for certain political ends. What is more, any imaginative articulation of the fetal voice must also be considered alongside that of the pregnant subject. As Adams reminds us, “the mother, as the speaking and acting ‘member’ in the mother-fetus relationship, must for all practical purposes be considered a fully autonomous individual” (Adams 1994, p. 249).

2. The Birth of the Author: Words Becoming Flesh

Although Dorfman and Fuentes participate in the (re)production of “new, national fetal subjects,” reading the maternal-fetal relationship as a metaphysical metaphor can help us to better understand their aesthetic and political projects.¹⁶ A striking commonality in both Dorfman’s and Fuentes’s novels is that they situate the origin of life in their father’s bodies, namely those of Manuel Sendero and Ángel Palomar, by narrating *ab spermatozoon*.¹⁷ While references to the eggs of their mothers play a

¹⁵ For a further discussion of the role of technology in changing definitions of life, see Susan Merrill Squier, *Liminal Lives: Imagining the Human at the Frontiers of Biomedicine* (Squier 2004). Melinda Cooper, commenting on the U.S.-American cultural context post-9/11 observes that George W. Bush, who takes up this pro-life discourse by “extending universal health coverage to the unborn,” effectively “acknowledged the unborn fetus as the abstract and universal subject of human rights” (Cooper 2008, p. 153).

¹⁶ According to Kimberly M. Nance, “In the mid-twentieth century one of the hallmarks of the Latin American *nueva novela* was a kaleidoscopic multiplication of new narrators. Not only did novelists of that period experiment with fragmented and multiplied storytellers and those whose perspective was shaped by paranoia, schizophrenia or hallucinogens; they explored the boundaries of narrative possibility *in extremis* as Artemio Cruz lay dying and Bombal’s *amortajada* commented on her own wake. [...] It was not until the nineteen-eighties that Ariel Dorfman and Carlos Fuentes situated narrators *in utero* with *La última canción de Manuel Sendero* (1982) and *Cristóbal Nonato* (1987)” (Nance 2006, p. 51). Indeed, Nance also situates both Dorfman and Fuentes within the larger literary context of the postmodernism and the neobaroque: “The fetal narrators were far from the sole technical innovation in either novel. Influenced by the hypertrophic tendencies of postmodernism and the Latin American neobaroque, these formidably complex texts were chock-full of embedded narrations and stylistic and typographical innovations” (ibid., p. 52).

¹⁷ Nance argues, rather convincingly, that “[w]hile Dorfman’s novelistic fetuses sometimes do speak pre-conception, their consciousness is expressly neither sperm nor egg; rather they speak from sheer potentiality striving to be born, as unborn and even unconceived grandchildren send messages to their grandfather (281). Despite all of the egg imagery in Fuentes’ novel, his fetus first speaks not *ab ovo* but *ab spermatozoon*, as illustrated in his self-portrait on page 117, and by his statement that ‘El huevo de mi madre me espera’ (16). His narrative actually begins *preconception*, with a description of his own ultra-primal scene” (Nance 2006, p. 56). Although I agree with Nance that we do not get the perspective specifically *ab spermatozoon* from each of Dorfman’s fetal narrators, *el abuelo* actually does narrate his own conception as a split self, with the sperm and egg as equal components, but nonetheless from the perspective of the sperm.

role, and have the possibility of compromising their accounts, we do not hear “their” perspectives. This idea that the sperm somehow makes a more authorial and authoritative contribution than the egg is reinforced by the fact that these narrators turn primarily to their paternal genealogy as evidence that they are genetically predisposed to be pioneers; they imbue their own conceptions and births with larger significance, claiming to be descendants of national “heroes” (Manuel Sendero and Christopher Columbus), whose names signify that they are chosen ones in the Christian tradition.¹⁸ According to Emily Martin, author of “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles,” “[e]ndowing egg and sperm with intentional action, a key aspect of personhood in our culture, lays the foundation for the point of viability being pushed back to the moment of fertilization” (Martin 1991, p. 500). Martin, who writes on the use of gender metaphors and stereotypes to explain cellular functioning, observes a similar phenomenon in scientific accounts of the egg and the sperm, which also preserve an oppositional and hierarchical structuring of masculinity and femininity. The problem, she claims, lies in the act of attributing “personhood” to molecules:

Even if we succeed in substituting more egalitarian, interactive metaphors to describe the activities of egg and sperm, and manage to avoid the pitfalls of cybernetic models, we would still be guilty of endowing cellular entities with personhood. More crucial, then, than what *kinds* of personalities we bestow on cells is the very fact that we are doing it at all. (ibid., p. 501)

Indeed, the ways in which Cristóbal and *el abuelo* narrate their own conceptions might suggest that Dorfman and Fuentes are preformationists, that is, they imagine gametes as if they were already miniature, and, in this case, gendered, subjects.¹⁹

What is more, in these novels little time or attention is given to how the union of egg and sperm alters the “subjectivity” of the sperm. Not only have these spermatozoa appropriated a male identity, but they also perform traditionally masculine traits in their cellular encounters. Often, these sperm, when referencing their membership of a collectivity, refer to themselves in the masculine. Regardless of the X or Y chromosome that they carry, Fuentes imbues the sperm with a masculine gender and a masculine sex. Although Cristóbal does entertain the possibility that he could actually be a Cristina, this musing is cut short. Cristóbal claims that his individual will combined with the natural destiny of his unique spermhood enable “him” to overcome the others to reach “his” mother’s egg; whereas, *el abuelo*’s conception seems somewhat ordinary and rather anticlimactic—“una fracción microscópica de mí mismo subía al encuentro de mi otra mitad redonda y jugosa” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 30); “a microscopic fraction of me climbed up to meet my other round and juicy half” (Fuentes 1989, p. 26)). Nonetheless, in these portrayals, the egg effortlessly descends or opens “her” arms to the newcomer, while the sperm actively struggles and physically exerts “himself,” thus reproducing what Emily Martin has called “[a] scientific fairytale” (Martin 1991, p. 486).

Dorfman’s representation of the unborn is abstract in nature and more focused on genealogical memory than on biological processes.²⁰ For instance, the fact that the sperm *el abuelo* is conscious of and is later able to recall the night of his own conception, when “he” and “his” father “había[n]

¹⁸ Manuel comes from Hebrew, as a derivative of Emmanuel, meaning “God is with us,” and Sendero means “path.” Cristóbal means “Christ-bearer” and Colón has been translated as “dove.”

¹⁹ Londa Schiebinger explains, “By the seventeenth century, the Aristotelian view that the woman (through her menses) contributed only formless matter to generation, while the male (through his semen) contributed form or sentient soul, was called into question by one important school of thought among the ‘preformationists.’ Preformationists believed that a fully formed organism exists in miniature in the egg [ovists] or sperm [animalculist], in contrast with the epigenesists, who believed that a fetus gradually develops from a simple to a complex organism” (Schiebinger 1991, pp. 178–79). Indeed, Nance refers to Cristóbal as “Fuentes’ homuncular fetus” (Nance 2006, p. 56).

²⁰ Because the maternal-fetal relationship is featured primarily in the narrative thread of Manuel Sendero’s last son(g), I focus on this storyline in my analysis. However, commenting on the diverse representations of reproduction throughout *La última canción de Manuel Sendero*, McClennen remarks: “On the one hand, it [the way that Dorfman represents reproduction] mirrors that of a society that is on the verge of extinction: David’s girlfriend Gringa gets an abortion, David gets a vasectomy, his son

establecido lo que se podría llamar conexiones privilegiadas” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 30); “had started to establish what you might call privileged connections” (Dorfman 1987, p. 26)), suggests that *el abuelo* has a sense of “self,” which humanizes “him” to some extent. However, *el abuelo*’s development of a connection with his father suggests that *el abuelo* is, as his father was, a pioneer, and ignores the collectivity of the sperm of which he is a part, a collectivity that he later recuperates with his fetal network. In response to the reader’s doubts regarding the reliability of *el abuelo*’s account, the narrator assures the audience that “[m]ejor testigo que él, improbable” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 14); “[a] better witness is unlikely” (Dorfman 1987, p. 7)) and that “[n]o había nacido todavía, es cierto, pero no cabe duda de que más cerca que él de los acontecimientos, ninguno, y mayor atención y esmero” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 13); “[i]t’s true that he hadn’t been born yet, but undoubtedly nobody was closer to the events than he was, there was no one who was more involved and paid more attention” (Dorfman 1987, p. 7)).²¹

Certainly, *el abuelo*, “who stands to be obliterated by the versions that disallow his own birth” (McClennen 2009, p. 203), has a stake in this story; in his version, Manuel Sendero comes to the rescue of Doralisa and his son. According to McClennen, “[i]ndicating Dorfman’s concern for the future of such tales, Manuel’s legendary history is mixed with that of his son, who may or may not be alive, and who never receives a name. When the son returns to help with a second fetal rebellion he finds various competing versions of his father’s story” (ibid., p. 198). Barr even suggests that “the reader is left in doubt as to the veracity of everything in the text” (Barr 1995, p. 144). *El abuelo*, however, finds solace in the fact that his story can be corroborated by an entire generation of fetuses, “who” have formed a fetal “intelligence” network (Dorfman 1982, p. 7; Dorfman 1987, p. 11). As the narrator reveals,

Es evidente que su perspectiva, ya que ustedes interrumpen puntillosos y exigentes, estaba algo bloqueada por la incomodidad de su postura y que el feto percibía con un dejo torcido y lejanía frágil las cosas, pero tampoco puede ignorarse que la histeria del encierro agudizó sus facultades y sobredesarrolló otras, amén de que logró armar en su defensa una red informativa vasta y rumorosa, un servicio secreto tan secreto, y eficaz que nadie se dio cuenta de que existía [...]. (Dorfman 1982, p. 14)

[It’s evident that his perspective—since you insist on interrupting me so punctiliously, so exactly—was somewhat blocked by the discomfort of his position and that the fetus perceived things with a certain twisted abandon and fragile distance, but neither can it be ignored that the hysteria of his confinement sharpened some of his faculties and exaggerated others, and that, in addition, he succeeded in setting up a vast and buzzing information network in his own defense, a secret service that was so secret and so efficient that no one ever knew it existed. (Dorfman 1987, p. 7)]

However, the information gathered by the fetal “intelligence” network is not only compromised by the possibility that “fetal intelligence,” let alone inter-uterine communication, may not exist, but also

probably commits suicide, Sarah Barks is infertile, it is suggested that the son of Sendero was aborted, and the fetuses refuse to be born in two massive rebellions. Yet, on the other hand, the female body and the womb, in particular, are depicted as utopian places of sanctuary and refuge and the children born from it are a source of hope” (McClennen 2009, p. 199). In *Cristóbal Nonato*, the bodily invasion that threatens Cristóbal (and his twin sister) takes the form of Ángeles’s rape by Matamoros Moreno.

²¹ The fact that *el abuelo* (as an unborn fetus) is the best witness to the torture, disappearance, and murder of his parents, and perhaps himself, is both ridiculous and incredibly sad; in my view, Dorfman’s work, which he describes as “testimonial art,” reminds us of all of the voices whose stories we will never have access to (McClennen 2004, p. 65). In *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, John Beverley defines *testimonio* as “the voice of the subaltern,” a voice that “speaks to us as an ‘I’ that nevertheless stands for a multitude. It affirms not only a singular experience of truth in the face of grand designs of power, but truth itself as singularity” (Beverley 2004, p. 27). For Beverley, *testimonio* “has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself” (ibid., p. 32) and most importantly, “[w]e [as readers] are meant to experience both the speaker and the situations and events recounted as real” (ibid., p. 33), which creates a sense of solidarity between reader and speaker (ibid., p. 37).

by the fairytale that the other fetuses want to believe.²² For obvious reasons, Pamela (*el abuelo's* love in utero and ex utero) also prefers “[u]n final feliz” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 268); “[a] happy ending” (Dorfman 1987, p. 336)), or the version of the story in which the son of Manuel Sendero lives (Dorfman 1982, p. 344; Dorfman 1987, p. 436). We are left with the possibility that *el abuelo's* story is “una inevitable reconstrucción parcial que dependía de las transmisiones de los otros fetos que deseaban que Manuel Sendero ubicara su fontana, matara el dragón y los rescatara” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 46); “inevitably a partial reconstruction, depending on the accounts of the other fetuses, who wanted Manuel Sendero to locate his fountain, to kill the dragon and to rescue them” (Dorfman 1987, p. 49)).

By “rechaz[ando] el primero y principal de los privilegios, que es nacer” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 136); “reject[ing] the first and principal privilege, birth” (Dorfman 1987, p. 168)), the fetuses strategically resist victimization by being incorporated into a system that is antagonist toward those who refuse conformity. In a strange invocation of right-to-life rhetoric (especially as it was promoted by the Catholic Church), in which the fetus is framed as the innocent victim whose point of view is disregarded by contraceptive or abortive practices, *el abuelo* feels forced into a life he does not want. In protest he grumbles, “nadie me había consultado si quería existir” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 35); “no one asked me if I wanted to exist” (Dorfman 1987, p. 33)), declaring this offense regarding his conception to be “el primero de tantos actos anti-democráticos que me iban a imponer” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 35); “the first of many antidemocratic acts they were going to impose on me” (Dorfman 1987, p. 33)). Rebelling against a world that he did not want to be born into, *el abuelo* proclaims: “Bueno, nosotros declaramos el poder de los fetos, la democracia de los que no hemos nacido, la verdadera mayoría. El futuro al poder, ese es nuestro lema” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 35); “Well, now we’re calling for Fetus Power, the democracy of the unborn, the true majority. *Power to the future*, that’s our slogan” (Dorfman 1987, p. 33)). While the future becomes a source of inspiration for unborn citizens, who are essential to national preservation, this “democracy of the unborn” overlooks and excludes the rights of the already born minority. Pamela also raises this point in her discussion with *el abuelo*:

Claro que la vida es sagrada. Pero alguna vida es más sagrada que otra. Me cansan esas personas que se preocupan por los que todavía no nacen y les importa tan poco los que ya nacieron. [...] Una vez que los bebés salieron, los mismos defensores de la vida en abstracto dejan a los pequeños que se arreglen como puedan, les da lo mismo si pasan hambre y violencia. Senderito. A mí me importan más los vivos. (Dorfman 1982, p. 158)

[Of course life is sacred. But some life is more sacred than other life. I’m sick and tired of the people who are so concerned about the ones who haven’t been born yet and who couldn’t care less about the ones who are already here. [...] Once the babies get here, those same defenders of life in the abstract leave the little ones to fend for themselves. They don’t care if they’re hungry or abused. Senderito, I’m more concerned about the living. (Dorfman 1987, pp. 197–98)]

To a certain extent, the fetuses seem to agree with Pamela when they contend that sex should be performed responsibly precisely because “no es cosa dejar que el semen fluya y que los óvulos

²² Dorfman often employs tropes typical of fairytales when he is appealing to the hope of his audience: “Érase una vez, niños, en el borde de un cuento de hadas, érase un cantante de nombre Manuel, habíase nosotros en ese país que no era de nunca jamás. Érase un país mientras tanto, una época de entre paréntesis, un país de puerta de atrás, un país en que adormecen a las mujeres y toman presos a los niños. Érase que Manuel Sendero había soñado que con su voz intacta él podría rescatar a su amor de los infiernos y resurreccionar a su hijo y mover a piedad a las fieras. Érase que Manuel Sendero, en una palabra, se creía inmortal” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 321); “Once upon a time, kids, on the frontier of a fairy tale, there was a singer whose name was Manuel. Once upon a time there was we ourselves in that country that never was. Once upon a time there was a land of meanwhile, a time of between parentheses, a land of the back door, a land where they put women to sleep and take children prisoner. Once upon a time Manuel Sendero had dreamed that with his voice intact he could rescue his beloved from Hell and resurrect his son and move the beasts to pity. Once upon a time, in a word, Manuel Sendero believed he was immortal” (Dorfman 1987, p. 407)).

broten y que el universo vuelva a recrearse en cada lecho" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 35); "these aren't the times to just let the semen flow and the ova blossom and the universe recreate itself in every bed" (Dorfman 1987, p. 32)). For example, *el abuelo*, who in the future performs coitus interruptus so as not to be "un inseminador falaz" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 36); "a false inseminator" (Dorfman 1987, p. 34)), is described as "inundando el valle de sábanas y no el valle de hijos que clamaban por armar camas y petacas en la caliente corola de Pamela" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 36); "flooding a valley in the sheets and not a valley of children clamoring for cradles and beds in Pamela's warm corolla" (Dorfman 1987, p. 34)). Here, in the fairytale, spermatozoa become children while the egg is converted into a cradle and the womb opens like the petals of a flower to receive them, a fairytale which co-exists with the stark reality that the *el abuelo* does not want to be held responsible for children he did not intend to create or who did not ask to be born. Although they value life, the fetuses seem only to do so when the conditions are right, that is, when they will be guaranteed that the current government will be dissolved, that all weapons will be destroyed, that a free market will be replaced with free food, and that everyone will go naked (Dorfman 1982, pp. 287–88; Dorfman 1987, p. 362). In the meantime, "[h]an declarado su independencia unilateral del género humano" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 287); "[t]hey've declared their unilateral independence from the human race" (Dorfman 1987, p. 361)), and appropriate the right to choose (in terms of whether or not they will be born) from their mothers.

In this novel, birth, rather than being liberating, becomes a form of self-annihilation. The narrator even likens birth to suicide, claiming that just as a universal genealogical connection is broken in the process, so too does the newborn lose a part of himself/herself when s/he makes that choice:

[T]odo recién nacido se mata a sí mismo, destruye sus vínculos consigo mismo, con los meses de embarazo, con los muertos que han acompañado y le han calentado la oscuridad, con los hermanos por venir que ocuparán ese hueco, con los padres que antes de ellos eran idénticos y espejos y pequeños en la concavidad de la abuela, y con la abuela que también llenó un oscuro hoyo tibio que no era de cementerio y así hacia atrás, la mentira de que el útero es uno en particular en vez de ser una constelación donde todos se encuentran y se sucesivan y se transponen. (Dorfman 1982, p. 141)

[[E]very newborn kills himself, destroys the bonds that link him to himself, to the months of pregnancy, to the dead who kept him company and warmed the darkness there, to the future brothers and sisters who will occupy that space, to the parents who before them were identical and mirror images and tiny in Grandmother's concavity, and to Grandmother, who also once filled a dark, warm hole that wasn't in a cemetery and so on, back through time, the lie that there is a particular uterus not a constellation of uteruses where all meet and succeed each other and change places. (Dorfman 1987, p. 174)]

Owing to this mass resistance against birth, the future descendants of Manuel Sendero (accompanied by a few roaming dead relatives) seem to accumulate in Doralisa's body, which connects them to the other unborn through a vast, perhaps global, inter-uterine network.

The fetal versions of the story of Manuel Sendero's son(g) are, indeed, a form of self-preservation and preferable to the alternate endings provided by *el Flaquísimo* (Skinny) and *el caballero* (the Gentleman). In *el Flaquísimo's* bleak account, he corrects *el abuelo*, claiming "la muerte era la muerte, joven. Era un hecho frío y sistemático y las únicas voces eran las de los generales" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 25); "death was death, young man. It was cold-blooded and systematic and the only voices were the generals" (Dorfman 1987, p. 21)). As *el caballero* tells it, he forces Manuel to witness the abortion of his son and the murder of his wife because he refused to sing in order to save his family's life (Dorfman 1982, pp. 316–20; Dorfman 1987, pp. 401–5).²³ However, the reader,

²³ "Making someone sing" can be read in a variety of ways here, as a metaphor for forcing them to speak, confess, or testify under conditions of torture, but also as a horrible violation of the individual's right to free expression, artistic or otherwise, by compelling it.

who learns the story of the last song of Manuel Sendero from a fetal perspective, often finds themselves identifying with the ending that would enable the story, and the future generations, to live on, namely, the account of a successful fetal rebellion, which hinges on the survival of the one man that would make it possible. More than a fairytale, this narrative assumes further rhetorical weight as a collective dream, a song that is later shattered by the violent truth:

Ese día común y corriente lo habíamos soñado y construido simultáneamente entre todos. Despertamos a lo que se llama la verdad y en ese mundo lo que verdaderamente estaba ocurriendo no era nuestra rebeldía o nuestro deseo de comunicarla, lo que nos había obligado a interrumpir el sueño era que en esa intersección de la eternidad una bala había alcanzado la canción de Manuel Sendero, habría traspasado el vientre cantante de Doralisa en su carretela de los despertares, había paralizado las ruedas de la bicicleta en alguna vereda de la ciudad deshabitada donde todos los habitantes soñaban el mismo, idéntico sueño cotidiano, donde abrimos los ojos y no había nada que pudiéramos hacer para salvar a esa pareja de enamorados. (Dorfman 1982, p. 351)

[Among us all we had dreamed and simultaneously created that ordinary day. We woke up to what is called truth and in that world what was really happening wasn't our rebellion or our desire to communicate it. What had obliged us to interrupt our dream was that at that particular juncture of history a bullet had reached Manuel Sendero's song. It must have pierced Doralisa's singing womb in the cart where she was to awaken. It had paralyzed the wheels of the bicycle in some alleyway of the uninhabited city where all the inhabitants were dreaming the same identical everyday dream, where we opened our eyes and there was nothing we could do to save that pair of lovers. (Dorfman 1987, p. 446)]

When this hope for an imagined future of the nation is cut short, the reader is left to face the human toll of the dictatorship and its legacy. Yet the hope of collaboration emerges at this devastating moment: “dependía de ellos y de cada uno de nosotros preparar un mundo en que los padres jamás tuvieran que escoger entre su dignidad y la vida de sus hijos, entre esas dos formas del futuro” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 352); “it depended on them and on each one of us to prepare a world where parents would never have to choose between their own dignity and the lives of their children, between those two forms of the future” (Dorfman 1987, pp. 446–47)). Here Dorfman counters this feeling of utter helplessness by forging a connection between these “two forms of the future,” one that emerges in relation to its socio-historical context and one that envisions something completely different—neither of which he is willing to give up. Indeed, this moment in the novel is demonstrative of what McClennen calls Dorfman's “aesthetics of hope,” which “seeks collective responses to social dilemmas and rejects the aesthetic of individualism where superheroes fix the world” (McClennen 2009, p. 90).²⁴

In contrast with Dorfman, who is very much concerned with the unborn as a collectivity and presents multiple perspectives on the same story, Fuentes spends more time detailing the psychology and physicality of Cristóbal's experience of the womb because he focuses primarily on the point of view and the intrauterine development of his narrator. The narrative begins with the story of Cristóbal's experience, which Cristóbal himself narrates from his father's body, “en cuyo saco prostático yo yazco aún, inocente y filadélfico con mis dormidos hermanitos (y hermanitas) cromosómicos y espermatozoides” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 12); “in whose prostatic sack I still lie in waiting,

²⁴ According to McClennen, “Dorfman explains that he ‘tentatively’ calls literature with an aesthetics of hope that which is ‘based on the proposition that the dead do not choose for us, but that we choose for them, that we change the past as we forge into the future’” (McClennen 2009, p. 87). McClennen outlines the elements of an aesthetics of hope in her book: “In addition to the three elements of hope that are fundamental to the aesthetics of hope—the bridging of the past, present, and future, the mutual interdependence of reason and emotion, and the association of the individual with the community—there are three further features that are essential to such an aesthetic theory. An aesthetics of hope is dialectical, provocative, and revolutionary” (Ariel Dorfman 107).

innocent and philadelphic, with my sleepy chromosomatic and spermatic little brothers (and sisters)" (Fuentes 1989, p. 4)). Perhaps inspired by Christopher Columbus, who was also confident in his prophetic abilities, Cristóbal claims, "yo estoy a punto de ser creado" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 14); "I am about to be created" (Fuentes 1989, p. 8)).²⁵ With this pronouncement, Fuentes symbolically places the origin of subjectivity, authorship, and creative genius in the male body. In an even more hyperbolic statement, Cristóbal expands on this conceptualization of male creativity by crediting the "family jewels" of his father for the origin of America: "por allí fue deseada, allí fue necesitada, y no en otra parte: América está en los cojones de mi padre!" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 535); "that's where we begin: that's where America was invented, that's where it was desired, that's where it was needed and nowhere else: America is in my father's balls!" (Fuentes 1989, p. 504)).

What is more, Cristóbal presents his father's creative capacities as an awe-inspiring, efficient, and productive worlding: "los dobles hemisferios de tu talega huevera, progenitor mío, productor parejo de millones de espermas, ininterrumpidamente de la pubertad a la vejez" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 552); "the double hemispheres in your egg sack, my dear progenitor, steady producer of millions of sperm, constant from puberty to old age" (Fuentes 1989, p. 521)). The climax, thus, is transcendental—"todo lo que semos desde el origen, todo viene inscrito en él, ay mi DNA del alma, va a encontrar tu huevo Ángeles, tu esperma Ángel, portando por Dios, Nombre de Dios, Española, la Reina por Dios, portándolo, Cristo, Cristo, CRISTÓBAL" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 17); "Angel, Angeles, bearing all that we are from our very origins, everything is inscribed in him, ay, my dearest DNA, he's going to find your egg, Angeles, your sperm, Angel, bearing, my God, name of God, nombre de Dios, Hispaniola, my Queen, by God, bearing, Christ, Christ, Christ... CHRISTOPHER" (Fuentes 1989, p. 9))—as it invokes various sources of genealogical history, from the Creator to DNA to Columbus's founding of the New World.²⁶ I would like to concentrate first on this image of Cristóbal as a Christ-figure. In response to this image, Hardin reasons:

Consequently though, if Cristóbal is the son of la Virgen, then, in a sense, he is a son *without* a biological mother; if there has been no sexual intercourse, then is not Cristóbal created purely from the divine insemination of sperm? Christ is considered to be God, not a demi-god; this relegates Mary to the position of vessel, in a sense an incubator for the Christ child. Mary is denied voice and presence despite her body being the receptacle of the Son of God. [. . .] Thus, Cristóbal—Cristóforo—is the Christ child and the Christ bearer. (Hardin 1996, p. 34)

This reference to Ángeles as a Virgin Mary figure is evident in *Cristóbal Nonato*, but Hardin's reading of the Virgin Mary as not "a biological mother" is problematic at best. Indeed, he tends toward a critical misreading of both the Biblical figure and reproductive processes. First, as Frances Gray argues, "Mary's consent is crucial to the event that will follow", namely, so that the word/God can be made flesh; she is certainly a biological mother who has an agency in gestating the son of God, in bearing Christ. Because we cannot know precisely the nature of Mary's biological contribution does not mean that there is none or that we can or should articulate its limits; what is equally unclear is the existence of a biological father, a fact which Hardin takes for granted. It should be made clear also that even Fuentes acknowledges, albeit marginally, the role of Ángeles creative agency regardless of his unreliable narrator's statements testifying otherwise. That Cristóbal takes credit for being the "Christ-bearer and Christ-child," does not mean that "he" is; indeed, the reference to "Christ-bearer" could equally be read as an etymological code for Columbus, who had his own Messianic complex. Although Hardin recognizes Cristóbal's later concession to give "his" mother some credit in the

²⁵ For an in-depth analysis of Christopher Columbus and Messianism, see Kadir's *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth* (Kadir 1992).

²⁶ This reference to Columbus is reinforced as Cristóbal, as he is being ejaculated from his father, imagines being expelled from the peninsula, namely Spain (Fuentes 1994, p. 17; Fuentes 1989, p. 9).

biological processes of gestation, he contends that Cristóbal “creates himself linguistically, and he gives her life within his narrative” (ibid., p. 36).

Columbus is also figured here literally as a “founding father,” when Cristóbal parses the name that he shares with his forebear: “Portador de Cristo y Paloma o sea las does personas que faltan de la Trinidad, el Hijo y el Espíritu Santo, nuestro Descubridor, el santo que se mojó las patiuux para cruzar los mares y la paloma que llegó con una ramita en el pico a anunciar la proximidad de la Tierra Nueva y el que se estrelló un huevo para inventarnos [...]” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 85); “Christ-bearer and Dove, which is to say, the two persons missing from the Trinity, the Son and the Holy Spirit, our Discoverer, the saint who got his footsies wet crossing the seas and the dove that arrived with a little branch in his beak to announce the nearness of the New Land and the one who broke an egg to invent us [...]” (Fuentes 1989, p. 76)). Cristóbal, involved in sperm worship, valiantly presents the act of “breaking”²⁷ the egg as a necessary violence, and in this scenario the sperm also takes all of the credit for creativity as it “invents” the nation. As the creative force, this Columbus-sperm holds not only the privilege of discovery and invention, but also is attributed with the power to narrate these events. Later on, Cristóbal, who claims that he is, at a most basic level, a spermatozoon, also places himself as the victor: “lo que yo soy: un esperma que dejó a sus antepasados y derrotó a sus hermanitos en las carreras charros of ire y ahora ha encontrado el huevo caliente y distribuye sus equis y sus zetas” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 196); “what I am: a sperm that left its ancestors behind and defeated his little brothers in the race for the charros of ire and who now has found the hot egg and is distributing his X’s and Z’s” (Fuentes 1989, p. 178)).

Although Cristóbal recognizes the genetic contribution of his mother on some level, he still maintains his personhood intact: “Con todo lo cual me obligan a admitir desde el huevo que Yo soy Yo Cristóbal Más mi Circunstancia” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 31); “I’m obliged to admit, from the egg on, that I am Christopher plus my Circumstance” (Fuentes 1989, p. 23)).²⁸ By adding “plus my Circumstance,” he suggests that, once he joins with the egg, his mother merely serves as a context, not an integral part of his identity as Cristóbal. This statement, held in contrast with Cristóbal’s later preoccupation with “no ser lo que mi plan genético ha determinado para mí, sino lo que las fuerzas de afuera, todos esos fenómenos que mi inteligencia (privada, interior) ha venido observando” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 489); “not being what my genetic plan has determined for me and instead being determined by outside forces, all those phenomena that my intelligence (private, interior) has been observing” (Fuentes 1989, p. 460)), might suggest that his mother also forms part of this environment and continues to construct his “Circumstance.” It would follow, then, that the character of Cristóbal is, in effect, an atomized version of himself or a personified cell; either option would most likely be problematic given that subjectivity and what Martin calls “intentional action” would be difficult to prove or justify (Martin 1991, p. 500).

Nonetheless, Fuentes perpetuates, albeit parodically, this notion of the intentionality of the gametes through his imaginative endeavor, which leaves stereotypical gender roles intact. Fertilization, thus, comes down to the art of seduction and is transformed into a testament to Cristóbal’s masculinity. The spermatozoa, “[t]odos como loquitos, tratando de penetrar, romper la barrera, perforar la coraza y vencer la fidelidad de esta Penélope que no admite a cualquier pene lópez de su vecino, qué va!, sólo a uno, al campeón, el Ulisex sin hulisex de regreso de las guerras, the greatest, el Muhammed Alí de los cromosomas, el meromero, el maromero, el estupendo” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 113); “[a]ll madly trying to penetrate, break the barrier, perforate the shell, and overcome the fidelity of this Penelope

²⁷ Although the official translation renders “se estrelló” as “broke,” it can also be translated as “crashed into.” Moreover, the syntax of the sentence emphasizes the “the one who broke” or “the one who crashed into,” as if this action were to form an integral part of Christopher Columbus’s and Cristóbal Palomar’s identities.

²⁸ This turn of phrase also recalls José Ortega y Gasset’s contemplative statement: “Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia, y si no la salvo a ella no me salvo yo” ((Ortega y Gasset 1921, p. 35); “I am myself and my circumstance, and if I don’t overcome it [my circumstance] then I won’t survive”). Nance reads Cristóbal’s predicament as follows: “Eventually and painfully Cristóbal comes to the realization that he is a product of genetics plus circumstance; the former inherited from his parents, the latter at the option and mercy of the reader” (Nance 2006, p. 58).

who will not invite just any old dick to dinner, only one, the champ, the Ulyssex returned from the wars, the greatest, the Muhammed Ali of the chromosomes, número uno" (Fuentes 1989, p. 96).²⁹ Of course, Cristóbal is the winner of the coveted prize, and therefore receives a proper homecoming: "El huevo de mi madre me espera en su escondite ... En su trono de sangre: la reina Isabel de los Ángeles, mi hermanita piadosa, mi madre cruel, me abren los brazos a mí, el campeón, victorioso sobre los millones de soldados y soldaderas muertos en la carrera inútil por llegar hasta aquí, donde yo estoy calentito, ávido, triste, pidiendo posada" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 18); [M]y mother's egg awaits me in its hiding place. She on her throne of blood, Queen of the Angels—Isabella, Angeles, opens her arms to me, the Champ, victorious over the millions of soldier boys and girls dead in the useless race to get to where I am, warm and cozy, avid and sad, asking for a room of my own" (Fuentes 1989, pp. 10–11)).³⁰ Although more recent studies of fertilization suggest that what might have formally been interpreted as "penetration," is actually a mutual process, Fuentes uses the traditional narrative readily available to him, in which exceptional strength and physical superiority wins over the selective egg.³¹

Cristóbal's bravado and self-confidence quickly waver as he asks himself, "cuándo empiezo a contar mi vida? en los testículos de mi padre? en el huevo de mi madre?" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 23); "when do I begin to count the days of my life? inside my father's testicles? inside my mother's egg?" (Fuentes 1989, p. 16)). Implicit in this question are existential concerns with being (*is he a human life worthy of value and protection?*), origin ("*when do I begin to count*"), and ownership ("*my life*"). Later, Cristóbal contemplates the relative value of life and wonders when he will be recognized as human: "[Y]o digno de respeto y consideración a partir de qué momento? desde cuándo más importante que ella, con tanto derecho a la vida como ella, desde qué instante, digo yo?" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 29); "At what moment am I worthy of respect and consideration? At what moment am I more important than she is, with as much right to life as she has, at what point?"; (Fuentes 1989, p. 21)) Not only does Cristóbal, who is obsessed with origins, want to know when his right to life will equal that of his mother's, but also when the value of his life will surpass her own, that is, when will their positions be reversed. Without a doubt Cristóbal's disquiet is justified, since the relative value of life determines all sorts of legal, medical, and ethical decisions. Nonetheless, perhaps the primary issue here is not *when* one life in the maternal-fetal relationship will take precedence over the other, but rather why these lives must be opposed in the first place.

3. Brave New Worlds: Pregnant Flesh and a Mother's Creativity

The metaphysical metaphors presented in these novels have some revolutionary potential, but they are ultimately fall short as models for intersubjective ethics. Dorfman provides us with the metaphysical metaphor of Doralisa's womb as the "world's womb," as a veritable homeland and ideal sanctuary, but the reality is that it is overcrowded by the weight of the unborn (and their futures) and those who have already died (and the historical past). Furthermore, the "world's womb" is hollowed out and rendered a static, dead object through its violent treatment.³² At first, Fuentes represents

²⁹ This excerpt is from a section titled "Una Vida Padre," which is translated as "It's a Wonderful Life," a translation which disregards the pun that Fuentes employs here. For "Padre" literally means "Father," but is also used in Mexican slang to refer to something "great" or "cool."

³⁰ Please note that Fuentes does not translate "mi hermanita piadosa, mi madre cruel," which means "my devout little sister, my cruel mother."

³¹ According to Martin, these new findings suggest that "[t]he researchers at Johns Hopkins concluded that the sperm and egg stick together because of adhesive molecules on the surfaces of each. The egg traps the sperm and adheres to it so tightly that the sperm's head is forced to lie flat against the surface of the zona, a little bit, they told me, 'like Br'er Rabbit getting more and more stuck to tar baby the more he wriggles.' The trapped sperm continues to wiggle ineffectually side to side. The mechanical force of its tail is so weak that a sperm cannot break even one chemical bond. This is where the digestive enzymes released by the sperm come in. If they start to soften the zona just at the tip of the sperm and the sides remain stuck, then the weak, flailing sperm can get oriented in the right direction and make it through the zona—provided that its bonds to the zona dissolve as it moves in" (Martin 1991, p. 493).

³² Here, I agree with Novak: "In this tale of historical trauma, Doralisa remains an object—a cathedral, a hearth, a cave—providing instinctual sustenance to the (male) fighters for liberation. The idea of the universal womb that

Ángeles's womb as an unpredictable, violent, and hostile "océano-matriz"³³ ["ocean-matrix/womb"], her reproductive system as inefficient, monarchical, and alienating, and Cristóbal as parasitic and antagonistic. However, later her womb is also a powerful site of intersubjective (and sometimes silent) communication and artistic creativity.

In Dorfman's novel, Doralisa, the only pregnant woman featured, is often depicted as the Andes mountain range, which demarcates most of Chile's eastern border and is extremely important for Chileans as a point of reference in their conceptual geography. What *el abuelo* describes as his entrance into Chile, or "atravesar la cordillera-hembra" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 138); "crossing the female divide" (Dorfman 1987, p. 171)), after being exiled can easily be read as story of his birth.³⁴ In this expedition, he traverses mountains that resemble a pregnant woman: "[P]ero le resultó un tránsito amenazante y estrecho, la cordillera alta como hembra, larga como muslos de hembra en calor, apretada y sofocante a diferencia de cómo la había imaginado en las acuarelas" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 14); "[B]ut the crossing turned out to be narrow and threatening, the mountains, as high as a woman, as long as the extended thighs of a woman in heat, but narrow and suffocating, totally different from what he had imagined based on the watercolor landscapes" (Dorfman 1987, p. 8)). After equating the Chilean landscape to a maternal body, he compares the interior of his mother with the Andes. He writes, "mamá con tu cordillera interior vacía si no fuera por el bebé, un cráter sin cometa si no fuera por el bebé que se agazapa y conspira y sonríe" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 19); "Mama, with the mountain range inside you completely empty except, of course, for the baby, crater without a comet, empty if it hadn't been for the baby crouching there and conspiring and smiling" (Dorfman 1987, p. 12)). At this moment, the mountain range is mapped onto Doralisa's interior, but this mountain range is hollowed out (perhaps the work of *el caballero*?). According to *el abuelo*, Doralisa, as earth-mother, and later as "la derrumbada montaña de mujer" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 29); "the crumbling mountain of a woman" (Dorfman 1987, p. 24)), safeguards her child from mining as if he were a precious metal. *El abuelo* also uses other metaphors to describe Doralisa's body, such as "la carabela dulce" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 132); "sweet caravel" (Dorfman 1987, p. 162)) and "esa fortaleza en el desierto" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 132); "that fortress in the desert" (Dorfman 1987, p. 162)), both of which indicate the security that she provides for the "residents" of her body, such that *el abuelo* and other political dissidents seek refuge in her womb.

Not only is Doralisa a safe haven and "una mujer cósmicamente generosa" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 52); "a cosmically generous woman" (Dorfman 1987, p. 57)), but she is also the source of the future population of Chile, for when *el abuelo* sends *la ciega* (the blind woman) to tell Eduardo "que le cuides a sus hijos como si fueran tuyos" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 357); "to care for his children as if they were your own" (Dorfman 1987, p. 453)), he "p[iensa] que *los países* tardan más de nueve meses en nacer" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 357, my emphasis); "think[s] that it takes more than nine months for *countries* to be born" (Dorfman 1987, p. 453, my emphasis)). Manuel Sendero, however, "no le gustaba mucho esto de que una mesnada de parientes y hasta de apátridas desconocidos recorrieran lo [sic] barrios prehistóricos interiores de su mujer" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 53); "was not at all pleased with the idea that a bunch of relatives and even unknown expatriates were wandering around his wife's prehistoric interior" (Dorfman 1987, p. 57)). Converted into a universal and symbolic space outside time, what McClintock has called "anachronistic space," the womb also becomes a "parachronistic space," the

nurtures and comforts the nation reappears in the unborn son's description of the welcoming home of her uterus." (Novak 2007, pp. 309–10).

³³ I borrow this term from Linda Egan's "De la caída de Tenochtitlán al decaimiento del Make Sicko Seedy de Carlos Fuentes: Ciudades en crisis, mundos por nacer." (Egan 2010, p. 124). See also Astrida Neimanis's introduction to *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, where she claims, "from watery womb to watery world: *we are bodies of water*" and describes what she calls a "posthuman gestationality" (Neimanis 2017, p. 1; p. 4).

³⁴ "Cordillera-hembra" can also be translated as a female mountain range, which would suggest a persistence of the metaphor of the female body as part of national geography in this novel.

vessel for the hopes of an alternative future nation (McClintock 1995, p. 42).³⁵ Indeed, as Amy Novak remarks, “This ending trope of woman as the world’s womb elucidates these characters’ positions not as agents of history but merely as vessels of history” (Novak 2007, p. 307). The symbolic womb is no longer linked to female agency or understood as a reproductive organ, but rather becomes static and sterile, a “crater without a comet.” Regardless of how dependent the male characters might be on the womb for their own survival, they still perceive it as a dead object rather than as integral to a living subject. In another instance, *el abuelo* remarks that, without a doubt, “la certidumbre y santuario del vientre de Pamela era algo a resguardar a toda costa” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 158); “the certainty and the sanctuary of Pamela’s womb was something to be protected at all costs” (Dorfman 1987, p. 197)). In both scenarios, it is the womb that protects and is to be protected, not the woman.

What further complicates the positioning of Doralisa as a national mother is her dormant state. The fact that Doralisa is unconscious throughout almost the entire narrative strips her of any subject agency in its construction beyond the biological processes that keep her and her offspring alive. Physically uncomfortable because her son refuses to be born and mentally exhausted with her husband’s disappearance, Doralisa takes the drugs that *el caballero* offers her, which leave her incapacitated. For Novak, “Doralisa remains a symbol and an abstraction, manipulated by competing discourses—those of the fascist regime and those of the infant rebellion—and unable to invoke her own voice in the narrative of national trauma” (Novak 2007, p. 310). Although it is unknown whether she is manipulated or a willing participant in her own subjection, Barr suggests that with the character of Doralisa, Dorfman’s novel “brings out the horrors of gynecological experiments and violence perpetrated by the military on the bodies of women” (Barr 1995, p. 146). Under the guise of a capitalist enterprise to test a new drug, *el caballero* basically hires women in order to sedate them. Claiming that “[e]ste trabajo requiere cierta femineidad” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 42); “[t]his work requires a certain feminine quality” (Dorfman 1987, p. 43)), *el caballero* justifies his experimentation on pregnant women by implying that they are particularly qualified to be passive and to live in the world of dreams, as “nuestra bellas durmientes” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 42); “our sleeping beauties” (Dorfman 1987, p. 42)). Whereas this might be the only choice for these women, preferable to coping with the reality of Chile under Pinochet, it might also be the case that this was not a choice at all, but a violent coercion. Nonetheless, Barr finds that “[a]lthough the junta seems able to control everything, even whether Doralisa will be able to give birth, there is great strength and resistance in the female bodies” (Barr 1995, p. 145). I agree with Barr, in the sense that Dorfman seems to believe in the “great strength and resistance in the female bodies,” but he does not go the extra step to develop them as female subjects.

And yet, Dorfman does provide a limited critique of his portrayal of women through the voice of Eduardo, a historian who is skeptical of literary devices: “Metáforas, se quejó Eduardo década más tarde cuando revisaba la bibliografía existente sobre el período: en vez de narrar la historia concreta y testimonial, se dedicaron a hincharnos de ficciones y símbolos vagos” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 60); “Metaphors, Eduardo complained decades later when he was revising the existing bibliography about that period: instead of narrating concrete, testimonial history, they dedicated themselves to swelling us up with fictions and vague symbols” (Dorfman 1987, p. 68)).³⁶ Eduardo states that “[e]l cuento es machista” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 66); “[i]t’s a macho story” (Dorfman 1987, p. 76)) and that “sólo se fija en lo atrasado, lo pasivo, lo manipulable de la mujer” ((Dorfman 1982, p. 66); “it focuses

³⁵ In *The Dialectics of Exile*, McClennen argues that “Dorfman chooses to narrate two separate alternatives to Pinochet’s Chile. The first refers specifically to Allende’s Chile, but the second version of the nation has no temporal or spatial markers” (McClennen 2004, p. 94). The latter, as McClennen observes, is “a mythical, manichean nation where the good are able to defeat the forces of evil” (ibid., p. 93). Kadir also reflects on the structure of time in Fuentes’s novel: “the fluid and heterodox reality in this novel’s scripture figures as an unremitting oscillation between a past perfect of nostalgia (called romantic conservatism in the novel) and a future perfect of utopia and messianic delivery (referred to as Ayatollahism or Westering the Pacífica) that belie any possible perfectability” (Kadir 1993, pp. 87–88).

³⁶ Barr also considers Eduardo to be the voice of Dorfman’s “anti-patriarchal self-criticism” (Barr 1995, p. 145).

on the woman only as backward, passive, and manipulated" (Dorfman 1987, p. 76)). Juxtaposing the role of Esmeralda, a sterile woman who dedicates her life to feeding the nation's poor, with Doralisa, he contends: "una madre que se dormía sin estimarse capaz de parir, y frente a esa extrema apatía, por fértil que fuera, la mujer de inmensos manantiales cuya actividad se pagaba sacrificándose en los altares de la esterilidad" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 148); "that immense fountain of a woman paid for the nourishment she gave to others and her participation in history by being sacrificed on the altars of sterility, and, in contrast, the only mother in the story had to go to sleep, an example of extreme apathy, in order to be sanctified as a nest of fertility" (Dorfman 1987, p. 183)). Eduardo's analysis, however, is marginal compared to the story of fetal rebellion that dominates the sections titled "Adentro." In other moments, the novel engages in a feminist critique, but these are also marginal in comparison to the larger narrative strands. Barr also recognizes the patriarchal elements of Dorfman's novel in which "[w]omen are identified with their bodies" and "[a]ll of the defiant and assertive women are barren," commenting that "[i]n terms of the plot, the women are marginal to the story," and "[w]omen's discourse is practically outside the scope of the text" (Barr 1995, pp. 145–46). Barr concludes that "Dorfman struggles mightily to make this novel antipatriarchal. He succeeds on many levels. The novel is antihistorical and antiauthoritarian. Matriarchal roles are extremely important. Yet upon close examination we see that the plot, albeit non-linear, still revolves around the all-important questions of male lineage" (ibid., pp. 139–40). Novak takes this argument a step further, arguing that "this figuring of women's bodies registers a textual trauma that qualifies the political force of Dorfman's writing and revises our understanding of historical trauma and trauma theory by drawing attention to a dissociated feminine voice" (Novak 2007, p. 297).

Yet, this tale of survival (if it really is one) is converted into a utopic dream in the Third Epilogue; as the narrator tells us, it "nos había metido, como hermanos, en el vientre de Doralisa para que confluyeran todos los ríos del dormir mientras ella despertaba, niños por nacer, niños sin secretos, fetos prenupciales e insurrectos" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 351); "had placed us like brothers and sisters inside Doralisa's womb, so that all the rivers of sleep would flow together while she was awakening—unborn children, children without secrets, prenuptial and rebellious fetuses" (Dorfman 1987, p. 446)). Her revolutionary womb, then, is transformed into an ideal collective unconscious, or, one could argue, a brand of national imaginary. A country only united through Manuel Sendero's music is thus reunited by this shared dream and communal awakening: "acababan de soñar y compartir el vientre del mundo. Les entró la sospecha [...] de que dependía de ellos y de cada uno de nosotros preparar un mundo en que los padres jamás tuvieran que escoger entre su dignidad y la vida de sus hijos, entre esas dos formas del futuro, [...] inventaron la primera marcha contra la muerte" ((Dorfman 1982, p. 352); "they had dreamed about and shared the world's womb. They suddenly suspected [...] that it depended on them and on each one of us to prepare a world where parents would never have to choose between their own dignity and the lives of their children, between those two forms of the future, [...] and] they invented the first march against death" (Dorfman 1987, pp. 446–47)). In this way, Dorfman calls attention to the ways that dreams and the imagination, by visualizing a homeland that is livable, have the potential to forge an alternative national history alongside the official one.

In contrast, Cristóbal's description of his mother's reproductive system pales in comparison to the glorified portrayal of his father's creativity, "[el] huevo racionado de mi madre, a su cerviz tacaña, protegida del mundo con un duro tapón de moco y sólo una vez al mes, un día glorioso, se destapa, se convierte en río de vidrio, en resbaladilla del esperma; el huevo encontró a la víbora, la serpiente encontró su nido fecundo y ME VOILA!" ((Fuentes 1994, pp. 552–53); "my mother's rationed-out egg, her stingy cervix, protected from the world by a hard mucous stopper, and only once a month, one glorious day, is it unstopped, and then it becomes a river of glass, a sliding board for the sperm; the egg found the snake, the serpent found its fecund nest, and ME VOILÀ!" (Fuentes 1989, p. 521)). Here, the "rationed-out egg" juxtaposes the limited egg supply with the "constant" hyper-production of the sperm. Moreover, his mother's "stingy cervix" and "hard mucous stopper" seem to evidence a hostile

environment, reluctant to authorize entrance. Thus, the female body is read in terms of the point of view of the sperm and with the assumption that the sperm is the “ideal” gamete, and performs as a valiant knight that fights to win the heart of the queen.³⁷

Cristóbal describes himself as “[u]n cuerpo extraño dentro del cuerpo de mi madre” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 241); “a foreign body within my mother’s body” (Fuentes 1989, p. 220)), depicts his mother’s body as hostile to his own, thus perpetuating this notion of maternal/fetal opposition. Feeling anxious and vulnerable, Cristóbal imagines his instinct of “self”-preservation as a strategic covert military operation:

[M]e defendí como pude, me trepé a mi nave espacial y me lancé a la guerra de las galaxias intrauterinas: me comí la membrana de la mucosa de mi madre, penetré por los vasos sanguíneos de mi madre devorando su oxígeno y su alimento como una rata del desierto, excavé, Elector, un hoyo dentro del hoyo de mi madre, hasta que mi paupérrima, fragilísima y frugaloides existencia se hiciera, a fuerza de mi voluntad de vivir, parte del cuerpo y de la vida de ella: Me *enterré* en mi madre, Elector, me hice tragar por la matriz de mi madre en contra de la voluntad rechazante de mi madre (una voluntad inconsciente, pero voluntad al cabo) [...]. (Fuentes 1994, p. 241)

[I defended myself as best I could, I scrambled up into my spaceship and launched myself into intrauterine star wars: I ate my mother’s mucous membrane, I penetrated my mother’s circulatory system, devouring her oxygen and food like a desert rat, I excavated, Reader, a hole within my mother’s hole, until my oh so poor, fragile, and frugal existence became, through my will to survive, part of her body and life: I *buried* myself in my mother, Reader, I caused myself to be swallowed by my mother herself (an unconscious will, but a will nevertheless) [...]. (Fuentes 1989, p. 221)]

Perpetuating the antagonistic relationship between Cristóbal and his mother, Fuentes invokes the metaphor of the fetus as a parasite, implying that the growth of the fetus is necessarily detrimental to the mother; in a preemptive strike, Cristóbal takes credit for natural processes that are only made possible by the conditions of the womb. “[E]n contra de los dos” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 246); “[A]gainst both of them [Angel and Angeles]” (Fuentes 1989, p. 225)), he declares, “me he instalado en la matriz y yo mismo creo la placenta naciente” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 246); “I’ve set myself up in the womb and I myself am creating the placenta” (Fuentes 1989, p. 225)). According to LaChance Adams and Lundquist, in Luce Irigaray’s concept of the *placental economy*, “the placenta is a vital mediating space that already preserves differentiation within the relationship. There is neither fusion or conflict, but a negotiation between mother and fetus. The placenta regulates exchanges between the two, ensuring that the fetus is not treated as a foreign or alien other” (LaChance Adams and Lundquist 2013, p. 16).³⁸ However, in this representation, Cristóbal imagines the placenta as a fortress in which he will hide to defend himself from attack. Once his mother Ángeles knows that she is pregnant, however, Cristóbal overcomes his feelings of insecurity and admits to a collaborative effort, “Ella no habla. Yo sólo escucho. No es lo mismo. Pero algo nos une. Ella me crea pero yo me creo también” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 280); “She does not speak. I only listen. It isn’t the same. But something links us. She creates me, but I create myself as well” (Fuentes 1989, p. 256)).

And yet, Cristóbal continues to view the maternal-fetal relationship through the lens of difference. With this description, Cristóbal intimates that he and his mother will speak that which is unspeakable for each other, but, as a matter of fact, he is the one who has more control over what is actually said out loud, since his mother’s form of communication is a silent one to which only he is privy.

³⁷ Debra A. Castillo remarks that “in Fuentes’s text reminders of impotence (the enwombed child, parasite, or proto-‘imbunche’) are always paired with images of sexual potency—the millions of rushing sperm” (Castillo 1991, p. 10).

³⁸ For an elaboration of the concept of the “placental body,” see also JaneMaree Maher’s “Visibly Pregnant: Toward a Placental Body” (Maher 2002).

[S]eremos siempre la diferencia: madre e hijo celebraremos no nuestra unión, sino nuestra alteridad! Somos el espejo de nuestros lenguajes. Yo estaré dentro del suyo para decir lo que ella no puede decir. Ella dirá lo que yo no puedo decir. Señores electores: rueguen por mí, rueguen que la lección del lenguaje aprendido en el seno de mi madre no la olvide, como tantas otras cosas, apenas tenga lugar el parto. (Fuentes 1994, p. 280)

[[W]e shall always be a difference: mother and child, we shall celebrate not our union but our alterity! We are the mirror of our languages. I shall be within hers to say what she cannot say. She shall say what I cannot say. Gentle Readers: pray for me, pray that I do not forget (as I shall forget so many other things the instant I am born) the lesson of language I've learned in my mother's womb. (Fuentes 1989, p. 256)]³⁹

In a similar gesture of projecting difference onto an "other," Ángeles becomes a screen for Ángel's projections of his *suave patria* ("sweet fatherland"). For instance, Ángel maps out continental American geography onto her body: Reina Mía: dame América, dale Ameriquita a tu Angelito; déjame acercarme a tu Guanahaní, acariciarte el golfo de México, rascarte rico la delta del Mississippi, alborotarte la Fernandina, destaparte el tapón de Darien" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 16); My Queen: give me America, give a little America to your little Angel. Let me come near your Guanahaní, Angeles, caress your Gulf of Mexico, tickle the delta of your Mississippi, excite your Cuba, get engulfed in your Gulf of Darien" (Fuentes 1989, p. 8)). Yet Ángeles, who spends most of her time reading Plato's *Cratylus*, is frustrated with Ángel's mad search for *la suave patria* that would match his and López Velarde's vision with a localizable reality, and represents herself as an ideal homeland: "Soy un receptáculo bueno, Ángel, un muro blanco sin recuerdos ni pasado propios [...]" ((Fuentes 1994, pp. 61–62); "I am a good receptacle, Angel, a white wall without memories or my own past [...]" (Fuentes 1989, p. 52)). What do we make of the fact that Ángeles willingly accepts and even touts this configuration of her body? Also, how do we reconcile the two different accounts, one in which she credits Ángel for her nature—"Ángel me dio la felicidad de crearme. No me encontró: me inventó, me hizo suya inventándose" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 424); "Angel made me happy by creating me. He didn't find me: he invented me, he made me his by inventing me" (Fuentes 1989, pp. 396–97))—and the other, in which she reveals the artifice of her own construction?

Lo vi joven y rebelde. Entonces rápido me apropié de todo lo que creí que le gustaría a él, feminismo, izquierdismo, ecología, Freud y Marx, exámenes a título, la ópera completa [...]. Imagínate mi sorpresa cuando me resultó con que era rebelde conservador! Ni modo; yo ya no podía cambiar mis símbolos sólo para darle gusto [...]. (Fuentes 1994, p. 424)

[I saw him as young and rebellious. So I instantly appropriated everything I thought he liked—feminism, left-wing politics, ecology, Freud and Marx, university exams, every opera ever written [...] Imagine how surprised I was when he turned out to be a conservative rebel! No way. There was no way I was going to change my symbols just for him [...]. (Fuentes 1989, p. 397)]

Ángeles resolves to remain silent, "Decidí que mejor era que nos complementáramos y callarme la boca para gozar los actos del amor sin comprender demasiado bien los actos de la ideología"

³⁹ Fuentes's use of "womb" as a translation for "seno" is an interesting choice, since it is translated literally as breast. However, it seems that given the context of this statement, that he means to signal a metaphorical interpretation of the word, which could be translated as "at the heart" or "in the center." Regarding the fetal narrators' "complete amnesia as regards to their fetal experience" at birth in these novels, Nance clarifies: "Once the fetus has been equipped with a vocabulary it becomes necessary to explain why the neonate lacks one. Thus, while the near simultaneous creation of fetal narrators by Fuentes and Dorfman may be something of a coincidence, the expectation in both novels that the fetus will forget his knowledge at birth appears to be a logical resolution of a common technical problem" (Nance 2006, p. 56; p. 55). According to Squier, "Even more than postcoloniality, fetal experience has the paradoxical nature of being annihilated in its transformation: once the unborn becomes the born, whatever experience existed on the other side of the boundary is irretrievable" (Squier 1991, p. 28).

((Fuentes 1994, p. 424); “I decided it was better for us to complement each other, so I kept my mouth shut, the better to enjoy making love without understanding too well about making ideology” (Fuentes 1989, p. 397)). Ultimately, the important lesson that Ángeles wants Ángel to learn is that it takes time for human creation, whether it is language, art, or a child, to become a reality.⁴⁰

El arte es un evento continuo, o una continuidad que acontece: hubiera querido comunicarle esto a Ángel para salvarlo de su *either/or*, sabes, locura o razón, estancamiento o progreso, su mundo de opciones dramáticas que tanto le gusta y tanto daño le hace. Acepté su hijo para darle realidad a esta idea, la idea de una continuidad del acontecimiento entre el relajo y la desesperación que van a devorar a mi pobre Ángel si no me entiende. Aunque sea a solas, sin mí, pero que me entienda. (Fuentes 1994, p. 425)

[Art is a continuous event or a continuity that takes place. I would have wanted to communicate that to Angel in order to save him from his *either/or*, you know, his madness or reason, stagnation or progress, his world of dramatic possibilities which he likes so much and which does him such damage. I agreed to have this child in order to bring this idea to reality, the idea of continuity of happening between the nonsense and the despair that will devour my poor Angel if he doesn't understand me. Even if he ends up doing it alone, without me, just as long as he understands me. (Fuentes 1989, pp. 397–98)]

Indeed, this lesson about truth as multiple, relative, and analogical is not only for Ángel's benefit, but also for Cristóbal, who listens attentively and who also thinks in terms of absolutes.

Cristóbal's thinking does shift towards the end of the novel, when he becomes very confident in his ability to make comparisons, as denoted by his frequent use of the colon throughout his narrative: “Ocurre que yo Cristóbal soy capaz de encontrar relaciones y analogías (no adivino: relaciono, asemejo!) que los demás no ven porque las han olvidado” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 505); “It turns out that I, Christopher, am capable of finding relations and analogies (I don't divine things: I relate things, make things similar!) others don't see because they have forgotten them” (Fuentes 1989, p. 475)).⁴¹ One could also interpret the fact that Cristóbal must expend an “enorme sobrehumano te lo juro esfuerzo por escuchar al OTRO a fin de saberme ÚNICO” ((Fuentes 1994, p. 518); “enormous superhuman effort (I swear it) to listen to the OTHER in order to know myself to be UNIQUE” (Fuentes 1989, p. 487)), suggests a shift in emphasis from speaking about the other to listening to the other; indeed, since he is incapable of “detached” observation, this seems promising.

In Fuentes's novel, “the lesson of language” materializes in the female body in a way that is unintelligible to the outside world.⁴² Regardless of the way that the female body absorbs the discourses that try to identify her role in creation, Ángeles's way of communicating in silence seems to be, as per Fuentes, a particularly female form that cannot be put into language. Once again, the female body is figured as “empty,” although this emptiness is framed somewhat positively:

⁴⁰ As Kadir remarks, “those who must carry the geste, gesture, or gestation to term—terms of time and terms of language—are not wont to take the process for granted” (Kadir 1993, p. 97).

⁴¹ The function of a colon is “to separate clauses which are grammatically independent and discontinuous, but between which there is an apposition or similar relation of sense” (Colon 2017, n.p.).

⁴² Fuentes, himself, has commented on his novel as a linguistic experiment: “Si estamos de acuerdo con Lyotard o con Derrida en que todo se ha vuelto juego del lenguaje, pues yo les voy a tomar la palabra, y voy a hacer un supremo juego del lenguaje para demostrar que hay algo más que el lenguaje, que hay algo fuera del lenguaje. En mi libro yo quise plantear esto de una manera muy radical: Cristóbal, por estar dentro del vientre de su madre, en contacto con su formación genética, oyendo cosas, lo único que tiene es lenguaje, lenguaje y una piscina donde nadar, no tiene otra cosa. Entonces el lenguaje se vuelve su realidad; Cristóbal no puede entender nada, porque no está moviéndose en el mundo [...], no está viendo las cosas realmente, las está viendo a través de un velo transparente” ((Fuentes 1996, p. 101); If we are in agreement with Lyotard or Derrida in that everything has turned into linguistic play, well I'm going to take them at their word, and I am going to play a supreme language game to show that there is something more than language, that there is something outside of language. In my book, I wanted to propose this in a radical way: Christopher, by being inside the womb of his mother, in contact with his genetic development, hearing things, the only thing that he has is language, language and a pool in which to swim, he doesn't have anything else. So language becomes his reality; Christopher can't understand anything, because he is not moving about in the world [...], he's not really seeing things, he's seeing them through a transparent veil).

Ella está exhausta de lenguaje. Vacía de palabras (me comunica en silencio o lo comunica en silencio [...]: la escucho, oigo su maravilloso silencio: su silencio le habla al otro, al ausente; recibe lo que el mundo imprime en su lengua, pero una maravillosa compensación la lleva a encontrar siempre la palabra contraria la que le fue dada: su discurso comparte el de mi padre pero también lo completa). (Fuentes 1994, p. 280)

[She's simply devoid of language. She's empty of words (she communicates me in silence or communicates it in silence [...]: I listen to her, I hear her marvelous silence: her silence speaks to the other, the one who is absent; she receives what the world prints on her language, but a marvelous compensation leads her always to find the antonym of the word given her: her discourse shares my father's discourse, but it completes it as well). (Fuentes 1989, pp. 255–56)]

Perhaps Cristóbal is his mother's "other" form of linguistic creation? If so, why must she be otherwise silent? And what does it mean that Cristóbal speaks in her stead?

Cristóbal, in fact, asserts that he is coterminous with language itself: "yo que me gesto con el lenguaje porque de otra manera no podría decir nada de lo que estoy diciendo: el lenguaje se gesta conmigo, ni un minuto, ni un centímetro antes o después o menos o más que yo mismo: [...A] mis palabras les salen ojos y párpados, uñas y cejas, igual que a mi cuerpo" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 279); "I who am gestating right along with language because if I weren't I wouldn't be able to say any of the things I'm saying: language gestates and grows with me, not one minute, not one centimeter before or after or less or more than I myself. [...M]y words grow eyes and eyelids, fingernails and eyebrows, just as my body does" (Fuentes 1989, p. 254)). What is more, Cristóbal also has it on good "authority" that his affiliation with language is ontological, "esto me dicen, en primer lugar, mis genes: eres lenguaje. Mas, qué clase de lenguaje soy?" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 279); "what my genes tell me is that you are language. But what kind of language am I?" (Fuentes 1989, p. 255)). Cristóbal, "como todo autor minoritario y silenciado, la voz rebelde, censurada y silente ante los lenguajes reinantes" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 281); "like all minority, silenced authors, the rebellious voice, censured and silent in the face of the reigning languages" (Fuentes 1989, pp. 256–57)), is the voice representing the mother-child relationship while his mother remains silent. Kadir reflects on the originary moment of the text, in which Cristóbal utters the first words of the novel, which would, in theory, mark the beginning of his life: "His enunciation, subsuming as it does the intercourse and interlocution of his conception, becomes the germinal word transmuted into flesh/text incarnate as bio/graphy" (Kadir 1993, p. 94). Cristóbal, then, becomes the idea realized, the word made flesh, a living symbol.

However, we are faced with the possibility that the entire novel is not a communication from an unborn Cristóbal, a result of Ángeles gestation, or a product of Ángel's desire. The idea for the story begins *ab ovo*, so to speak, as the creation of the character Huevo (formerly known as gordito), who had been trapped in a metallic egg, where he conceived of an entire novel in his mind. Huevo, whose name means "egg," and in popular uses refers to both male (testicle) and female (egg) reproductivity, "vio un latigazo negro en su mente y pensó que en la realidad era el espectro oscuro de un espermatozoide perfecto como el que algún día podía conferirle vida a un hijo suyo, o de su amigo Ángel Palomar, o de sus cuates el Huérfano Huerta, el Jipi Toltec y la Niña Ba" ((Fuentes 1994, p. 149); "saw in his mind a black whiplash and thought that in reality it was the dark ghost of a perfect spermatozoon like the one that might give life to his own son or that of his friend Ángel Palomar, or those of his buddies, the Orphan Huerta, Hipi Toltec, and the Baby Ba" (Fuentes 1989, p. 131)).⁴³ Many critics claim that Huevo, as the author of the novel we are reading, is also by extension, Cristóbal and Fuentes; and, I would add, Ángeles's idea literalized.

⁴³ For an extensive reading of this "whiplash," see Castillo and also Kadir, "Fuentes and the Profane Sublime" (Castillo 1991; Kadir 1993). Many critics have concentrated on the meaning of the figure of la Niña Ba, who we learn, alongside Cristóbal at the moment of his birth, is his twin sister. See, for example, Castillo (1991); Egan (2010); Hardin (1996).

Although it is probably clear, at this point, that Dorfman's and Fuentes's representations of their textual pregnant mothers are problematic in feminist terms, I would argue that, as metaphysical metaphors, they are pregnant with possibility. For instance, Dorfman's Doralisa, figured as the cosmically generous world's womb, could be read in terms of what feminist philosopher, Frances Gray, calls "absolute hospitality." In her essay, "Original Habitation: Pregnant Flesh as Absolute Hospitality," she argues that "[w]hat distinguishes the pregnant flesh as absolute hospitality is its unique coming to being that is coterminous with the making of the fetus: It is the primary expression of abandonment to an unknown Other, who is yet to be" (Gray 2013, p. 86). In constructing the idea of "pregnant flesh," she builds primarily on the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty on "flesh" and "Edmund Husserl's claim that the conscious body, as personal individual, presupposes 'a plurality of subjects in mutual intersubjective understanding'" (ibid., p. 71). As such, Gray describes the experience of "pregnant flesh" as follows: "her subject/object singularity is temporarily suspended in two ways: her singular flesh now becomes two fleshes in one place; and her singular flesh is now symbolically the flesh of all humans, in its plurality and multiplicity, symbolically, that is, the being of all flesh" (ibid., p. 79). Indeed, Gray, reflecting both upon the individual lived experience of the pregnant subject and her symbolic link to the universal human experience of being born, figures "pregnant flesh as original home, framed, *ideally* by consent and acceptance, welcoming and anticipation" (ibid., p. 77). For Gray, this concept of "original home" is predicated on the notion of "absolute hospitality [a]s an expression of the body's life-will or intentionality" as a "biometaphor" that does not preclude the agency of the pregnant subject to act otherwise. In the metaphor of Doralisa, imagined as pregnant flesh, questions arise as to the nature of Doralisa's consent. For example, does she accept the symbolic rendering of her pregnant flesh as the world's womb, or is the accompanying weight of being occupied by the future unborn and the already dead too difficult to bear? Even if she accepts *el abuelo* with "consent and acceptance, welcoming and anticipation," will circumstances even permit her to bring *el abuelo* to term? While the idea of an "absolute hospitality" is one of beautiful self-sacrifice and unconditional love, we have to be wary of representations where consent is not possible or when such conditions are violently coerced, especially if we are to invoke it as a model for intersubjective ethics. Lisa Guenther reminds that in order to understand the maternal-fetal relationship, we need to examine it not only from the side of the embryo-becoming-child, but also from the side of the woman-becoming-mother" (Guenther 2013, p. 102).

A redeeming aspect of Fuentes's representation of the maternal-fetal relationship is that, as Cristóbal evolves, he comes to more nuanced understanding of his mother's modes of communication and the possibility of her creative agency. In her essay, "The Vision of the Artist/Mother: The Strange Creativity of Painting and Pregnancy," Florentian Verhage resituates creativity in the pregnant subject: "From the very first preparation of life a fetus is in relationship with a lived body that is the 'moving, tactile and sonorous body' of a creative subject. Pregnancy is the most fundamental moment of being in-one-another that founds intersubjectivity in *intercorporeality*" (Verhage 2013, p. 313). Verhage bases her argument on an engagement with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of creativity, which is dependent on an interaction between the painter and the world: "because creativity is this passive-active exchange between the subject and his world, one can no longer claim that the artist is the center of creativity. Instead the *interplay* between the artist and the world is creative; the artist has been submerged and decentered from his world" (ibid., p. 309). As such, Verhage reads creativity into the maternal-fetal relationship, where the pregnant subject has a "generative, world-constituting, discursive, and intersubjective power": "when the mother as a discursive agent engages with the child through perception and discourse, she also creatively embeds her in a particular world. Thus, having been born from a maternal subject means, among other things, having a relation with a generative past through the creative narratives of maternal others (the 'tongues' of mothers) who share with us the very specific practices and traditions of the world we live in" (ibid., p. 312).

As Iris Marion Young established in her seminal essay in feminist phenomenology, "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation", the pregnant subject "experiences herself as a source

and participant in a creative process” and “is not simply a splitting in which the two halves lie open and still, but a dialectic” (Young 2014, p. 54). It does not make sense, therefore, that we should metaphorically render her pregnant flesh as the site of absolute hospitality without her consent or metaphorically extricate her pregnant subjectivity from the creative process to which she is integral. What we must come to recognize is that both pregnant flesh and the pregnant subject are resilient and revolutionary, but there are certainly poetic, philosophical, and political implications to figuring the maternal-fetal relationship as a metaphysical metaphor for intersubjective ethics.

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