

Universidad Tecnológica Nacional

Facultad Regional Avellaneda

Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa

Tesis de Licenciatura

Women's Power and Patriarchy:

A Literary Case Study in William Henry Hudson's Work

Poder femenino y Patriarcado:

Un estudio de caso en la obra de Guillermo Enrique Hudson

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Septiembre de 2021

*“Mankind has always feared women who fly, either because they are
witches or because they are free”.*

(Anonymous)

Dedicated to Martina and Joaquín.

I love being your mother.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Dra. María Rosa Mucci for her assistance and the clarity of her guidance as my thesis director.

I would also like to thank my husband, Claudio, my daughter, Martina, and my son, Joaquín, for patiently accompanying me during the process of writing.

Finally, my special thanks to Lic. María José Ferré y Ferré, who has been part and witness of my own search for self-empowerment.

Abstract

The representation of female characters in male-authored literary texts constitutes a central point in feminist criticism (Manly, 2007: 46-50; Goldman, 2007: 74). Especially in the Victorian period, women's quest for power appears as an unusual topic on account of the patriarchal order prevailing in the society of the time. The Anglo-Argentinian author William Henry Hudson was a prolific writer during this historical context; however, the power relationships that come into play in his fictional works have been overlooked until now. Hence, this study analyses the short story *Pelino Viera's Confession* with a special focus on its female character, Rosaura, and her search for self-empowerment under patriarchal constraints. For this purpose, a content analysis research method was followed, applying a deconstructive feminist approach in order to dismantle the power relationships existing in the story. The findings from this study highlight the importance of challenging the culturally-determined stereotypes present in literary works so as to perceive the inequalities and power struggles between men and women, and also lead to interesting implications for a feminist debate both in the classroom and in society.

Key words: Women's representation – Patriarchy – Women's power – Feminism - Deconstruction

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Definition and scope of the problem.....	1
Purpose of the research.....	5
Methodological framework.....	6
Organization of this work.....	7
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
1.1 Feminism and patriarchal power in Literature.....	9
1.2 On Deconstruction and Feminism.....	16
1.3 Male dominance and witch hunting.....	24
CHAPTER 2: <i>PELINO VIERA ´S CONFESSION</i>.....	28
2.1 The fantastic tale.....	28
2.2 Women and the historical context.....	30
2.3 The story: plot and analysis.....	33
CONCLUSIONS.....	59
Conclusion.....	59
Limitations	62
Implications of the present study.....	63
Suggestions for future research.....	64
WORKS CITED.....	66
APPENDIX.....	72
Pelino Viera ´s Confession.....	73

INTRODUCTION

Definition and scope of the problem

Literary representations of women have long been the object of study by feminist critics (Manly, 2007: 46-8; Goldman, 2007: 74-5; Colebrook, 2007: 221). Notably, women have usually been depicted in such a way that they conform to the norms of the patriarchal society in which the works of art have been produced, showing the importance of the socio-historical context in the analysis of the portrayal of women's bodies, minds and souls (Tubert, 2001: 83-4). During the Victorian age (1837-1901), in particular, women's search for knowledge and power appears to be an unusual theme, especially in male-authored texts, which not infrequently display man's power over women as the natural order. This does not seem to be surprising due to the singular characteristics of the social context of the time, in which women were relegated to the domestic domain and were imposed a role of submission to men (Manly, 2007: 50; Goldman, 2007: 79; Colebrook, 2007: 225-6; Sprengnether, 2007: 239, 254; Tubert, 2001: 75, 85; Federici, 2015: 184).

In this particular historical period, the Victorian era, in England and at the age of thirty-four, William Henry Hudson published his first article (*Wanted, a Lullaby*, 1875) in *Cassell's Family Magazine*, under the female pseudonym Maud Merryweather (Maudo García, 2017: 116). This fact results striking indeed, as

there were not a few women who wrote under male pseudonyms (e.g. the Brontë sisters published poems and novels under the names Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; Mary Ann Evan was better known by her pen name George Eliot; Louisa May Alcott used the pseudonym A. M. Barnard) or even anonymously so as to be taken seriously (as Mary Wollstonecraft's daughter herself, Mary Shelley, did when *Frankenstein* was first published). Men did not usually have to recur to this resource, though.

William Henry Hudson can be considered an Anglo-Argentinian author insofar as he was born in Argentina (near Quilmes, province of Buenos Aires, in 1841) and spent more than half of his life in his homeland. However, he wrote and published all his work in English after emigrating to London in 1874, where he recorded his South American experiences (Ferradas, 2010: 2) and lived until his death in 1922. He published nearly thirty works which range from a series of ornithological studies (derived from his thoughtful observation of birds and nature in his homeland) to memoirs, novels and short stories. In her 1918 anonymous review of Hudson's *Far Away and Long Ago: A History of my Early Life* (1918), Virginia Woolf stated:

One does not want to recommend it as a book so much as to greet it as a person, and not the clipped and imperfect person of ordinary autobiography, but the whole and complete person whom we meet rarely enough in life or in literature. (Wilson, 2015)

It is interesting to remark that, although, W.H. Hudson's prose was admired by many famous authors, including Ernest Hemingway, Miguel de Unamuno, Jorge Luis Borges (Arocena, 2003) and Virginia Woolf, among others, his work receives relatively little attention today. In the words of Maudo García (2017), "Hudson has the merit of being one of the nineteenth century writers who started the Argentinian fantastic literature. Even so, he doesn't [sic] usually receive such recognition" (Maudo García, 2017: 115).

John Walker (1983) notes that the few publications that deal with Hudson's works of fiction mostly concentrate on two romances: *The Purple Land* (1885), which depicts the River Plate life and customs, and *Green Mansions* (1904) (Walker, 1983: 349), his most popular novel which was even made into a film (1959). And as regards his female characters, Walker (1983) writes that "Hudson has effected one of the most felicitous creations in English literature in the figure of Rima [*Green Mansions*' main character], who has survived when all his other novelesque figures have disappeared into oblivion" (Ibid).

The short story *Pelino Viera's Confession* was published in *The Cornhill Magazine* in 1883¹. In it, as Anaya Ferreira (2001) puts it, "Hudson makes use of legends and local traditions to achieve an in-depth description of the obscure natural forces that have been conquered by civilization" (Anaya Ferreira, 2001: 149). The main theme of the story is the fact that its protagonist, Pelino Viera,

¹ It would later be included in Hudson, W.H. (1916) *Tales of the Pampas [El Ombú and Other Stories]* New York: Alfred A. Knoff, pp. 95-133.

discovers that his wife, Rosaura, practises the hidden art of witchcraft and she ends up being killed in a confusing incident. The analysis of the story goes beyond the mere examination of the belief in sorcery; it implies, as it is seen in this research, a deconstruction of the man-woman categories and the power relationships that exist in patriarchal society (Moi, 1986: 104; Tubert, 2001: 42, 84-5; Sprengnether, 2007: 253; Federici, 2015: 25, 183-4, 262, 264, 275, 329-30).

Although *Pelino Viera's Confession* was one of the first tales published by W. H. Hudson, it has been given scant attention, with a very few exceptions (Maudó García, 2017). Besides, the character of Rosaura itself has only been examined from the point of view of her relationship with popular superstitions, as is the case of the belief in witchcraft (Anaya Ferreira, 2001; Maudó García, 2017), and, together with Rima and Marta Riquelme², in relation to Hudson's recurrent obsession with the bird-woman (Maudó García, 2017: 117-118). However, until now, researchers have overlooked an underlying theme within the story object of this study: how W. H. Hudson depicts patriarchal power in *Pelino Viera's Confession* as exerted over the female character, Rosaura.

This research attempts to acknowledge Hudson's work through the analysis of *Pelino Viera's Confession*, a fantastic short story published at the dawn of his writing career and one of his less known fictional works. Moreover, in the

² Hudson, W.H. (1916) "Marta Riquelme" in *Tales of the Pampas [El Ombú and Other Stories]* New York: Alfred A. Knoff, pp. 175-225.

current social context in which patriarchy is being challenged and reconfigured, giving birth to a new female paradigm, it is important to inquire about the way women are represented in fictional works written by men and to analyse women's quest for power, focusing on how they are affected by the patriarchal constraints set upon them.

Purpose of the research

This study was conducted with the purpose of analysing the power relationships that come into play in W. H. Hudson's *Pelino Viera's Confession* when its female character Rosaura rebels against patriarchal rules and decides to set out on a journey to knowledge and self-empowerment. Furthermore, as witchcraft is a central theme in the story, a second objective of this research was to determine the importance of the process of witch hunting in the reinforcement of patriarchy throughout the tale.

Therefore, this study is informed by the following Research Question:

To what extent does Rosaura, from William Henry Hudson's *Pelino Viera's Confession*, find death in an endeavour to pursue knowledge and power?

From this Research Question, the following basic hypotheses have been derived:

- (1) Rosaura may have been accidentally killed by her husband when he discovers that she is thirsting after a kind of knowledge that is provided to her by witchcraft.

- (2) Rosaura may want to escape from the constraints of the patriarchal society in which she is immersed and is finally killed by her husband due to her power and superiority.

Methodological framework

In order to arrive at a reliable response to the research question postulated and to prove the hypotheses as valid, this study was conducted following the content analysis research method (Ary et al., 2010: 30, 457-9) to analyse the tensions and power struggles between the main characters of the short story *Pelino Viera's Confession* (Pelino and his wife Rosaura).

The tale was approached from a feminist perspective so as to focus on women's place in patriarchal society and how this is reflected in the literary work object of this study. Moreover, a deconstructive approach was applied in order

to decentre the text and explore the suppressed or denied aspects of the story, focusing on the Otherness that is not explicitly addressed.

Organization of this paper

This work has been organized into an introduction, two chapters and a conclusion.

The introduction contains the definition and scope of the problem to be analysed, the purpose of the present research, including the research question and hypotheses, and the methodological framework within which this work was undertaken.

Chapter 1 consists of a revision of literature which provides the theoretical framework that supports the analysis carried out in this study. First, an overview of feminist literary criticism is provided in order to discuss how the constraints of patriarchy are expressed in literary texts. Second, the theory of deconstruction is examined together with the contributions of French feminism so as to approach the story object of this study from a post-structural feminist point of view. Then, the process of witch hunting, a central topic in *Pelino Viera's Confession*, is explored as a means to relate it with feminist theories in the analysis of the tale.

Chapter 2 deals with the analysis of the short story *Pelino Viera's Confession* taking into account the fantastic genre to which it belongs and the historical setting of the tale. The representation of the character Rosaura and the struggle for power between her and the protagonist, Pelino, constitute the focal point of this section.

The conclusions, along with the limitations, possible implications of the present study and suggestions for future lines of research, are found in the last section of this paper.

Finally, a list of works cited and an appendix are included at the end of this work.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Feminism and patriarchal power in Literature

Feminism has had a great influence on literary criticism since the mid-1900s, modifying not only the study of literary texts but also the way in which literary works have been produced (Plain and Sellers, 2007: 1).

The roots of modern feminism can be traced back to mid-eighteenth-century women's movements during the French Revolution and the fight for the right to vote in the 19th and early 20th centuries, a period which is commonly known as 'first-wave' feminism. One of the most important literary critics of the time was Mary Woolstonecraft (1759-1797), an English writer and philosopher whose work concentrates on the inauthentic representation of gender in fictional texts written by men. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1790) she strongly critiques the aesthetic categories associated with women and the naturalized hierarchy of the powerful (men) over the powerless (women) (Manly, 2007: 48). Woolstonecraft argues that women's ideas and behaviour have been encroached by a fictitious femininity that is communicated through literature with the aim of defining women as sexually submissive and intellectually inferior (Manly, 2007: 50). She disdains the idea, commonly accepted at the time, that women should be tender and docile so as to influence men in some way. For

her, this kind of power is 'illegitimate' because it degrades women making them slaves to men. Instead, women should set themselves free from the precepts of beauty and search for their own knowledge and emancipation (Manly, 2007: 53-4).

Wollstonecraft's ideas have influenced the development of feminist theories to the present day. Nevertheless, it was not until the so-called 'second-wave' feminism, a period of stirring activity that started in the United States in the 1960's, that feminist literary criticism properly began (Plain and Sellers, 2007: 2). One of the main objectives of the feminist theories from this second wave was to analyse the differences between the sexes, focusing on the inequalities that derive from the sexist power structures intrinsically established in society. This implied analysing masculine oppression and women's place in patriarchal society while, at the same time, exploring the aspects that have been suppressed or denied by the dominant status quo (Tubert, 2001: 42). In this context, the concept of patriarchy, a term derived from the Latin *pater* (father) and *arch* (rule)³, constitutes itself as "an arbitrary assumption of power" (Sprengnether, 2007: 253), a socially constructed system that places male supremacy over women as the only valid axiom.

In spite of the fact that her feminist manifesto was written well before the 1960's, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) is widely recognized as the founder of

³ Retrieved from: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/anthropology-and-archaeology/anthropology-terms-and-concepts/patriarchy>

modern feminist literary criticism (Goldman, 2007: 66). Her book-length essay *A Room of One's Own* (1998 [1929]) delves into the role of women as writers and as fictional characters. In it, she wonders:

Have you any idea how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion how many are written by men? Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe? (1998 [1929]: 26)

Here, not only does she reflect upon patriarchal power as expressed by literary authorship but she also focuses on the representation of women in male-authored texts. At the same time, she deliberately uses the term 'animal' to refer to the female reader, as a means of conveying the idea that women belong to a different species, completely foreign to men, thus enforcing the notion that women hold an 'outsider status' that would never be comprehended by men.

Concerned with the incongruity between 'woman' as a sign, that is, how women are produced as a category, and the actual life of women, she remarks that "some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband" (Woolf, 1998 [1929]: 56). Taking up Woolstonecraft's ideas about the representation of women in literature, Woolf critiques this dual image by stating that the depiction of women can never do justice to their real lives because what is signified by the sign 'woman' is definitely not what they

actually experience (Goldman, 2007: 75). However, she recognises that a subordinate, though forced, complicity on the part of women, mainly influenced by the *virtuous*⁴ characterisation of women during Victorian times, has been necessary for the construction of the patriarchal order (Goldman, 2007: 74, 79). This is why she urges women to annihilate this passive patriarchal role in favour of assuming a more independent position both in their personal and public lives (Ibid).

Under the scope of feminist literary criticism, the tenets about women's identity and nature are challenged to such a degree that Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), French writer and philosopher, affirms, in her renowned book *The Second Sex* (1972 [1949]), that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir, 1972 [1949], Vol. 2: 13), meaning that the concept of 'woman' is socially and historically created, a consequence of representational forces. Her analysis of myths as producers of universal patterns served as a point of departure to identify the mechanisms of patriarchal power. She made use of Jung's notion of archetypes to examine the myths of 'Woman', stating that they have been purposely fabricated by men so as to keep women under control by representing them according to patriarchy's needs. In her view, myths function in concomitance with economic and social factors to support patriarchy, thus reinforcing the oppression of women and the naturalness of their destiny. (Plain and Sellers, 2007: 10; Fallaize, 2007: 88-90).

⁴ My italics.

Beauvoir strongly critiques Freudian conceptions, which had occupied a central place in the psychoanalytic world during the 1930s and which defined women as organically inferior to men due to their lack of penis. For Freud, as this organ symbolises power (both physical and social), when the girl recognizes her 'castration' status, she finally "must accept her condition of physical deprivation and subordinate social position" (Sprengnether, 2007: 254). As the guarantor of power and authority, then, the Oedipus complex lays the foundations of civilisation, which are inherently phallic and patriarchal (Sprengnether, 2007: 252, 254).

Beauvoir deconstructs myths and objects the philosophical and cultural ideologies that prevailed at the time about the relegation of women to an inferior standing in society and at home (Sprengnether, 2007: 239) by seeking to dismantle the master-slave relationship that exists between men and women. She argues that "by identifying women with the inert world of the body and with nature, men are able to maintain themselves in the master/subject position" (Fallaize, 2007: 89). Following this line, women are defined as flesh, immanence, objects destined to serve men; and if they refuse these assigned roles, they become monstrous in the eyes of men (Fallaize, 2007: 92).

As, historically, the world has been masculine, women have always been defined as the 'Other', different to the norm, inferior (Tubert, 2001: 75). The concept of 'Otherness' is fundamental to Beauvoir's thinking: functioning as men's other, women are forced to occupy a position of passive objects, always

dependant. When years later, Jaques Lacan (1901-1981), French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, declares that “there is no such thing as Woman” (Evans, 1996: 222), by no means does he deny the existence of women but, instead, equals the term Woman (with a capital W) with the Other (with a capital O). Even though this field is too vast to cover in this study, it is important to explain here the difference between ‘the other’ (*le petit autre*) and ‘the Other’ (*le grand Autre*) in Lacanian terms so as to comprehend his analogy better. The ‘little other’ is the other subject, simultaneously one’s like and its specular image, that is totally inscribed in the Imaginary order. The Imaginary is defined as the closest to what people experience in everyday life: “who and what one ‘imagines’ the other to be, what one ‘imagines’ they mean when communicatively interacting, who and what one ‘imagines’ oneself to be including from the imagined perspectives of others”. Meanwhile, the big Other designates radical Otherness, that which transcends the illusionary otherness of the Imaginary and, as such, is inscribed in the Symbolic order.⁵

Whereas for Freud the child’s entry to the Symbolic is achieved through the physical threat of castration, Lacan takes that theory into the realm of language and culture (Sprengnether, 2007: 244). For both psychoanalysts, patriarchal social organization requires that entry; yet, Lacan considers that it is not determined by anatomy (Ibid). That is why he does not use the term penis but chooses ‘phallus’ to refer to our (men’s and women’s) wish for completeness

⁵ Retrieved from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/>

(Luepnitz, 2003: 226). As it can be seen, Lacan's concept of 'castration' is rather different from Freud's, as, in Lacanian terms, it means the ability to recognize that we all lack something (Luepnitz, 2003: 227).

While Lacan states that "all men are subjected to the phallic function", he believes that "not all of a woman is subject to [it]". The difference lies in the fact that whereas men can be discussed as a class, the category "all women" does not exist. Women are part of the phallic or symbolic order, but they are not in it "all together". Any given woman can choose whether to identify herself with the phallic function, which is in the realm of the Imaginary, or with the Other, the "not all", the jouissance that is beyond the phallus, within the Symbolic order. (Luepnitz, 2003: 231). So, when Lacan affirms that "there is no such thing as Woman" he means that the concept Woman with a capital W indicating the universal does not exist; women do not accept generalisations, not even phallogocentric generalisation (Evans, 1996: 222). The otherness of the Other, Tubert (2001) explains, is absolutely irreducible: language can evoke the Other (Women) but it can never capture it or represent it completely. The Other moves through the texts and among them, in an infinite play of signification (Tubert, 2001: 55).

In sum, psychoanalysis is of major significance to feminist theory as it describes what occurs in individuals in general and, for the purpose of this study, in women in particular, once they have confronted the norms and regulations prevailing in the societies they belong to (Tubert, 2001: 80). In most cultures,

this process inevitably results in the 'domestication of women', and no woman can escape from the consequences of this position as oppressed objects, unless the patriarchal construct of woman as 'Other' is dissolved. If women's issues continue to be referred to as 'women's problems' or 'feminine questions', the socio-cultural construction of the relationships between men and women will be repeated endlessly. Instead, it would be more productive to understand that these relationships constitute forms of domination and subordination that need to be deconstructed and analysed (Tubert, 2001: 77).

1.2. On Deconstruction and Feminism

Deconstruction, a term coined by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), fits within the poststructuralist movement of literary criticism that emerged in the 1970's as a critique of Saussurean structuralist theories. Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) conceived language as an abstract system constituted by chains of signs. According to him, the signifier (that is, the form of a sign) refers directly to the signified (the content of a sign) in an arbitrary relationship, where the value of a sign is not intrinsic but relational, derived from the opposition to other signs (Tubert, 2001: 53). This kind of thinking has dominated much of the Western tradition, generating a dyadic sign model in which one pole is hierarchically superior to the other, which occupies a subordinate status: culture / nature, good / evil, logic (logos) / emotion (pathos), day / night, soul / body, self / other, man / woman, and so forth.

Derrida questions the Saussurean idea of the two-faced sign that implies an opposition between signifier and signified, and which confers a unique and definite interpretation to texts, arguing that each signifier produces, in turn, other signifiers, an infinite shift in meaning (Guillemette and Cossette, 2006). Deconstructionists disrupt the linguistic system based on binary oppositions (the way Saussurean structure was conceived) not by reversing the opposition but by *deconstructing* it, challenging any stable meaning that the author may have wished to impose on the text and analysing it to find contradictions within itself. Moreover, they assert that the relationship between signifier and signified is subject to dynamic change. As Chandler (2007) puts it: “any ‘fixing’ of the ‘chain of signifiers’ is seen as both temporary and socially determined” (Chandler, 2007: 44). This means that discourse always exists in historically specific contexts and that signifiers are never immovable but constantly displaced. The signifier “woman”, for instance, may vary according to the context: it may represent the virgin, the mother, the witch, the victim, the object of sexual desire, the “good” woman or the “evil” one, and each of them is by no means an essential attribute of femininity but the product of external cultural pressures that assign a particular function to them. Therefore, any interpretation of the text is provisional and specific of the context in which it is produced and, thus, susceptible of being questioned.

Post-structural feminism presents a ‘paradigm shift’ in feminist literary criticism as the concept of ‘woman’ as a signifying term is completely destabilized by

recognizing how diverse women's lives and experiences are (Plain and Sellers, 2007: 210). During the 1970s to the 1990s, the works of Luce Irigaray (b. 1930), Hélène Cixous (b. 1937) and Julia Kristeva (b. 1941), introduced to the United States by editors Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron in *New French Feminisms* (1981), inquired into Western thinking and its hierarchical ordering, in which one element is not only *different from* but also *less than* the other, and coined the term 'phallogocentrism', a concept that refers to "a binary logic that makes the phallus the master sign and the father the origin of symbolic law" (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2005: 14). 'Man' is referred to as the being that recognizes what is other than, or different from, himself thus the point from which difference is represented, mastered and contained. For Derrida, there is not an origin from which everything derives; instead, the term 'man' is produced first, instantly placing woman as a lesser or derived complement (Colebrook, 2007: 217-8).

French feminists' writings are based on the idea that, in Western society, women have been assigned the representation of the body and that there are certain qualities which are associated to and, at the same time, define women's activities (for example, procreation, childrearing, caring for others). Moreover, it is supposed that women's psyche reflects the intrinsically feminine properties and functions of their bodies and that men would have a higher ability for abstract reasoning that would transform them into the masters of nature, hence of women's bodies (Tubert, 2001: 83-4). For French feminist critics, this "traditional mind-body dualism has been both a contributing cause and an effect

of women's historical subordination" (Still, 2007: 264). However, in spite of the fact that Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva have been highly influenced by Lacanian conceptions, French feminism, unlike Lacan, conceives the possibility of altering the existing social order (Sprengnether: 2007: 245).

In the 1970s, Second Wave feminist theorists and writers began to delve into the question of femininity arguing that both sexes are equally valuable to society, but different. If liberal feminism seeks to reach equal opportunities for both sexes in all aspects of life, modifying the sexual division of labour and the norms and values that regulate the representations of femininity and masculinity, 'difference feminism' maintains that this would only support and extend the power of patriarchy. Instead, they claim that women need to get disjoined from patriarchal social structures so that their autonomy and authentic femininity be affirmed in a different position rather than that of the silence, which is the place that has traditionally been assigned to them in the symbolic order (Tubert, 2001: 84-5). Following this line, Luce Irigaray rejects the idea of 'phallogocentrism' and proposes another way of subjectivity: "woman would not be man's other" but a subject with its own desires and intentionalities (Colebrook, 2007: 221-2). She critiques the idea of 'sexual sameness' that presupposes that women are like men. In Irigaray's analysis, which has been greatly influential on literary studies and on the humanities in general, sexual sameness is seen from two perspectives: complementarity and opposition. Either women are presented as complementary to men or as their opposite, which is, in essence, the same: the universal phallic truth against which all the

other is measured (Still, 2007: 267). For feminist critics, men's discourse, which is logocentric in the sense that it is constituted according to a binary logic where everything is organized in terms of oppositions, cannot conceive any difference within itself:

The other is reduced to be the other of the sameness, its inferior, its reflection, its excess; the other is always defined in relation to the valued term. Masculine discourse, however, presents itself as sexually neutral, thus hiding the denial of the differences between the sexes through systems that are mere "self-representations of the masculine subject" (Tubert, 2001: 85).⁶

Concerned with the degraded representation of women in patriarchal culture, Irigaray poses two reactions to literature: feminists could direct their attention to the way in which "woman" is represented in the text as something that needs to be mastered, differentiated and rendered intelligible, or they could read as a woman, relating to the text from a completely challenging point of view (Colebrook, 2007: 221). This idea of 'a feminist reading' was later taken up by Shoshana Felman who, in *Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy* (1991), argues that we should pay attention to what the text does not make explicit but only conceals. The challenge, for Felman, lies in giving voice to that otherness which is precisely that which cannot speak in Western societies (Colebrook, 2007: 227).

⁶ My own translation.

Luce Irigaray deals with how the concept of knowledge is constructed as a metaphor. Knowledge is represented as mastery, dominance and activity, as figures of light that penetrate obscurity; all characteristics which have also defined masculinity. On the other hand, the unknown is depicted as chaotic, passive, awaiting to be illuminated and represented; features that are associated with the female body as complement of man's knowledge (Colebrook, 2007: 225-6). Irigaray's critique of the definition of 'woman' as something to be discovered and brought to light coincides with what Helene Cixous considers the fictitious description of the feminine world as the 'Dark Continent': from a male-centred point of view, dark (woman) is unattainable, dangerous and deadly. But, as Cixous explains in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976),:

The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable.- It is still unexplored only because we've [sic] been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they [men] want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed. (1976: 884-5)

Here, she strongly critiques phallogentric thought and, at the same time, urges women to take a stance on their own emancipation. Women must write themselves and about their own selves in order to attain liberation and transformation. This 'feminine writing' (English version of the French term *écriture féminine*, coined by Cixous) would be the only way for a woman to "return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, (...) which

so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions” (Cixous, 1976: 880).

In her deconstruction of the feminine/masculine dualism, Cixous claims that for one term to acquire meaning, it must destroy the other in a struggle for signifying supremacy. Under patriarchy, she notes, man is the winner as the victorious pole is always the one associated with activity, while femininity equates not only with passivity but also with death: “Either woman is passive or she doesn’t [*sic*] exist” (Moi, 1986: 105). Cixous’s theoretical approach proclaims woman as the source of life, power and energy, advocating for a feminine language that subverts the logocentric ideology which characterizes our patriarchal culture and that oppresses and silences women. (Moi, 1986: 104).

Together with Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva is considered one of the most influential proponents of French feminism with great influence on feminist literary studies. Although her ideas do not translate easily into feminist thought due to her strong association with psychoanalysis, her contributions to feminism, and to critical theory in general, are important in the way she relates the personal and the political, affect and signification, body and meaning (Schippers, 2011: 21-2). For her, signification in the human subject is made up of the symbolic and the semiotic. Kristeva argues that the subject’s first contact with authority is when the child learns about its body through interaction with the mother. This process is what she calls ‘semiotic’, a pre-

Oedipal phase with no structure, in which instincts, emotions and communication by means of sounds and intonation reign. She argues that this period is characterized by the exercise of 'authority without guilt', a time when there is a fusion between mother and nature (Creed, 1993: 13). The subject's entry into the symbolic period is marked by paternal law: now the child must break away from the mother in order to become a separate subject and come into the world of language, culture and structure. This phase constitutes a "totally different universe of socially signifying performances where embarrassment, shame, guilt, desire, etc. come into play- the order of the phallus" (Ibid). During this process of separation, the mother becomes an 'abject': her figure and the authority she signifies are repressed and the maternal body becomes a site of conflicting desires. Kristeva argues that all individuals experience abjection at the time of their earliest attempts to break away from the mother, a feeling of confrontation with the 'corporeal reality', a distinction between Self and Other (Creed, 1993: 11, 14). Barbara Creed (1993) takes this idea further by stating that the degradation that women and their bodies suffer in society is a consequence of the fear for the loss of identity that the mother's body, with its generative power, presents. Woman is a representative of the archaic maternal figure: a reminder of the joyful semiotic state and, at the same time, someone that needs to be abjected (Creed, 1993: 11-15). In brief, Kristeva's theory of abjection provides important theoretical framework for analysing the construction and representation of the feminine as that Other that needs to be annihilated by men in order to protect their own Self.

1.3. Male dominance and witch hunting

An analysis of the rules that patriarchy imposes on women, and how these constraints are suffered by female characters in literary texts written by men, also requires examining the power relationships and the symbolic order generated by the man/woman categories, which constitute forms of domination and subordination in capitalist societies. It is interesting to note that, as Silvia Federici (2015) claims, “(...) the exploitation systems, centred on men, have tried to discipline and appropriate the female body, making it evident that women’s bodies have constituted the main objectives (...) for the display of (...) power relationships” (Federici, 2015: 25).⁷

Although Federici’s work goes beyond the main objective of the present study as she concentrates on how women suffered a process of social degradation that was of fundamental importance for the transition from feudalism to capitalism (Federici, 2015: 19, 131), her analysis of witch hunting as instrumental in the construction of a patriarchal order in which women’s bodies were placed under men’s control arises as an interesting way to put that persecution in dialogue with feminist theories. In *Calibán y la bruja. Mujeres, cuerpo y acumulación originaria*, Federici wonders: “Which fears instigated such genocide? Why did such violence break out? And why were women its main

⁷ My own translation.

objective?" (Federici, 2015: 273)⁸. She states that, taking into account the gender and social class of the accused ones, and the effects of the persecution, witch hunting -a process that reached its peak between 1580 and 1630 in France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy - constituted a direct attack to women's power and to certain generalized ways of female behaviour that were no longer tolerated by men and which had to be eliminated. (Federici, 2015: 275).

The depiction of women as demoniac creatures placed them as part of a different species, an "Other" to be feared of and dominated. The witch-woman was object of persecution as the embodiment of the "savage side" of nature, of everything that seemed perverted, rowdy, uncontrollable, and, hence, opposite to patriarchal power (Federici, 2015: 329-30). Many of these women were, in fact, wise women who possessed valuable knowledge as regards sexuality, the control of reproduction and traditional medicine but witch hunting instilled in people in general, and in men in particular, fear to these women's power, their rituals and beliefs. Women were tried for sorcery, exposed to the cruellest tortures and slaughtered by the thousands⁹. It follows, then, that this persecution appeared as the unequivocal cause of the collapse of matriarchy,

⁸ My own translation.

⁹ The exact number of witches that were burnt is not exactly known due to the fact that many trials were not registered or, if they were, the exact number of executed women was not specified. Anne L. Barstow (1994) states that approximately 200,000 women were accused of witchcraft between 1590 and 1650 in Europe, of whom at least 100,000 were killed. But she adds that those who could escape "were ruined for life" because, once they were accused, suspicion and hostility would continue until their death (Federici, 2015: 262-3).

as it destroyed a whole universe of female practices, collective relationships and systems of knowledge that had been the basis of women's power in the previous centuries. From this moment onwards, a new model of femininity emerged: the ideal woman had to be cast, passive, silent and obedient. This change started at the end of the 17th century after women had been persecuted and disciplined for more than two centuries. The insubordinate witch, who defied male power, had finally given place to a new, domesticated, subservient woman who fitted perfectly within the patriarchal system (Federici, 2015: 183-4, 262, 264).

As it has been seen, witch hunting was the most extreme means in history by which patriarchy achieved complete supremacy over women. However, literature has also contributed to the disciplining of women by the way they are depicted (not rational, vain, superficial or wild), and by establishing punishment to female insubordination to patriarchal power as the theme of countless literary texts¹⁰.

In short, the theories of feminist literary criticism reviewed in this chapter, together with the background of the deconstructive approach to literary texts provided and the examination of the motives for the persecution and punishment of women who were believed to be witches, make up the theoretical

¹⁰ *The Taming of the Shrew*, comedy written by William Shakespeare between 1590 and 1592, and *Tis Pitty She's a Whore* (Ford, J., 1633) are examples of warning theatre plays from the witch hunting period.

framework used to analyse how patriarchy operates against Rosaura, the main female character in William Henry Hudson's *Pelino Viera's Confession*.

CHAPTER 2: PELINO VIERA'S CONFESSION

2.1. The fantastic tale

Tzvetan Todorov (1939-2017) was the first theorist to identify *the fantastic* as a literary genre. Though he was a structuralist, and the present study deals with a poststructuralist approach, the analysis he carries out in his book *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975) turns out to be important as it lays the groundwork for the characterization of fantastic fiction.

Todorov explains that the events occurring in fantastic literature cannot be explained in a rational way and the reader is obliged to take a stance: either to consider that everything has been part of a dream or hallucination, or to believe that the events have really happened and so there are certain laws which are unknown to the human being (Martín Santana, 2006: 187-8). In other words, “the fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (Todorov, 1975: 25). This feeling of confusion about whether the phenomenon has really occurred or if it has been an imagined or paranormal event is a necessary condition of the fantastic and can be felt by the reader or by a character in the narrative. However, Todorov states that:

At the story's end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous [*sic*] (1975: 41).

Although it is difficult to situate William Henry Hudson's production within a particular field of literature (he published a wide range of works including scientific books (*Argentine Ornithology* (1888); *British Birds* (1895)), autobiographies (*Far Away and Long Ago: A History of my Early Life* (1918)), nonfiction (*Idle Days in Patagonia* (1893)), and fiction (*The Purple Land* (1885), *Green Mansions* (1904), *Afoot in England* (1909)), among others), he can be considered to be one of the nineteenth century writers who began the field of Argentinian¹¹ fantastic literature with his short story *Pelino Viera's Confession* (1883), which was not only Hudson's first published tale but also the first of his

¹¹ The question of his nationality remains problematic. W. H. Hudson was born in Argentina to American parents and was naturalized English subject in 1900, twenty six years after he settled in London. He wrote and published in English but more than half of his life was spent in Argentina, where he found inspiration for his work. The discussion about his nationality seems interesting enough but, as it is not within the objectives of the present study, we could say that, if Hudson is considered an Argentinian author, *Pelino Viera's Confession* should be situated at the outset of the Argentinian fantastic literature movement.

texts that was translated into Spanish and published in Argentina (Maudo García, 2017: 117).

The story has the typical elements of fantastic fiction: that hesitation described by Todorov which comes from the ambiguity between a rational and a supernatural interpretation. Moreover, *Pelino Viera's Confession* appears in several anthologies published in Spanish, such as *Cuentos fantásticos argentinos* (1969), by Nicolás Cócara, *Los brujos* (1979), by Adriana Martínez Dalke, *Fundadores del cuento fantástico hispanoamericano* (1998), by Óscar Hahn, *Antología de relatos fantásticos argentinos* (2006), by Helios Jaime-Ramírez, and *Cuentos fantásticos argentinos del siglo XIX. Tomo 3* (2017), by Carlos Abraham, among others, (Maudo García, 2017: 122), a fact that shows its importance in the Hispanic fantastic literature domain.

2.2. Women and the historical context

W. H. Hudson's short story *Pelino Viera's Confession* begins with a warning to the reader made by the narrator: "It will be necessary to inform the reader – in all probability unacquainted with the political events of 1829 in Buenos Aires – that the close of that year was more memorable for tumults of a revolutionary character than usual" (Hudson, 1916: 95). The narrator refers, here, to the historical context in which the story is set: the beginning of Juan Manuel de Rosas' first government (1829-1832), one of the most violent and bloody

periods in Argentinian history (Hallstead, 2005: 32). Through different means (intimidation, execution or forced exile), Rosas intended to organize and control the chaotic post-colonial Argentina and what he considered to be “the barbarism plaguing the country” (Ibid). In this context and for the purposes of the present study, it is interesting to enquire about the place that women occupied in the society of the time. Susan Hallstead (2005) affirms that “the roles of women during moments of national formation and under periods of extreme socio-cultural and political turmoil are usually clear-cut and prescriptive” (Hallstead, 2005: 41). According to her, the national struggles for independence in Argentina and the subsequent formation of a national identity threatened to disrupt traditional values and the place that women occupied both in the private and public domains. The chaos produced by independence wars together with the fact that the state, in the early nineteenth century, was weakened by the civil war between Unitarios and Federales, resulted, thus, in a stricter control of the domestic sphere. Females were not only seen as real mothers who ensured the perpetuity of the family model but also as metaphorical mothers of the nation who would guarantee the successful development of the country. Therefore, women who did not respect those prescribed gender roles were considered a threat to the order and boundaries imposed by a patriarchal state. They had to be mothers (the “citizenship machinery”) and faithful wives, and any woman whose behaviour diverted from that norm would risk becoming the nation’s “other” (Hallstead, 2005: 41-3).

It is worth noticing that *Pelino Viera's Confession* was written, in England, during the reign of Queen Victoria, a period which is known as the Victorian Age (1837–1901) and which was characterised by rigid moral norms in terms of social and private behaviour, particularly as regards women. The patriarchal precepts set upon them were so strong that females were relegated to the domestic domain, and they were tied to a role of submission to men. As Susan Manly (2007) puts it, quoting the British philosopher and women's rights advocate Harriet Taylor (1807-1858), "women, especially in England, [were] ostentatious in disclaiming the desire for equality or citizenship, and proclaiming their complete satisfaction with the place that society [assigned] to them" (Manly, 2007: 58). Females living under Victorian morality displayed a passive attitude towards men as a way of ingratiating themselves to a patriarchal society which would not tolerate any deviant behaviour on their part, such as being bad wives or unfeminine (Ibid).

It is of interest to this study, hence, to take into account these contexts, both the one the tale is set in and the one in which W. H. Hudson wrote the story, as a way of being aware of "the particular historical moment (...) and practices within which and through which the category of woman [both real and fictional] is produced" (Eagleton, 2007: 114), and of inquiring how Hudson's Rosaura fits, or not, within those historical-cultural parameters.

2.3 The story: plot and analysis

Before analysing the plot of the story in detail, it is worth mentioning that two narrating voices (Chatman, 1978: 146) can be identified in *Pelino Viera's Confession*: the narrator, who presents an introduction to the story, and the protagonist himself, Pelino Viera, who is found guilty of having killed his wife, Rosaura, and tells his experience in first person. It is interesting to note that the narrator's intention seems to be to present the events *as they were*: "I am not going to shock the enlightened and scientific reader by expressing belief in this confession but give, without comment, a simple translation of it" (Hudson, 1916: 97-98). However, it turns out from the narration itself that, in several opportunities, the narrator does give his/her conceptual point of view (Chatman, 1978: 151), expressing his/her own ideology through the description of the events and of Pelino himself. The protagonist is depicted as a young man "of good standing, and generally liked for the sweetness of his disposition [who] had married a very beautiful woman, and was believed by all who knew him to entertain the deepest affection for her" (Hudson, 1916: 96). Also, at the time of the trial, even though Pelino "would not open his lips either to confess or to deny his guilt, [he] appeared (...) like one overwhelmed by a great despair" (Hudson, 1916: 97). In both instances, the narrator portrays Pelino Viera as the holder of the purest feelings towards his wife and seems to be trying to convince the reader¹² that the protagonist may have been incapable of having

¹² We refer here to the *implied* reader, a concept with which Chatman (1978) refers to the audience presupposed by the narrative itself (Chatman, 1978: 149-150).

killed her. Moreover, before the beginning of Pelino's confession, the narrator makes sure of informing the reader about the practice of witchcraft in Argentina¹³, mentioning that, in Pelino's country, it is common to hear shrill hysterical guffaws in the midnight sky and that the rest of the story would explain the origin of this *witch-laughter* (Hudson: 1916, 98), suggesting that Rosaura could have been a witch herself and that that fact may be related to her death.

Taking into account the social and historical context in which the story is both set and written (an idea developed in the previous section of this chapter), it appears as if the implied reader was expected to understand and justify Pelino's actions against his wife. What is more, it is likely that, many real readers¹⁴ accepted that projected role without questioning, due to the patriarchal cultural and moral norms that ruled at the time and that may persist today. Nevertheless, when the story is analysed from a post-structural feminist perspective it results necessary to question the reader's position in order to be able to take a different stance, where the term 'woman' is deconstructed (Plain and Sellers, 2007: 210) focusing on what the literary text veils about female characters and their lives (Colebrook, 2007: 227).

¹³This brief explanation also serves as a warning to the reader about the supernatural elements present in the story, which are not only characteristic of the literature of the Fin de Siècle but also typical of the fantastic genre (Maudo García, 2017: 117).

¹⁴ "The flesh-and-bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book" (Chatman, 1978: 149-150).

Going back to the plot, as the motive of murder is unknown and the accused is unable to give an account of what happened, Pelino Viera's lawyer argues that Rosaura died accidentally by stabbing herself with a pointed sword while sleepwalking around the house. This version, however, does not convince the judge, who sentences Pelino to being shot for finding the story incredible and absurd. His fellow prisoners help him to escape taking advantage of the confusion produced by the revolution¹⁵ and he is never seen again. Eventually, his confession is found under the bunk he occupied in prison and this fact gives rise to the beginning of the story object of the present study, told in first person by Pelino Viera himself. Here, the point of view and the narrative voice¹⁶ converge in the protagonist, who is the witness of and at the same time recounts the events. Moreover, it is worth taking into consideration that Pelino's account of the story is temporally distant, that is, he contemplates the events retrospectively, looking back at his own earlier perceptions. This corresponds, as Chatman (1978) puts it, to another "act of seeing", which is no longer a perception but a conception, a seeing that is tinged with the narrator's cultural and psychological idiosyncrasy (Chatman, 1978: 155). It is interesting to see, thus, how Pelino's confession becomes a declaration of a whole suite of

¹⁵ As it was said before, the story is set in Buenos Aires in 1829, a time of political revolt at the start of Rosas' first government.

¹⁶ According to Chatman, while point of view refers to perspective, that is "the physical place or ideological situation or practical life-orientation to which narrative events stand in relation", narrative voice concerns "speech or other overt means through which events are communicated to the audience" (Chatman, 1978: 153).

patriarchal concepts and practices that are put into play against his wife Rosaura when he discovers that she has acquired a kind of power that would set her free from his control.

Pelino's confession begins with an account of how he meets Rosaura: when his parents and siblings leave for Portugal, he decides to stay in Argentina and goes to live with Don Hilario Roldan, the wealthy owner of the "Espinillo", an estate in Buenos Aires, at the suggestion of his father. As he is approaching the house, he witnesses a quarrel between two women in the woods: a young lady is striking a white-haired old woman dressed in rags and both are screaming and insulting each other. At the sight of him, they quickly disappear and he is left with a feeling of confusion. After arriving at the house and being welcomed by Mr Roldan, Pelino is introduced to the landowner's daughters, Dolores and Rosaura, and he is astounded by Rosaura's beauty:

[She] was one of those women who are instantly pronounced beautiful by all who see them. Her eyes were dark and passionate, her features perfect; never had I seen anything to compare with the richness of her complexion, shaded by luxuriant masses of blue-black hair. I tried to restrain the spontaneous admiration I felt. I desired to look on her with calm indifference, or only with an interest like that felt for rare and lovely flowers (...). Was any defence against such sweetness possible? She fascinated me. (Hudson, 1916: 102)

Rosaura is assigned the representation of the body, a concept developed by Simone de Beauvoir (1972) in order to explain that, by identifying women with the domain of the body as an object, patriarchal society justifies men's position as subjects/masters (Fallaize, 2007: 89). The character Rosaura is depicted in the way women are classically represented in literary texts: her physical appearance is the characteristic that first impresses Pelino when they meet. And it is not only something that *he* feels: she belongs to that group of females who are admired for her beauty by everyone, referring to a stereotypical image of women. Rosaura is a source of admiration and fascination, but in the way men admire nature and its beauty. This identification of females with the body and with nature places woman as an "other", an object to be possessed, mastered and controlled by the man/subject (Fallaize, 2007: 89; Tubert, 2001: 75).

Pelino associates her with certain characteristics (beauty, passion, perfection, luxury, sweetness) which define women from a masculine perspective that is culturally accepted, thus supporting patriarchal power. Feminist theorists are particularly concerned with the way in which women are depicted in male-authored texts as the characterization of female fictional characters tends to reproduce the role of women in society. Virginia Woolf, for instance, strongly advocates for the defiance of the patriarchal order which is built through this fictitious representation of women, particularly in the Victorian age (Goldman, 2007: 74, 79), and she is also interested in dismantling the differences between the sign 'woman' as a cultural construct and the real lives women lead (Woolf,

1998 [1929]: 56). Also in this sense, the stereotype referred to before responds to what post-structuralist feminists call a universal phallogocentric point of view, where the phallus constitutes the master sign (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2005: 14) and men are the truth against which all the rest is produced (Still, 2007: 267). What the sign 'woman' signifies (in this case, what a woman should be and how she should look like) is established by men; that is why Luce Irigaray poses that a feminist reading should be directed toward the way in which 'woman' is represented in the text so as to challenge this sexist position (Colebrook, 2007: 221).

In spite of all his passionate feelings towards Rosaura, Pelino mistrusts her as he suspects she is the angry young woman he saw in the woods. This doubt on his part seems to contradict his feelings towards her sweet appearance and that may be the reason why he remains silent about it. Meanwhile, she continues to be the object of his desire: "...if I (...) touched her hand my heart was on fire. (...) And she was not indifferent to me. How could I fail to remark (...) the fire that flashed from her dark eyes at my approach?" (Hudson, 1916: 103-4). Here, there is a recognition and at the same time a denial of the other on Pelino's part: he assumes that their feelings are reciprocal but what Rosaura really feels towards him is not known, neither by Pelino nor by the reader. It is beyond the bounds of possibility that the real reader (Chatman, 1978: 149-150) knows about Rosaura's feelings as there are no details as regards this in the story. This fact reinforces the idea that the narrative itself also expects the implied reader (Ibid) not to have this information so as to place Rosaura in an inferior

position, a person who does not deserve to be taken into account thus diminishing her importance in relation to Pelino. Rosaura acts as that 'other' that complements man, the valued term, passively (Tubert, 2001: 75, 85). He convinces himself that Rosaura is also attracted to him as a way of confirming his own dominance over her and establishing himself as the master of the relationship. In this way, he denies the existence of that 'other'¹⁷, with its own thoughts, feelings and desires.

Pelino eventually buys the estate next to Roldan's and names it "Santa Rosaura", a fact that results interesting enough as he identifies the woman with a saint, associating her with purity and devotion. This constitutes another instance of what Simone de Beauvoir (1972) describes, in her discussion of myths, as 'the master-slave dialectic', which has operated against women throughout history (Fallaize, 2007: 89). According to Beauvoir, myths have the purpose of representing women according to patriarchy's needs (Fallaize, 2007: 90), and when Pelino equates Rosaura with a saint, he may be considering her someone unattainable, a mystery. The myth of the feminine mystery, Beauvoir continues, is the one which best works to men's advantage as it justifies masculine lack of understanding of women's needs and opinions, assigning them the position of an absolute other (Ibid). Pelino's association of Rosaura

¹⁷ We refer here to both concepts of otherness in Lacanian terms: 'the little other', meaning, literally, the other subject, and 'the big Other', that represents that Otherness inscribed in the Symbolic order. For Lacan, women may opt for identifying themselves with the phallic function (corresponding to the Imaginary) or with the realm of the symbolic Other, the "not all" that is beyond phallogocentric generalizations (Luepnitz, 2003: 231; Evans, 1996: 222).

with a saint might also be a way of showing that, though feeling deeply attracted to her, he needs to soothe his sexual drives towards her, not allowing himself to surrender to his passionate feelings. The reason for this restraint appears to be confusing at this point; however, an imminent circumstance would serve as an explanation.

After several months without seeing each other, Mr Roldan visits Pelino to encourage him to marry Rosaura: “And should she refuse you, swear by all you hold sacred to marry her in spite of her refusals. That was what I did, Pelino, and the woman I won (...) was like her daughter Rosaura.” (Hudson, 1916: 106). This passage seems to demonstrate how patriarchal power operates, not only through the arrangement of marriage, which shows how women’s feelings and opinions are ignored by men, but also through the way in which the father, the origin of symbolic law, pressures Pelino to act in consequence. The Name of the Father (*le nom du père*) is a Lacanian concept that refers to the laws and restrictions imposed by the father during the phallic or Oedipal stage, which permit the subject’s entry into the Symbolic Order (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2005: 13). French feminists have strongly criticized this vision arguing that it constitutes an arbitrary construction of men’s supremacy over women (Sprengnether, 2007: 253) and a way of justifying patriarchal culture (Colebrook, 2007: 231). Understanding this form of domination could be a first step to challenge a socio-cultural structure that has ruled Western societies so far (Tubert, 2001: 77).

Pelino still casts doubts on Rosaura as being the young woman he saw in the woods: “Only the image of the white-faced fury of the tala wood remained persistently in my mind. (...) Never would such a fiend win me to marry her, though her beauty exceeded that of an angel!” (Hudson, 1916: 107), and this appears to be the reason why he has needed to restrain his strong feelings towards her. The protagonist experiments a deep inner struggle between the strong attraction he feels towards Rosaura and his suspicion that she may be an evil woman. This dichotomy is reflected in the way Pelino depicts her, sometimes like a devil (“I will discover (...) in her that hateful being” (Hudson, 1916: 107)) and in other instances like an angel (“What insane delusions, what lies whispered by some malignant fiend, had made me harbour cruel thoughts of this precious woman I loved, this sweetest creature Heaven had made? (...) She was still all my imagination had pictured.” (Hudson, 1916: 110-111)). The representation of women in fictional works, particularly in male-authored texts, constitutes a central point in feminist criticism (Manly, 2007: 50; Goldman, 2007: 70), and the above descriptions serve as examples of how Pelino may construct an image of Rosaura that fits this characterization from a man-centred point of view. If Western society is intrinsically patriarchal (Sprengnether, 2007: 254), it follows, then, that, in literary texts, women are characterized in conformity with phallogentric thought. Thus, women suffer a degraded representation in different aspects: (1) by being defined as powerless, sexually submissive and intellectually inferior to men (Manly, 2007: 48, 50; Federici, 2015: 180); (2) by being depicted as belonging to a lower socio-economic standing in relation to men (Tubert, 2001: 42; Sprengnether, 2007: 239; Federici, 2015: 179); (3) by

portraying their bodies as men's property (Fallaise, 2007: 88; Tubert, 2001: 84; Cixous, 1976: 880; Still, 2007: 264; Federici, 2015: 197); (4) by representing femininity as something mysterious, problematic and unintelligible (Colebrook, 2007: 221; Cixous, 1976: 884). The previously mentioned elements work together in order to perpetuate patriarchal mechanisms of domination and subordination (Tubert, 2001: 77) and they are all seen at work in the story object of this study.

Pelino and Rosaura finally get married, but a few months later he falls ill with a series of strange symptoms that make him feel "afflicted by headache and lassitude" (Hudson, 1916: 111). He starts to perceive an unusual smell in his bedroom which he suspects is responsible for his state but cannot identify, and soon he discovers that the strange scent comes from what Pelino describes as "a small ebony silver-bound box I could not open, having no key to fit it, and I dared not break the lock, for I had now grown afraid of my wife." (Hudson, 1916: 112). He admits that the love he used to feel for Rosaura has faded and that "hatred had taken its place – fear and hatred." (Ibid). At this point, he commences a secret search for what he thinks his wife may be up to, "like a man advancing to strike a venomous snake and fearing to rouse it before he is ready to deliver the blow" (Hudson, 1916: 113). The question that arises here is why he begins to fear and hate his once beloved wife. The answer to this may be in the analysis of the power relationships that are put into play in patriarchal society. Women are restrained by the rules imposed on them by patriarchy and any attempt on their part to set free from these precepts may be seen as

something dangerous, an act of defiance of male authority and supremacy (Federici, 2015: 25, 305). It seems that Rosaura is doing something without her husband's knowing, and when Pelino realizes he may fear that he has lost control over her. Silvia Federici (2015) calls this apprehension "fear to women's power", a kind of fear that instigates hatred in men and that, in turn, becomes violence, which is perpetrated on women's bodies as they are the main objectives for the manifestation of male dominance. (Federici, 2015: 25, 264).

Some days later, while walking in the country, Pelino accidentally steps on a "small dark green plant with long lance-shaped leaves and clusters of greenish-white flowers (...) well-known for its powerful narcotic smell" (Hudson, 1916: 113), and he recognizes in it the mysterious perfume he had felt in his bedroom. As a consequence, he decides to pay a visit to Old Salomé, the *curandera*¹⁸, who is said to be an expert in the properties of plants, along with being able to cure diseases and make prophecies. In spite of the fact that the healer woman is a secondary character in *Pelino Viera's Confession*, the election of the name "Salomé" for her deserves special attention as it seems not to have been accidental. And although carrying out a thorough investigation of the topic would exceed the purpose of the present study, taking a closer look at the name's origin and implications becomes of interest to the analysis of the story object of this research.

¹⁸ The Spanish word *curandera* refers to a healer woman.

Salome¹⁹ is a biblical character who, according to the gospels of Matthew and Mark (Mt. 14, 3-12; Mk. 6, 17-29), danced so beautifully at Herod's birthday celebration that he offered her whatever she wanted in return. Encouraged by her mother Herodias, she asked for Saint John Baptist's head, who was at the time imprisoned for having criticized the licentious life of the tetrarch's wife (Herodias) publicly²⁰. Although Salome appears in a brief episode in the Bible, she has inspired several works of art (both pictorial and literary) especially at the end of the 19th century (Sanchez Martinez, 2016: 623). In English literature the theme is taken up, for example, by Oscar Wilde in his one-act tragedy *Salome* (1893), while many Hispanic modernists have also devoted themselves to explore this female character, such as Francisco Villaespesa (1928) and Rubén Darío (1905) (Sanchez Martinez, 2016: 625, 630, 634). Numerous *fin de siècle* artists show a strong fascination for Salome, placing her as the most popular archetype for the *femme fatale*, a woman who possesses all the imaginable perversions (eroticism, lust, cruelty, savageness) (Sanchez Martinez, 2016: 624, 626, 629). Salome may be depicted in this way with the aim of showing a negative image of women as she represents the most important threat to the society of the turn of the twentieth century, running

¹⁹ In the Bible, she is mentioned as "Herodías' daughter", not by her name. She was first called "Salome" by Flavio Josefo in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVIII, Chapter 5, 4; circa 94 (Navarro Durán; 2010: 131).

²⁰ Retrieved from: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13403a.htm>

counter to the image of the “angel of the house”²¹, typical of the time. (Sanchez Martinez, 2016: 627, 631). In a society in which women had begun to stand up for their rights, Salome symbolizes men’s fear to this new reality. A strong and powerful woman who can end up with male social dominance, going against patriarchal power and authority inspires terror in men, and as such she must be depicted as an example of distorted femininity (Sanchez Martinez, 2016: 631, 639, 640, 644). This idea is coincident with Federici’s concept of male “fear to women’s power” (Federici, 2015: 264) and may also seem to correspond to Pelino Viera’s uneasiness at his encounter with Salomé, the healer woman in the story. The power that Salomé owns is the one given to her by certain knowledge that is usually associated with witchcraft practices, a kind of wisdom that has been feared for centuries as a means of insubordination²² (Federici, 2015: 265) and that can be clearly identified in the story. For example, although Pelino considers Salomé an ignorant but astute person, he feels upset about the fact that she knows so much about everything (Hudson, 1916: 113-4), and when he asks her about the plant he has found, she replies angrily, arguing that

²¹ In her essay ‘Professions for Women’ (1931), Virginia Woolf strongly advocates for eliminating the submissive female roles portrayed in the poem ‘The Angel in the House’ (1862) by Coventry Patmore. The woman described in the poem represents the typical wife and mother who undergoes domestic servitude, fulfilling the wishes of others. Woolf argues that it is necessary to kill the Angel in the House in order to become a woman writer or any other professional woman (Goldman, 2007: 79).

²² As an example, it can be noted that the dominant classes in the Roman Empire considered magic as being part of slaves’ insubordination and longing for emancipation (Federici, 2015: 265).

he wishes to steal knowledge from her (Hudson, 1916: 115). It is interesting to note that, in spite of the fact that Pelino “had often heard about her [because] all her neighbours (...) professed to believe in her skill” (Hudson, 1916: 114) and even though he needs her knowledge to learn about the narcotic plant, he despises all that empirical wisdom related to medicinal herbs that may have been passed on to her from generation to generation and that has deep roots in ancestral culture (Federici, 2015: 183). What may cause fear and disdain in Pelino could be the fact that the *curandera* and the witch²³ represent the savage side of nature, everything that seems to be unruly, uncontrollable, and thus opposed to the patriarchal precepts imposed on women (Federici, 2015: 329, 330).

Pelino Viera soon realizes that Salomé is the old woman that was being hit by Rosaura when he first arrived at the “Espinillo” estate, and when he describes the strange plant to her and explains the effect its fragrance has on him, she quickly recognizes it as the “Flor de Pesadilla, [or] *night-mare flower*” and begins to swear at Rosaura’s behaviour, referring to her as an “insolent wretch, [who] was always bold [and] now grows careless, (...) [an] infamous despiser of her betters, [an] accursed viper with a pretty face” (Hudson, 1916: 114-116), thus suggesting that the young woman has learnt the occult arts much better than her teacher but has not been careful enough so that her husband did not

²³ It is interesting to note that while the term *witch* refers mostly to women object of oppression due to their use of magic with supposedly evil purposes, the masculine equivalent *wizard*, meaning “wise man”, has not suffered such persecution (Federici, 2015: 320).

find the potion. As it can be noted, Rosaura is described as a snake on two occasions so far: her husband considers her “a venomous snake” (Hudson, 1916: 113) and Salomé alludes to her as being a “viper with a pretty face” (Hudson, 1916: 116). The identification of females with nature is a concept that has been vastly studied by feminist critics (Fallaize, 2007: 89; Tubert, 2001: 83-4) and the association of women with a snake, specifically, dates from the Bible. The serpent is the instrument of evil in the original sin and, by extension, an ally of Eve in Adan’s fall. It can represent temptation, deceit and destruction²⁴, and it is usually used in literature to highlight a character’s diabolical features (Sanchez Martinez, 2016: 113). In the case of Rosaura, her depiction as a snake may seem to intensify her savage and instinctive personality and, at the same time, might serve as a justification to exert violence and revenge on her, as she may be a source of wickedness and perversity.

Pelino soon discovers what really happens in his bedroom when he smells the “flor de Pesadilla”. Salomé had given him a bunch of leaves that, after being chewed, would allow him to be wide-awake for about two or three hours at night while seeming to be asleep. So, one night, he can observe how Rosaura places a phial with the narcotic “Pesadilla” liquid next to his nose and pours a few drops of it on his lips with the intention of keeping him unconscious. However, the drug has no effect on Pelino thanks to Salomé’s help, and he is now able to witness his wife’s witchcraft (Hudson, 1916: 117, 118). He carefully describes how Rosaura takes a little clay pot from her small ebony box and rubs some

²⁴ Retrieved from <http://umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/S/serpent.html>

ointment on her whole body, and how she immediately becomes covered with blue feathers and two wings²⁵ that spring from her shoulders²⁶. At the same time, and while Rosaura rushes out of the house in the middle of peals of shrill laughter, Pelino can hear sounds of agitated wings coming from the roof and strange voices calling 'Sister! Sister!', a scene that leaves him in a state of perplexity and horror (Hudson, 1916: 119). Witches have historically been accused of being able to abandon their body, changing their appearance and adopting the one of an animal (Federici, 2015: 230, 315), and the description of Rosaura's transformation into a bird with the help of a substance which has magical properties coincides with this idea²⁷. During the 15th Century, Federici (2015) explains, witches were said to prepare a balsam or unguent

²⁵ Note that wings are referred to as a symbol of freedom and spirituality. The possibility of flying would provide a person with a means of transcending the human condition and rising up to Paradise. (Retrieved from: <https://library.acropolis.org/the-symbolism-of-wings/>)

²⁶ Hudson expresses here, for the first time, his recurrent obsession with bird women, which will be later seen in the short story *Marta Riquelme* (1903) and in the romance *Green Mansions* (1904), with its protagonist Rima as the most famous exponent (Maudó García, 2017: 117, 118).

²⁷ The figure of winged women has been present in worldwide mythology throughout history. In Ancient Greece, for example, *Sirens* and *Harpies* were fabulous creatures represented as birds with the face of a woman. Later, they began to be depicted as dreadful women with the body of a bird of prey, this being the possible origin of the belief in the existence of passerine-looking witches. Also, in Argentina and Chile there is a *Mapuche* legend about the *Chonchón*, which describes sinister witches -or *Calcus*- who can fly adopting the shape of a bird-like creature or owl. This is connected to the supposition that certain night birds are, in fact, malignant beings with mutation capabilities (Maudó García, 2017: 118).

(traditionally, sorcery's most important element) with poisonous substances which they spread on their bodies so as to be able to begin a night flight towards their Sabbath²⁸, a place where they were believed to gather to commit their atrocities (Federici, 2015: 76, 371). Although the purpose of this meeting remains unknown in *Pelino Viera's Confession*, Rosaura does make use of an unguent to adopt the bird-like appearance. At the sight of that, Pelino wonders what to do now that he has discovered his "wife was one of those abhorred beings possessing superhuman knowledge, which they kept secret and doubtless used for evil purposes" (Hudson, 1916: 120). Again, the question of knowledge appears as a central point in the story. Pelino seems to be unable to cope with the fact that his wife has acquired a kind of wisdom that gives her the power to utilize nature for her own benefit and, what seems to be worse, that she has achieved that without his consent and control. As Federici (2015) puts it, during the witch hunting period every woman was potentially a witch, an assertion that was founded on a calculated and well-organized campaign initiated, financed and executed by the Church and the State, which was, in turn, based on the *Malleus Maleficarum* or *Hammer of Witches*, a book written in 1484 by Reverends Kramer and Sprenger that served as unquestioned authority in witch trials for three centuries (Federici, 2015: 261). As a consequence, no man could be sure that his wife was not a witch, and this must have terrorized many men due to the possibility that their wives had the power

²⁸ The term *witches' Sabbath* (first used circa 1676) or "coven" refers to an assembly of witches, devils, and sorcerers for the celebration of rites and orgies. (Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/witches%27%20Sabbath>)

to abandon their bed, deceiving their sleeping husbands, in order to meet their fellows so that they could perpetrate their horrid occult arts against men, such as castrating them or making them sexually impotent (Federici, 2015: 306). In the new patriarchal code that arose along with the witch hunting process, male physical impotence equalled moral impotence; in other words, as sexual power was the physical manifestation of male authority over women, impotence and castration would appear as the deterioration and even the destruction of that authority. After centuries of terror propaganda against women, it seems understandable that men had developed a deep psychological alienation which may have led them to fear females and even see them as their enemies, thus undermining women's own and collective power and increasing male supremacy (Federici, 2015: 305, 307, 309). Since those times, whenever they disregard men's authority, women have been considered dangerous social subjects and, as such, they should be punished (Federici, 2015: 320). In *Pelino Viera's Confession*, this is what Pelino decides to do when he discovers what his wife is up to, as he becomes "insane with rage" at the woman who had defied his patriarchal supremacy (Hudson, 1916: 121).

From this moment on, Pelino goes through a limit-experience, in the sense that he experiments a situation which seems to be an alteration of reality, and this corresponds to the climax of the story, or the highest point of tension in the plot²⁹. The term limit-experience is referred to here in the way Michel Foucault describes it: as "an experience that undermines the subject" (Jay, 1995: 158),

²⁹ Retrieved from <https://literaryterms.net/climax/>

transgressing the limits of coherent subjectivity and constituting a threat to the life of the individual (Ibid). The natural world and the fantastic one collide at this point in the story: Pelino realizes that something strange and not related to the natural order is occurring; however, he feels compelled to go after his wife in order to discover the truth about her. He covers his body with the same unguent that Rosaura used, thus having the opportunity to experience his own supernatural transformation into a bird, which allows him to follow his wife in her night flight towards the “often and vainly sought city” of Trapalanda³⁰ (Hudson, 1916: 120-122). At his arrival at the concealed city, he enters a building in which a crowd of women “were whirling about, apparently dancing, all the time shouting and laughing like maniacs” (Hudson, 1916: 124). This seems to be the typical description of a covenstead, which can be examined under the light of the analysis that Federici (2015) makes of the *aquejarre* or witches’ meeting place. During the witch hunting period, women were accused of gathering together in order to carry out aberrant practices, such as demoniac ceremonies, orgies, human sacrifices and cannibalistic rituals, among other atrocities (Federici, 2015: 155, 347, 365). However, according to the author, this depiction has only been part of a patriarchal strategy to weaken women’s power by

³⁰ The legend of Trapalanda, or the City of Caesars, refers to a city in the Conlara valley (between the provinces of San Luis and Córdoba, in Argentina) that was supposedly found in 1528 by Francisco César’s expedition. It was believed to be inhabited by immortal people who possessed gold, silver and precious gems. However, there has been no evidence so far that could confirm its existence. (Retrieved from: <https://elarcondelahistoria.com/trapalanda-111528/>. My own translation).

demonizing the feminine bonds through which women have shared their common experiences and knowledge about traditional practices, their own bodies, contraception, and so on (Federici, 2015: 183, 302-3). Since then, any reunion among women has been considered as a potential source of transgressive behaviour against male supremacy and control (Federici, 2015: 317). It is also interesting to mention here that the existence of a female network is also evidenced when Rosaura is preparing herself to become a bird and she can hear the call from her 'sisters' urging her to join them in their night flight (Hudson, 1916: 119). The same group of women, who call one another 'sister', will later accompany her back to her house after the coven (Hudson, 1916: 127). Even Salomé, the *curandera*, refers to Rosaura as "sister mine" during her interview with Pelino (Hudson, 1916: 115). These events may serve as examples of how these witch women have formed a community or sisterhood in which they share not only the same interests but also a feeling of solidarity among them.³¹

After some time, a group of amazed and angry feathered women discover Pelino and he soon becomes surrounded by them. In his attempt to defend himself, he stabs one of the women with a small sword he had taken with him and flies away, leaving the witches' shrill angry cries behind him (Hudson, 1916:

³¹ Note the different definitions of the word 'sister' (among others): (a) a female sibling; (b) a female friend or protector regarded as a sister; (c) a woman having a close relationship with another because of shared interests, problems, or the like; (d) a woman who supports, promotes, or participates in feminism.

(Retrieved from: <https://www.wordreference.com/definition/sister>).

125-6). He returns to his house, still like a feathered man, feeling desperate and fainthearted because he suspects his wife would inflict some kind of revenge on him for having followed her and discovered her night adventures (Hudson, 1916: 127). Suddenly, he can hear the sounds of wings and female voices, and Rosaura appears in the room, not only still covered by feathers but also with a bleeding stab wound in her bosom³². Breathless and shivering, she opens the small ebony box again and draws a different clay pot, from which she takes some ointment and rubs her body, this time to make her feathers disappear (Hudson, 1916: 128). Pelino remains shocked with horror and fascination as her wounded breast continues bleeding until she utters a loud shriek and falls dead on the floor (Ibid). The Foucauldian conception of the limit-experience as a powerful breach in normalcy (Jay, 1995: 158) can be observed in this part of the story and it coincides with the typical ambiguity present in the fantastic tale, where there may be a rational interpretation of the events (Pelino may have committed uxoricide³³ without having left the house, and he may have invented everything so as to justify the murder) and, at the same time, a supernatural one (the night flight to the *aquejarre* and the encounter with the feathered witches may have really happened) (Maudó García, 2017: 118). In either case,

³² It seems not to have been fortuitous that Rosaura was injured in her bosom. Note that the word, apart from referring to a person's breast, it also indicates a person's heart or soul, the centre of feelings and emotions (Retrieved from: <https://www.wordreference.com/definition/bosom>). Hence, the deadly wound in that part of her body may serve as a symbol of the annihilation of Rosaura's whole being as a woman.

³³ Of a man, the act of murdering his wife. (Retrieved from: <https://www.wordreference.com/definition/uxoricide>)

the point is that Rosaura has been killed by her husband, whether by accident or as part of a premeditated action.

Some authors present Pelino as a victim of the extraordinary situation he has had to experience. Maudo García (2017), for instance, refers to him as an innocent man who discovers his wife's occult arts and, prey to fear, ends up killing her in a cruel act while he defends himself from an abominable attack (Maudo García, 2017: 120-1). However, the evidence that can be found in the last part of story, along with all the elements that have been analysed so far, might lead the reader to think, instead, that Pelino has purposely killed his wife taking revenge for her not having followed the patriarchal precepts imposed on women. Since his interview with Salomé, the *curandera*, Pelino had confirmed the suspicion, already harboured in his mind, that Rosaura was a detestable being with superhuman knowledge, a witch that used her powers for evil purposes (Hudson, 1916: 120). That awareness on his part may have been the starting point in order to plan a violent revenge towards her: "...and to inspire me to further action the hatred I had long nursed in secret became all at once a bitter, burning desire for vengeance (...). I was (...) now (...) anxious to be up and doing" (Ibid). Moreover, it is interesting to note that when Pelino arrives at the city of Trapalanda, following the flying group of witches, he is carrying a rapier³⁴ in his hand (Hudson, 1916: 122), a fact which may show that he has the intention of killing, or at least injuring, his wife. The admiration and attraction he

³⁴ A narrow sword having a double-edged blade. (Retrieved from:

<https://www.wordreference.com/definition/rapier>)

once felt towards Rosaura has now turned into hate, and the sexual passion-murder cycle is fulfilled (Maudó García, 2017: 121). At first sight, Rosaura's murder may be considered a crime of passion, that is, a crime committed *in the heat of passion*³⁵. However, from a feminist perspective, it can be said that considering Pelino's attack as being provoked by his wife's actions would be to reproduce a patriarchal point of view which places the responsibility on the victim and which implies that the perpetrator is a blameless person whose reason has been inflamed by the passions stirred by others. From this angle, Rosaura's behaviour may seem to be regarded as sufficient provocation for her to be killed: she is a "fiend with a beautiful mask" (Hudson, 1916: 131), an uncontrollable woman who can heal or cause damage through her witchcraft and who can generate such an erotic passion in men that those who commit an illicit act may argue that they have been bewitched by her (Federici, 2015: 309, 320), a profoundly attractive woman who incarnates evil and negatively influences Pelino to the point of awakening his darkest side (Maudó García, 2017: 121). Nevertheless, it results necessary to bring to light what the text does not overtly reveal, giving voice to that otherness that is not given the possibility of speaking (Colebrook, 2007: 227).

³⁵ In criminal law, a crime of passion is defined as one committed in response to provocation, as opposed to a deliberated or premeditated action (Retrieved from: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/crime_of_passion).

After applying some ointment onto his own body in order to recover his human appearance, Pelino examines Rosaura and confirms that she is dead: “It was a horrible death she had met; still I felt no compassion, no remorse, though convinced that my own hand had inflicted her death-wound” (Hudson, 1916: 129). Pelino feels that his wife deserves to have been killed, and this can be interpreted as *femicide*, that is, the killing of a woman by a man that is motivated by disdain, hatred, pleasure or the sense of property with respect to her, carried out with the aim of obtaining, conserving and/or increasing his control, domination and power over her (Fernandez, 2012: 48, 51, 69). This term is broader than the simple feminization of the word *homicide*: the concept of femicide implies that the death of a woman at the hands of a man is not the outcome of unavoidable personal situations (such as passion, vengeance or rejection on the part of the woman), pathological behaviour or accidents, but the product of a patriarchal social system of oppression where men are thought of as superior, more powerful and with more rights than women (Fernandez, 2012: 48, 50, 67). This is consistent with the discussion Federici (2015) holds as regards the slaughtering of witches during the Middle Ages: she argues that the systematic attack on women was carried out in order to control their behaviour and limit their autonomy and social power. And, as the author explains, “the price of resistance has always been extermination”³⁶ (Federici, 2015: 182). Witch hunting constituted, then, a war against women, a coordinated attempt to

³⁶ My own translation.

degrade them, demonize them and destroy their power (Federici, 2015: 301)³⁷. As Fernandez (2012) explains, this type of genocide can only occur when there exist certain social practices which allow these extremely cruel attacks against women's integrity and freedom, and which constitute clear examples of hate murders that are intensified whenever male supremacy is defied (Fernandez, 2012: 49, 69).

Pelino realizes he is in a difficult position: he does not know whether to admit his crime, in which case he would be sentenced to death, or to recount the marvellous circumstances he has gone through, risking not being believed. Anyhow, he states "I am guilty, yet not guilty" (Hudson, 1916: 129), an expression that would mean he is convinced that he is only responsible for the deadly wound he inflicted on his wife's body, but that Rosaura's behaviour would serve for sufficient justification for him having punished her with death. This situation concurs with a whole system of attitudes, practices, ideas, values and roles, socially constructed through history, which consider male dominance and control over women as naturalized characteristics of a patriarchal culture that fosters unequal relations of domination and submission among men and women which, in turn, lead to the devaluation of women in society (Fernandez, 2012: 48, 49, 68; Tubert, 2001: 43).

³⁷ At the same time, and not surprisingly, it was during this period that the bourgeois ideals of femininity and domestication were forged (Ibid).

Pelino is finally arrested, charged with murder and sentenced to death. Occasionally, he entertains the idea of having been able to avoid the trial if he had “feigned a grief [he] did not feel” (Hudson, 1916: 131); however, he knows that nothing would save him from his fate. Before escaping from prison, he decides to write his confession so that his family knows his side of the story. There, he insists on the fact that he does not consider himself a murderer but someone who has got involved in a non-premeditated act of justice: “Accidentally I set my heel on the head of a venomous serpent and crushed it – that was my only crime” (Hudson, 1916: 132). He also tells the fantastic events to his Father Confessor and, although he perceives the priest does not believe him, he hopes to have his sins absolved, “for who could willingly die with the burden of a great crime on his soul?” (Hudson, 1916: 133). He requests to have the clergyman write, at the end of his confession, whether he thinks he has spoken the truth (Ibid); however, the confessor’s opinion does not appear in the tale. Only a blank space marks the end of *Pelino Viera’s Confession*, leaving the reader with a probable state of perturbation (Maudó García, 2017: 119, 121) which would lead him/her to question his/her own position in relation to the protagonist and to wonder whether Pelino’s confession results valid or if it just constitutes a way of trying to find in the reader an accomplice who justifies his conduct.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion

This study was conducted with the purpose of analysing the power relationships that come into play in W. H. Hudson's *Pelino Viera's Confession* when its female character Rosaura rebels against patriarchal rules and decides to begin her own quest for knowledge and self-empowerment. Also, as witchcraft is a central theme in the story, it was of interest to inquire into the importance of the process of witch hunting in the reinforcement of patriarchy throughout the tale.

Hence, the research question that guided this study was the following:

To what extent does Rosaura, from William Henry Hudson's *Pelino Viera's Confession*, find death in an endeavour to pursue knowledge and power?

In this section, the following two hypotheses that derived from this research question are analysed:

- (1) Rosaura may have been accidentally killed by her husband when he discovers that she is thirsting after a kind of knowledge that is provided to her by witchcraft.

(2) Rosaura may want to escape from the constraints of the patriarchal society in which she is immersed and is finally killed by her husband due to her power and superiority.

In relation to the first hypothesis (H1), it can be concluded that it results weak considering the analysis carried out in this paper. H1 implies that Rosaura was killed by accident when her husband Pelino discovered that she had acquired the craft of sorcery, and, indeed, it can be said that she did obtain certain knowledge as she was able to use her occult arts in order to become a bird and fly to the witches' Sabbath so as to meet her "sisters" (Hudson, 1916: 119). Moreover, Salomé, the *curandera*, made it clear that Rosaura had become knowledgeable about witchcraft when Pelino visited her (Hudson, 1916: 116), a fact that could be evidenced by Rosaura's ability to use not only the *Flor de Pesadilla* to keep her husband asleep while she was at the covenstead (Hudson, 1916: 112-3) but also the unguent to become a feathered woman (Hudson, 1916: 119). As it is not mentioned in the story whether Rosaura really made use of her supernatural powers for wicked purposes (e.g. if any kind of atrocities were actually committed during the witches' meeting) or if she had ever casted an evil spell on her husband, it does not result clear, then, why Pelino became so furious with rage and revenge towards her that she finally found death in a confusing episode where she was stabbed by her husband while he was trying to defend himself from an attack (Hudson, 1916: 126). By analysing the story from a feminist perspective, it can be inferred that the fact

that Rosaura ventured herself into witchcraft does not seem to represent sufficient reason for her husband's executing such level of violence on her. Thus, the idea of Rosaura having been killed by accident presents itself as an unfounded argument.

When approaching the story from a completely challenging standpoint, a much deeper motive for her murder can be found. It was necessary to reflect on the culturally-determined stereotypes embedded within the text (Manly, 2007: 47) and become aware of the power relationships and inequalities that exist between men and women in order to focus on that otherness that is not explicitly addressed by the patriarchal status quo (Colebrook, 2007: 221, 227). Hence, the second hypothesis (H2) proves to be better grounded than H1, as H2 states that Rosaura's empowerment as a woman may have been the real reason for her murder. At the moment of knowing that his wife was a witch, Pelino may have been left with a sense of disempowerment (Fallaise, 2007: 95): she had escaped from the management of her husband (Manly, 2007: 58), challenging male authority (Federici, 2015: 300) and acquiring a kind of knowledge that provided her with supernatural powers. She had become "the dark 'other' of the Angel in the House, a figure of danger and disruption" (Eagleton, 2007: 110). Thus, he resorted to extreme means of violence so as to receive confirmation of his own dominance, which had been undermined by Rosaura's empowerment as a woman and her concurrent defiance of patriarchal rules. Pelino did not seem to be able to cope with Rosaura's superiority (for him, his wife could not and should not be more powerful than

himself) and committed femicide, which is neither an unexplainable phenomenon nor a naturally-occurring or unavoidable situation but the maximum expression of male dominance and the greatest instrument of terror and hatred that functions in order to perpetuate patriarchal power (Fernandez 2012: 68).

In this paper, a deconstructive reading of *Pelino Viera's Confession* was performed following a post-structural feminist analysis that did not respect the patriarchal criteria of authority but suspected of all the categories that may have been presented as "natural" in the text, for they were considered as mere representations of the world from the universalizing perspective of phallogocentric thought (Tubert, 2001: 44, 51). It resulted necessary to escape from the homogeneity of the dominant discourses and approach the text not from a single, "correct" reading but from alternative readings that allowed the analysis of women's subjectivity within the frame of patriarchal constraints (Tubert, 2001: 87).

Limitations

The main limitation that must be addressed in this study is the fact that only one short story by William Henry Hudson was analysed. If more fiction works had been taken into account, it would have been interesting to find out whether other stories by the same author reflect the same power struggles between

male and female characters. Likewise, it would have been of interest to observe whether the uneven power relationships analysed in *Pelino Viera's Confession* replicate in Hudson's non-fiction literature.

Implications of the present study

There are some interesting implications that derive from this study. In the current social context in which patriarchal power is being challenged and reconfigured, giving birth to a new female paradigm, a number of feminist political movements have arisen (Plain and Sellers, 2007: 102), which have generated a flow of both protest and solidarity among women. Campaigns all around the world, such as #MeToo, #YoSíTeCreo, #NoEsNo, #LaManadaSomosNosotras, and #MiráCómoNosPonemos, among others, have emerged in the last few years as examples of a kind of sorority that has only been seen before in the period previous to the witch hunting process, when female collective power had not yet been undermined (Federici, 2015: 307)³⁸. Moreover, feminist movements such as #NiUnaMenos have broken the silence that has been maintained over the murder of women, making it clear that the concept "crime of passion" has only been used to conceal the violence that

³⁸ For the author, only the feminist movement has made knowledge about witch hunting come forth from the secrecy it had been confined to thanks to feminists' identification with witches. An expression of this identification was the creation of WITCH, a network of autonomous feminist groups that played an important role in the initial phase of the women's liberation movement in the USA during the late 1960s (Federici, 2015: 261).

patriarchal society exerts on women, giving significance to the use of the word femicide, instead, with all the legal and political aspects this term implies.

The analysis carried out in the present study may serve, thus, as a starting point for a feminist literary debate that could aim at changing the consciousness of the reader (Manly, 2007: 55), making the discussion of patriarchy and women's empowerment an important topic on the agenda of educational institutions as well as of political debates.

Moreover, as William Henry Hudson was an Anglo-Argentinian author who wrote about local customs and traditions, it would be of interest to use this short story in English literature classes at secondary schools or teacher-training colleges so as to observe the impact of debating feminist approaches to literary texts in these contexts.

Suggestions for future research

It would be interesting to explore, in more depth, the psychological reasons why women's bodies become the objective of men's violence, being that women are the ones who give birth to and raise the same men who later kill them. According to Tubert (2001), it is surprising that most philosophical theories tend to overlook an essential fact in every human being's life: we are born *from* a woman, and she is also the first person with whom we establish an intimate

relationship which will, in turn, be the starting point of our own constitution as subjects. For her, the destruction of women's womb (represented in their body) seems to be fundamental to the reproduction of patriarchal culture (Tubert, 2001: 88). Julia Kristeva's abjection theory would serve as a thought-provoking approach to analyse the degradation of women in society, which, in her view, is a result of the fear for the loss of identity that the maternal figure, and her pre-Oedipal body, represents (Creed, 1993: 13-15). Further inquiry into these topics would lead to a deeper understanding of men's desire to annihilate women and the life, power and energy they represent.

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APPENDIX

TALES
OF THE PAMPAS

BY
W. H. HUDSON



NEW YORK
ALFRED A. KNOPF
MCMXVI

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>El Ombú</i>	1
<i>Story of a Piebald Horse</i>	73
<i>Pelino Viera's Confession</i>	95
<i>Niño Diablo</i>	137
<i>Marta Riquelme</i>	175
<i>Tecla and the Little Men</i>	229
<i>Appendix to El Ombú</i>	245

PELINO VIERA'S CONFESSION

IT will be necessary to inform the reader—in all probability unacquainted with the political events of 1829 in Buenos Ayres—that the close of that year was more memorable for tumults of a revolutionary character than usual. During these disturbances the prisoners confined in the city gaol, taking advantage of the outside agitation and of the weakness of their guard, made an attempt to recover their liberty. They were not acting without precedent, and had things taken their usual course they would, no doubt, have succeeded in placing themselves beyond the oppressive tyranny of the criminal laws. Unfortunately for them they were discovered in time and fired on by the guard; several were killed or wounded, and in the end they were overpowered; not, however, before some half-dozen of them had made good their escape. Amongst the few thus favoured of fortune was Pelino Viera, a prisoner who had already been found guilty—without extenuating circum-

96 *Tales of the Pampas*

stances—of murdering his wife. Notwithstanding the unsettled condition of the country the tragedy had created a great sensation at the time, owing to the unusual circumstances attending it. Viera was a young man of good standing, and generally liked for the sweetness of his disposition; he had married a very beautiful woman, and was believed by all who knew him to entertain the deepest affection for her. What then was the motive of the crime? The mystery remained unsolved at the trial, and the learned and eloquent Doctor of Laws who defended Viera was evidently put to great straits, since the theory he set up was characterised by the Judge of First Instance, presiding at the trial, as incredible and even absurd. It was to the effect that Viera's wife was a somnambulist; that roaming about her bedchamber she had knocked down a rapier hanging against the wall, which falling pierced her bosom; and that Viera, distracted at so sudden and awful a calamity, had been unable to give an account of what had happened, but had only raved incoherently when discovered mourning over the corpse of his bride. The accused himself would not open his lips either to confess or to deny his guilt,

Pelino Viera's Confession 97

but appeared, while the trial lasted, like one overwhelmed by a great despair. He was accordingly condemned to be shot; those who saw him carried back to his cell knew there was not the smallest chance of a reprieve, even in a country where reprieves may often be had for the asking: for the unhappy man's relations were thousands of miles away and ignorant of his desperate situation, while his wife's family were only too anxious to see the last penalty of the law inflicted on him. Unexpectedly, when the young wife-killer imagined that only two days of life remained to him, his fellow-prisoners dragged him forth from his cell, and from that moment he vanished utterly from sight. Concealed in the pallet he had occupied the following confession was found, written in pencil on a few sheets of the large Barcelona paper which it is customary to give out to the prisoners to make their cigarettes with. The manuscript was preserved, along with other prison curiosities, by the gaoler, and after his death, many years ago, it came by chance into my possession.

I am not going to shock the enlightened and scientific reader by expressing belief in this confession, but give, without comment, a

98 *Tales of the Pampas*

simple translation of it. Witchcraft in England is dead and buried; and if sometimes it rises out of its grass-grown grave it returns to us under some new and pretty name, and can no longer be recognised as that maleficent something which was wont to trouble the peace of our forefathers. But in Pelino Viera's country it is or still was in his day, a reality and a power. There, at the hour of midnight it is a common thing to be startled by peals of shrill hysterical laughter, heard far up in the sky; this is called the *witch-laughter*, and something about what is supposed to be the cause of it may be gathered from what follows.

My father came early in life to this city as agent for a commercial firm in Lisbon. In time he prospered greatly, and for over twenty years figured as one of the principal merchants of Buenos Ayres. At length he resolved to give up business and spend the remainder of his days in his own country. The very thought of going to Portugal was to me intolerable. By birth and education I was an Argentine, and looked upon the Portuguese as a distant people about whom we knew nothing, except that they were of the same race as the

Pelino Viera's Confession 99

Brazilians, our natural enemies. My father consented to let me remain; he had nine children and could afford to spare me; nor did my mother regard the separation as a calamity, for I was not her favourite son. Before embarking my father made generous provision for my support. Knowing that my preference was for a country life, he gave me a letter to Don Hilario Roldan, a wealthy landholder of Los Montes Grandes—a pastoral district in the southern portion of the province; and told me to go and reside with Roldan, who would be a second father to me. He also gave me to understand that a sum of money, sufficient for the purchase of an estate, would be lodged for me with his old friend.

After parting from my relations on board their ship I despatched a letter to Don Hilario, informing him of my intended visit, and then spent a few days making preparations for my country life. I sent my luggage on by the diligence, then, having provided myself with a good horse, I left Buenos Ayres, intending to journey leisurely to the Espinillo, Roldan's estate. I rode slowly across country, inquiring my way and resting every night at some village or estancia house. On the afternoon

100 *Tales of the Pampas*

of the third day I came in sight of the Espinillo—a herdsman pointed it out to me—a blue line of trees on the distant horizon. My horse being tired when I approached my destination, I walked him slowly through the wood of tala trees. Here the boles and lower branches had been rubbed smooth by the cattle, and there was no underwood. Finding the shade grateful and wishing to feel my feet on the ground, I dismounted and led my horse by the bridle. A great silence rested on the earth; only the distant lowing of cattle could be heard, and sometimes a wild bird broke into song near me. This quiet of nature was grateful to me; I could not have wished for a sweeter welcome. Suddenly as I walked I heard before me the shrill voices of women quarrelling: they seemed to be very angry, and some of the expressions they used were dreadful to hear. Very soon I caught sight of them. One was a withered, white-haired old woman, dressed in rags, and holding in her arms a bundle of dried sticks. The other was young, and wore a dark-green dress; her face was white with passion, and I saw her strike the old woman a blow that made her stagger and drop her bundle of sticks on the ground. At this mo-

Pelino Viera's Confession 101

ment they perceived me. The young woman had a grey shawl with a green fringe on her arm, and on seeing me she wrapped up her face in it, and hurried away through the trees. The other, snatching up her bundle, hobbled off in an opposite direction. When I called to her she only increased her pace, and I was left alone. I continued my walk, and presently emerging from the road I found myself before the house I sought.

Don Hilario had not visited Buenos Ayres for many years, and I did not remember him. He was a stout, elderly man, with white hair, which he wore long, and a pleasing, open, florid countenance. He embraced me joyfully, asked me a hundred questions, and talked and laughed incessantly, so pleased was he at my visit. Later he presented me to his daughters, and I was surprised and flattered at the warmth of their welcome.

Don Hilario had a gay, lively disposition, and, remarking my white hands, asked me if I thought they could check a hot-mouthed horse, or cast a lasso on to the horns of a bull. After dinner, when we all sat under the corridor to enjoy the cool evening, I began to observe his daughters more closely. The young-

102 *Tales of the Pampas*

est, whose name was Dolores, was a gentle-faced girl, with grey eyes and chestnut hair. Apart from her sister she would have been greatly admired. Her sister, Rosaura, was one of those women who are instantly pronounced beautiful by all who see them. Her eyes were dark and passionate, her features perfect; never had I seen anything to compare with the richness of her complexion, shaded by luxuriant masses of blue-black hair. I tried to restrain the spontaneous admiration I felt. I desired to look on her with calm indifference, or only with an interest like that felt for rare and lovely flowers by one learned in plants. If a thought of love was born in me, I regarded it as a dangerous thought, and strove to divest myself of it. Was any defence against such sweetness possible? She fascinated me. Every glance, every word, every smile drew me irresistibly to her. Yet the struggle in me would not cease. What is the reason of this unwillingness to submit? I asked myself. The answer took the form of a painful suspicion. I remembered that scene in the tala wood, and imagined that in Rosaura I beheld that angry young woman of the green dress. In another

Pelino Viera's Confession 103

moment I rebuked a thought so unjust. I was about to relate to her what I had witnessed. Again and again I attempted to speak of it, but though rebuked, the suspicion still lived and made me silent.

For many days these thoughts continued to disquiet me, and made me anxiously watch for the appearance of the green dress and of the shawl with green fringe. I never saw them. Days, weeks, months flew pleasantly by; I had lived an entire year at the Espinillo. Roldan treated me like a beloved son. I acted as major-domo on the estate, and the free life of the pampas grew unspeakably dear to me. I could understand why those who have once tasted it are never satisfied with any other. The artificial luxuries of cities, the excitement of politics, the delights of travel—what are these in comparison with it? The sisters were my constant companions. With them I rode, walked, sang, or conversed at all hours of the day. Dolores was my sweet sister, and I was her brother; but Rosaura—if I but touched her hand my heart was on fire; I trembled and could not speak for joy. And she was not indifferent to me. How could I fail to re-

104 *Tales of the Pampas*

mark the rich colour that mantled her olive cheek, the fire that flashed from her dark eyes at my approach?

One evening Roldan hurried in full of happy excitement. "Pelino!" he cried, "I bring you great news! The estate adjoining mine on the west side is for sale—two leagues of incomparable pasture land. The thing could not be better. The Verro—a perennial stream, remember—runs the entire length of the land. Will you now begin life for yourself? I advise you to buy, build a proper house, plant trees, and make a paradise. If your money is not sufficient, let me help you. I am rich and have few mouths to feed."

I did as he advised. I bought the estate, built houses, and increased the stock. The care of my new establishment, which I had rechristened Santa Rosaura, occupied all my time, so that my visits to my friends became infrequent. At first I could scarcely exist apart from Rosaura; her image was before me day and night, while the craving to be with her was so intense that I lost flesh and looked pale and worn. I was therefore surprised to find this great longing quickly pass away. My

Pelino Viera's Confession 105

mind was again serene as in the days before that great passion had disturbed me. At the same time, however, I felt that only while apart from Rosaura would this feeling of freedom which I had now recovered endure, so that I grew more and more reluctant to visit her.

I had been about four months at Santa Rosaura when Roldan came one day to visit me. After admiring all I had done he asked me how I bore my solitary life.

"Ah, there it is!" I replied. "I miss your pleasant society every hour of the day."

The old man's face darkened, for by nature he was proud and passionate. "And is the society of my daughters nothing to you, Pelino?" he sternly said.

"What must I say to him now?" I asked myself, and was silent.

"Pelino," he demanded, "have you nothing to answer? I have been a father to you. I am an old and wealthy man; remember that I am also a proud one. Have I not seen everything since the day that brought you to my door? You have won the heart of the daughter I idolise. I never spoke a word to

106 *Tales of the Pampas*

you, remembering whose son you were, and that a Viera should be incapable of a dishonourable action."

The old man's just anger and my facile nature conspired to destroy me. "Oh, señor," I exclaimed, "I should indeed be the basest of men had any motive but the purest love and esteem influenced me. To possess your daughter's affections would indeed be the greatest happiness. I have loved and I love her. But has she given me her heart? On that point I have only cruel doubts."

"And are you so weak as to resign your hopes because of doubts?" asked Roldan with a touch of scorn. "Speak to her, boy, and you will know all. And should she refuse you, swear by all you hold sacred to marry her in spite of refusals. That was what I did, Pelino, and the woman I won—Heaven rest her soul!—was like her daughter Rosaura."

I clasped his hand and thanked him for the encouragement he gave me. The cloud passed from his brow, and we parted friends.

Notwithstanding all I had said I was filled with despondency when he left me. True, I loved Rosaura, but the thought of an alliance with her was almost intolerable. Yet what

Pelino Viera's Confession 107

could I do? From the alternative course I shrank in dismay, for how could I ever endure to be despised by Roldan, whom I loved, as the vilest of men? I saw no possible escape from the false position I was in. My mind was in a dreadful tumult, and in this condition I passed several days and nights. I tried to force myself to believe that I loved Rosaura passionately, as I had indeed loved her once, and that were I to marry her, a great and enduring happiness would crown my life. I figured her in my mind a bride, dwelling in imagination on her perennial smile, her passionate beauty, her thousand nameless fascinations. All in vain! Only the image of the white-faced fury of the tala wood remained persistently on my mind, and my heart sank within me. At length, driven to extremity, I resolved to prove the truth of my suspicions. Never would such a fiend win me to marry her, though her beauty exceeded that of an angel! Suddenly a means of escape opened before me. I will visit Rosaura, I said, and tell her of that strange scene in the tala wood. Her confusion will betray her. I will be grieved, alarmed, amazed. I will discover by accident, as it were, in her that hateful being. Then I will

108 *Tales of the Pampas*

not spare her, but wound her with cruel taunts; her agitation will turn to implacable rage, and our miserable affair will end in mutual insults. Roldan, ignorant of the cause of our quarrel, will be unable to blame me. Having thus carefully considered my plans and prepared myself for the exercise of dissimulation, I went to the Espinillo.

Roldan was absent. Dolores received me; her sister, she told me, was far from well, and for some days past had kept her room. I expressed sympathy and sent a kind message. I was left alone for half an hour, and experienced the greatest agitation of mind. I was now, perhaps, about to be subjected to a terrible trial, but the happiness of my whole life depended on my resolution, and I was determined to allow no soft feelings to influence me.

At length Dolores returned supporting her sister, who advanced with feeble steps to meet me. What a change in her face—how thin and pale it was! Yet never had I seen her fairer: the pensive languor of illness, her pallor, the eyes cast down, and the shy fondness with which she regarded me, increased her beauty a thousand times. I hastened to her side and clasped her hand in mine, and could

Pelino Viera's Confession · 109

not withdraw my sight from her countenance. For a few moments she permitted me to retain her hand, then gently withdrew it. Her eyes drooped and her face became suffused with a soft indescribable loveliness. When Dolores left us I could no longer disguise my feelings, and tenderly upbraided her for having kept me in ignorance of her illness. She turned her face aside and burst into a flood of tears. I implored her to tell me the secret of her grief.

“If this is grief, Pelino,” she replied, “then it is indeed sweet to grieve. Oh, you do not know how dear you are to us all in this house. What would our lonely lives be without your friendship? And you grew so cold towards us I thought it was about to end for ever. I knew, Pelino, I had never uttered a word, never harboured a thought you could take offence at, and feared that some cruel falsehood had come between us. Will you now always—always be our friend, Pelino?”

I replied by clasping her to my bosom, pressing a hundred burning kisses on her sweet lips, and pouring a thousand tender vows of eternal love in her ear. What supreme happiness I felt! I now looked back on my former state

110 *Tales of the Pampas*

as madness. For what insane delusions, what lies whispered by some malignant fiend, had made me harbour cruel thoughts of this precious woman I loved, this sweetest creature Heaven had made? Never, so long as life lasted, should anything come between us again!

Not very long after that meeting we were married. For three happy months we resided in Buenos Ayres, visiting my wife's relations. Then we returned to Santa Rosaura, and I was once more occupied with my flocks and herds and the pastimes of the pampas.

Life was now doubly sweet for the presence of the woman I idolised. Never had man a more beautiful or a more devoted wife, and the readiness, nay joy, with which she resigned the luxuries and gay pastimes of the capital to accompany me to our home in the lonely pampa filled me with a pleasant surprise. Still even then my mind had not regained its calm; the delirious happiness I experienced was not a dress for everyday wear, but a gay, embroidered garment that would soon lose its gloss.

Eight months had elapsed since my return, when, turning my eyes inward and considering my state, as those who have been disturbed in

Pelino Viera's Confession III

their minds are accustomed to do, I made the discovery that I was no longer happy. "Ingrate, fool, dreamer of vain dreams, what would you have?" I said to myself, striving to overcome the secret melancholy corroding my heart. Had I ceased to love my wife? She was still all my imagination had pictured: her sweet temper never knew a cloud; her rare grace and exquisite beauty had not forsaken her; the suspicion I had once harboured now seemed forgotten, or came back to me only like the remembrance of an evil dream, and yet, and yet I could not say that I loved my wife. Sometimes I thought my depression was caused by a secret malady undermining my existence, for I was now often afflicted by headache and lassitude.

Not very long after I had begun to note these symptoms, which I was careful to conceal from my wife, I woke one morning with a dull, throbbing sensation in my brain. I noticed a peculiar odour in the room which appeared to make the air so heavy that it was a labour to breathe: it was a familiar odour, but not musk, lavender, attar of roses, or any of the perfumes Rosaura was so fond of, and I could not remember what it was. For an

112 *Tales of the Pampas*

hour I lay on my bed disinclined to rise, vainly trying to recall the name of the scent, and with a vague fear that my memory was beginning to fail, that I was perhaps even sinking into hopeless imbecility. A few weeks later it all happened again—the late waking, the oppressive sensation, the faint familiar odour in the room. Again and again the same thing occurred. I was anxious and my health suffered, but my suspicions were now thoroughly aroused. In Rosaura's absence I searched the apartment. I found many scent-bottles, but the odour I was in quest of was not there. A small ebony silver-bound box I could not open, having no key to fit it, and I dared not break the lock, for I had now grown afraid of my wife. My evanescent passion had utterly passed away by this time; hatred had taken its place—fear and hatred, for these two ever go together. I dissembled well. I feigned illness; when she kissed me I smiled while loathing her in my heart; the folds of a serpent would have been more endurable than her arms about me, yet I affected to sleep peacefully in her bosom.

One day while out riding I dropped my whip; dismounting to pick it up I put my foot

Pelino Viera's Confession 113

on a small dark green plant with long lance-shaped leaves and clusters of greenish-white flowers. It is a plant well known for its powerful narcotic smell and for the acrid milky juice the stem gives out when bruised.

"This is it!" I cried in exultation. "This is the mysterious perfume I have been seeking. From this little thing I will advance to great things."

I resolved to follow the clue; but I would be secret in all I did, like a man advancing to strike a venomous snake and fearing to rouse it before he is ready to deliver the blow.

Taking a sprig of the plant I went to an old herdsman living on my estate and asked him its name.

He shook his head. "Old Salomé the *curandera*, knows everything," he answered. "She can tell you the virtue of every plant, cure diseases, and prophesy many things."

I replied that I was sorry she knew so much, and rode home determined to visit her.

Close to the Espinillo house there existed a group of little ranchos, tenanted by some very poor people who were charitably allowed by Roldan to live and keep a few cattle rent free on his land. In one of these huts lived

114 *Tales of the Pampas*

Salomé, the *curandera*. I had often heard about her, for all her neighbours, not even excepting my father-in-law, professed to believe in her skill; but I had never seen her, having always felt a great contempt for these ignorant but cunning people, who give themselves mysterious airs and pretend to know so much more than their neighbours. In my trouble, however, I forgot my prejudice and hastened to consult her. On first entering her hovel, I was astonished to discover in Salomé the old woman I had seen in the tala wood on my arrival at the Espinillo. I sat down on the bleached skull of a horse—the only seat she had to offer me—and began by saying that I had long known her by fame, but now desired a more intimate acquaintance. She thanked me dryly. I spoke of medicinal herbs, and, drawing from my pocket a leaf of the strange-smelling plant I had provided for the occasion, asked her what she called it.

“’Tis the Flor de Pesadilla,” she replied, and, seeing me start, she cackled maliciously.

I tried to laugh off my nervousness. “What a pity to give a pretty flower a name so terrible!” I said. “The *night-mare flower*—only a madman could have called it that! Perhaps

Pelino Viera's Confession 115

you can tell me why it was called by such a name?"

She answered that she did not know, then angrily added "that I came to her like one wishing to steal knowledge."

"No," I returned, "tell me, mother, all I wish to know, and I will give you this;" and with that I drew from my pocket a gold doubloon.

Her eyes sparkled like fireflies at the sight. "What do you wish to know, my son?" she asked in eager tones.

I replied, "Out of this flower there comes by night an evil spirit and cruelly persecutes me. I do not wish to fly from it. Give me strength to resist it, for it drowns my senses in slumber."

The old hag became strangely excited at my words; she jumped up clapping her hands, then burst into a peal of laughter so shrill and unearthly that my blood was chilled in my veins, and the hair stood up on my head. Finally she sank down in a crouching attitude upon the floor, mumbling, and with a horrid expression of gratified malice in her eyes.

"Ah, sister mine!" I heard her mutter. "Ah, bright eyes, sweet lips, because of you I

116 *Tales of the Pampas*

was driven out, and those who knew and obeyed me before you were born now neglect and despise me. Insolent wretch! Fools, fools that they were! See now what you have done; something must surely come of this, something good for me. She was always bold, the pretty one, now she grows careless."

She kept on in this way for some time, occasionally uttering a little cackling laugh. I was greatly disturbed at her words; and she, too, when the excitement had worn itself out, seemed troubled in mind, and from time to time stole an anxious glance at the great yellow coin in my hand.

At length she roused herself, and taking a small wooden crucifix from the wall approached me.

"My son," she said, "I know all your afflictions, and that you are now only about to increase them. Nevertheless, I cannot reject the succour Heaven in its infinite compassion sends to one so old and feeble. Kneel, my son, and swear on this cross that whatever happens to you you will never disclose this visit, or name my name to that infamous despiser of her betters, that accursed viper with a pretty face—alas, what am I saying? I am old—old, my

Pelino Viera's Confession 117

son, and sometimes my mind wanders. I mean your sweet wife, your pretty angel, Rosaura; swear that she shall never know of this visit; for to you she is sweet and good and beautiful, to every one she is good, only to me—a poor old woman—she is more bitter than the wild pumpkin, more cruel than the hungry hawk!”

I went down on my knees and took the required oath. “Go now,” she said, “and return to me before sunset.”

On my return to the hovel the old woman gave me a bundle of leaves, apparently just gathered and hastily dried by the fire. “Take these,” she said, “and keep them where no eye can see them. Every night, before retiring, chew well and swallow two or three of them.”

“Will they prevent sleep?” I asked.

“No, no,” said the hag, with a little cackle as she clutched the doubloon; “they will not keep you long awake when there is nothing stirring. When you smell Pesadilla be careful to keep your eyes closed, and you will dream strange dreams.”

I shuddered at her words and went home. I followed her directions, and every night

118 *Tales of the Pampas*

after chewing the leaves felt strangely wakeful; not feverish, but with senses clear and keen. This would last for about two hours, then I would sleep quietly till morning.

Close to the head of the bed, on a small table, there was an ebony cross on which a golden Christ was suspended, and it was Rosaura's habit every night after undressing to kneel before it and perform her devotions. One night, about a fortnight after I had seen Salomé, while I lay with partially closed eyes, I noticed that Rosaura glanced frequently towards me. She rose, and moving stealthily about undressed herself, then came, as was her custom, and knelt down beside the bed. Presently she placed a hand gently on mine and whispered, "Asleep, Pelino?" Receiving no reply she raised her other hand, there was a small phial in it, and removing the stopper the room was quickly filled with the powerful Pesadilla odour. She bent over me, placing the phial close to my nose, then poured a few clammy drops into my lips, and withdrew from the bedside uttering a great sigh of relief. The drug produced no effect on me: on the contrary, I felt intensely wakeful, and watched

Pelino Viera's Confession 119

her slightest movement, while outwardly I was calm and apparently in a sound sleep.

Rosaura retired to a seat beside the dressing-table at some distance from the bed. She smiled to herself and appeared to be in a soft, placid frame of mind. By-and-by she opened the small ebony box I have already spoken about, and took from it a little clay pot and placed it on the table before her. Suddenly I heard a rushing noise like the sound of great wings above me; then it seemed to me as if beings of some kind had alighted on the roof; the walls shook, and I heard voices calling, "Sister! sister!" Rosaura rose and threw off her night-dress, then, taking ointment from the pot and rubbing it on the palms of her hands, she passed it rapidly over her whole body, arms, and legs, only leaving her face untouched. Instantly she became covered with a plumage of a slaty-blue colour, only on her face there were no feathers. At the same time from her shoulders sprang wings which were incessantly agitated. She hurried forth, closing the door after her; once more the walls trembled or seemed to tremble; a sound of rushing wings was heard, and, mingling with

120 *Tales of the Pampas*

it, shrill peals of laughter; then all was still. At the last, in my amazement and horror, I had forgotten myself and stared with wide-open eyes at her doings; but in her haste she went out without one glance at me.

Since my interview with the *curandera* the suspicion, already then in my mind, that my wife was one of those abhorred beings possessing superhuman knowledge, which they kept secret and doubtless used for evil purposes, had grown into a settled conviction. And now that I had satisfied the dangerous curiosity that had animated me, had actually seen my wife making use of her horrid occult arts, what was I to do? Not even yet was my curiosity wholly satisfied, however, and to inspire me to further action the hatred I had long nursed in secret became all at once a bitter, burning desire for vengeance on the woman who had linked with mine her accursed destiny. I was desperate now and fearless, and anxious to be up and doing. Suddenly a strange thought came to me, and springing to my feet I tore off my shirt and began to rub myself with the ointment. The mysterious effect was produced on me—I was instantly covered with dark blue feathers, and on my shoulders I felt

Pelino Viera's Confession 121

wings. Perhaps, I thought, I am now like those abhorred beings in soul also. But the thought scarcely troubled me, for I was insane with rage. Catching up a slender rapier that hung on the wall, I sallied forth. The moon had risen, and the night was almost as bright as day. I felt strangely buoyant as I walked, and could scarcely keep my feet on the ground. I raised my pinions, and rose without apparent effort perpendicularly to a vast height in the air. I heard a shrill peal of laughter near me, then a winged being like myself shot by me with a celerity compared with which the falcon's flight is slow. I followed, and the still night air was like a mighty rushing wind in my face. I glanced back for a moment to see the Verro, like a silver thread, far, far beneath me. Behind me in the northern sky shone the cluster of the seven stars, for we flew towards the Magellanic clouds. We passed over vast desert pampas, over broad rivers and mountain ranges of which I had never heard. My guide vanished before me, still I kept on—the same stars shining in my face. Shrill peals of laughter were occasionally heard, and dark forms were seen shooting past me. And now I noticed them sweeping downwards to-

122 *Tales of the Pampas*

wards the distant earth. Beneath me lay a vast lake, and in its centre an island, its shores covered with a dense forest of tall trees; but the interior was a lofty plain, barren and desolate. To this plain the flying forms descended, I with them, still grasping the naked weapon in my hand. I alighted in the middle of a city surrounded by a wall. It was all dark and silent, and the houses were of stone and vast in size, each house standing by itself surrounded by broad stony walks. The sight of these great gloomy buildings, the work of former times, inspired my soul with awe, almost with fear, and for a short time banished the thought of Rosaura. But I did not feel astonished. From childhood I had been taught to believe in the existence of this often and vainly sought city in the wilderness, founded centuries ago by the Bishop of Placentia and his missionary colonists, but probably no longer the habitation of Christian men. The account history gives of it, the hundred traditions I had heard, the fate of the expeditions sent out for its discovery, and the horror the Indian tribes manifest concerning it, all seemed to indicate that some powerful influence of an unearthly maleficent nature

Pelino Viera's Confession 123

rests upon it. The very elements appear leagued together to protect it from prying curiosity, if there is any foundation for the common belief that on the approach of white men the earth trembles, the waters of the lake rise up in huge billows covering the shores with angry foam, while the sky darkens overhead, and sudden flashes of lightning reveal gigantic human forms in the clouds. The explorer turns in terror and dismay from this evil region, called by the Indians *Trapalanda*.

For a few moments I stood still in a wide silent street; but very soon I discerned a crowd of winged people hurrying towards me, talking and laughing aloud, and, to escape them, I concealed myself in the shadow of a vast arched entrance to one of the buildings. In a moment they entered after me, and passed into the interior of the building without seeing me. My courage returned, and I followed them at some distance. The passage led me quickly into a vast room, so long that it looked like a wide avenue of stone arched over. Around me all was dark and deserted, but at the further end of the room, which seemed nearly half a mile from me, there was a great light and a crowd of people. They were

124 *Tales of the Pampas*

whirling about, apparently dancing, all the time shouting and laughing like maniacs. The group I had followed had probably already joined this crowd, for I could not see them. Walls, floor, and the high arched roof were all of black stone. There were no fires or lamps, but on the walls were painted figures of jaguars, horses speeding through clouds of dust, Indians engaged in fight with white men, serpents, whirlwinds, grassy plains on fire, with ostriches flying before the flames, and a hundred other things; the men and animals were drawn life size, and the bright colours they were painted in gave out a phosphorescent light, making them visible and shedding a dim twilight into the room. I advanced cautiously, rapier in hand, and keeping always in the centre of the floor where it was very dark, being at least ten yards from the pictured walls on either hand. At length I came on a black figure crouching on the floor before me; at the sound of my step it started up—a great gaunt man, with cavernous eyes that gleamed like will-o'-wisps, and a white beard reaching to his waist. His sole garment was a piece of guanaco hide tied round the body, and his yellow skin was drawn so closely

Pelino Viera's Confession 125

over his bones that he looked more like a skeleton than a living being. As I approached him I noticed an iron chain on his ankle, and feeling now very bold and careless, and commiserating this sad object, I said, "Old man, what brought you here? We are comrades in misfortune; shall I give you liberty?" For a few moments he stared at me with a wild, astonished look, then bending forward till his lips almost touched my face, he murmured, "This is hell—do you not know? How can you get out of it? Look!" and his finger pointed over my shoulder. "Poor old man, your mind is gone!" I said. He answered nothing, but dropped down on his face upon the floor again. The next moment I saw at my elbow a woman, all feathered like myself, who stood staring at me with an expression of amazement and fear in her face. As I turned she uttered a piercing yell; I raised my weapon, but she fled screaming beyond its reach. The old man lifted his head again and stared at me, then pointed towards the door by which I had entered. In another moment such a shrill and outrageous hubbub resounded from the further end of the room that, struck with sudden terror, I turned and fled.

126 *Tales of the Pampas*

Before I reached the door a crowd of feathered women appeared before me, all staring at me with pale, furious faces; but the cries behind me were coming nearer; there was no other way of escape, and I rushed at them striking them furiously with my rapier. I saw distinctly one woman fall before its thrust, while three or four more were borne down by the shock of my body. I passed out over them, sprang into the air, and fled. The shrill angry cries beneath me quickly died away; I was at a vast height speeding towards the cluster of the seven stars. In the homeward flight I was alone in the vast solitary sky, for not one dark winged form did I meet, nor did any sound break the deep silence. In about two hours I was again in my own district, and saw far beneath me the Verro glimmering in the moonlight.

I reached my home and re-entered my silent room, where the candle still burnt on the dressing-table just where Rosaura had left it. I now began to experience a terrible excitement, for every moment I expected the return of my wife. Cautiously I disposed everything just as she had left it. I had forgotten for a time the wings and feathers that clothed my body.

Pelino Viera's Confession 127

Merciful heaven! what should I do to rid myself of them? I tore at the feathers with my hands, but they were deeply embedded in the flesh. Perhaps, I thought, when daylight comes they will go off of themselves. Night was wearing away; in an agony of fear I concealed myself under the bed-clothes. All my desperate courage had now left me; I was completely at Rosaura's mercy, and no doubt she would wreak some dreadful vengeance on me. In this miserable condition I lay for another hour. Still she came not, and every moment my terror and anguish increased until it was almost more than I could bear. Suddenly a sound was heard—a sound of rushing wings; a few moments later I heard the cautious footsteps of several people in the room adjoining mine. Then I heard voices whispering. "Leave me now, sisters," one said. "Yes, sister," another replied; "but remember it is late, be quick, and if it cannot be concealed say it was an accident—a dream—that he did it, anything to save yourself." Then all was silent. Slowly the door opened. A sweat of terror broke over my forehead. I closed my eyes. I was about to rise in my distraction, and throw myself at once on the

128 *Tales of the Pampas*

devilish mercy of my wife. I looked again and saw her standing in the room with a face like ashes, her legs trembling under her, and the blood oozing from her bosom. She staggered to a seat, gasping for breath; with trembling hands she again opened the small ebony box and took from it a second clay pot. Taking ointment from it she rubbed herself with it. Slowly she passed her hands downward from her shoulders, and lo, the feathers withered up and disappeared, but the blood continued to flow from her wounded breast. She took up a garment lying near, and tried to staunch it. I forgot everything in the horror and fascination that possessed my soul. I had risen to a sitting position, and was staring at her with wide-open eyes when she glanced towards me. She sprang from her seat uttering a terrified shriek, then fell back with a groan upon the floor. For some time I dared not approach her, but she never stirred. I heard footsteps in the next room; then there was a knock at the door, and my servants calling. I perceived the danger of my position. I flew to the door and locked it. "Go back to bed," I cried; "your mistress has had a bad dream, that's all!" The servants retired. I

Pelino Viera's Confession 129

quickly applied ointment from the second pot to my body, and was restored to my former state. I examined Rosaura and found that she was dead. It was a horrible death she had met; still I felt no compassion, no remorse, though convinced that my own hand had inflicted her death-wound. I dressed myself and sat down to meditate on my situation. Day had long dawned, and the sun shining in that ghastly chamber reminded me of the necessity of action. There at my feet lay my wife, an expression of horror and anguish still disfiguring her beautiful countenance, the blood still slowly oozing from her wounded breast. But in my heart there was now a great despair that rendered me incapable of making any resolution. What would the world say when it came to look into that blood-stained chamber? Should I fly to escape the fate of a murderer? It was late for that; moreover, my flight would proclaim me guilty at once, and I was not guilty. I should be captured and put to a death most horrible. Or would it do to tell the simple truth; to say, when interrogated, "I am guilty, yet not guilty," and then proceed to relate the marvellous circumstances? Would such a story be believed?

130 *Tales of the Pampas*

Perhaps yes, but that would avail me nothing: the prosecuting counsel—for a trial for murder would certainly come—would say that I had a good invention, and was learned in legends and superstitions, and no judge would have the courage to acquit me.

I was still sitting, unable to decide on anything, when I heard voices eagerly talking, footsteps rapidly approaching, then a loud rap at my door. It was my father-in-law come to surprise us by an early visit. I recognised his voice, though it was full of alarm, for the servants had already told him what they had heard. I was about to rise and admit him, since further concealment was impossible, when the frail lock gave way, and the door flew wide open. Roldan stared in, horror-struck, for some moments, while loud exclamations escaped from the servants standing behind him. "Rosaura—O my beloved daughter!" cried the old man at last, "dead—slain! In the name of God, Pelino, explain this!"

I will tell him that in a sudden fit of rage she stabbed herself, I thought; then immediately I perceived that this story would not do, for no person had ever seen Rosaura in a

Pelino Viera's Confession 131

passion. Roldan marked my hesitation. "Assassin!" he shrieked, springing forward and seizing my arm with a firm grip. In an instant an uncontrollable rage possessed me, and all prudence was forgotten. I rose, shaking him violently from me. "Back!" I cried. "Know, miserable dotard, that this is your work! When I had escaped from your detestable daughter's wiles, who but you dragged me back to her? Accursed be the day in which I first saw you and this fiend with a beautiful mask! This is the result of your interference!" By giving vent to these frantic words I had destroyed myself, for they almost amounted to a confession of guilt. Overwhelmed with despair, I threw myself once more on my seat. Roldan fell back to the door, hurriedly dispatched one of my servants to summon the Alcalde, and took measures to prevent me from escaping.

The Alcalde soon arrived; I was formally charged and sent to Buenos Ayres; the trial and sentence followed. Nothing that could be urged in my defence was omitted, but all in vain. Had I, at the proper moment, feigned a grief I did not feel, and told the story my defender afterwards invented to ac-

132 *Tales of the Pampas*

count for Rosaura's death, I should have been saved. But after my behaviour towards my father-in-law, when he entered that chamber of death, nothing could avail me. That anything will now interpose between me and the fatal *banquillo* I have no hope.

Before long my family will hear of my fate, and this is a great bitterness for me: it is for them I write this narrative; when they read it they will know that I was no murderer. Accidentally I set my heel on the head of a venomous serpent, and crushed it—that was my only crime.

It is hard to die so young, but life could no longer be sweet and pleasant to me as in former days. Sometimes, lying awake at night, thinking of the great breezy plains, till I almost fancy I hear the cattle lowing far off, and the evening call of the partridge, the tears gush from my eyes. It would be sad to live far away from that sweet life I knew, to wander amongst strangers in distant lands, always haunted by the memory of that tragedy.

I have told my story to my Father Confessor, and I know from the strange look in his face that he does not altogether believe it, and thinks, perhaps, that at the last I will declare

Pelino Viera's Confession 133

it all an invention. When I am on the bench, and the bandage is on my eyes; when the muskets are levelled at my breast, and he is forced at the last to quit my side, then he will know that I have told him the truth; for who could willingly die with the burden of a great crime on his soul?

Let him, in justice to me, write here at the end of this confession, before sending it to my unhappy father in Portugal, whether he believes that I have spoken the truth.

