

Voiceless Victims in Sin tetas no hay paraíso

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Abstract: In his article "Voiceless Victims in *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*" Henry James Morello discusses Gustavo Bolívar's *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*. The novel is, in Bolívar's words, his way of bringing attention to the problem of young women in Colombia using prostitution in order to pay for plastic surgery a very specific problem facing the youth of Colombia. However, at what price is the success of the novel? Or, rather, who is compromised as a result of this cultural phenomenon? The author may have intended to write a novel that called attention to the problems facing Colombian society, the result, however, is very different. The outcome of the novel and its subsequent *telenovela* incarnations is nothing short of the reification and commodification of the people of Pereira, Colombia. In examining Bolívar's choice of genre and narrative voice, Morello argues that Bolívar's claim to bring attention to a terrible situation breaks down.

Henry James MORELLO

Voiceless Victims in *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*

With the ever-increasing supply and demand of *narcocultura*, writing an ethically aware text dealing with sex trafficking, drugs, and violence is by no means an unproblematic task. As soon as one desires to write a text about the misfortunes of marginalized teens in order to make a larger audience aware of their plight, there are concomitant ethical risks involved in the endeavor. The greatest danger is dealing with sex, drugs, and violence without glorifying them. Nevertheless, the proliferation of *narcocultura* stems from the titillation of the morbid in its audiences. Yet, unless someone takes that risk, how does a story about an epidemic of human sex trafficking and unsafe body modification come to national or international awareness? I use the term epidemic to express, not only the fact that statistically speaking there is a high rate of prostitution in Colombia, but also to allude to the damage that is done to the people who are involved, often against their desires and own best interest. If one does attempt to write this story, how does one go about it? How does one portray the lives of preteens who prostitute themselves in order to pay for breast implants so that they can attract the powerful drug traffickers who dominate their home towns? Gustavo Bolívar's *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* attempts such a feat.

The novel is, in Bolívar's words, his way of bringing attention to a very specific problem facing the youth of Colombia, "I want the novel to call attention to society because it is very sad that the youth of this county do not think that education can help them at all as Catalina told me and instead people are choosing fucking narcotrafficking, the get rich scheme, that message is a lethal one" (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine) ("Quiero que la novela sea un llamado de atención a la sociedad, porque es muy triste que la juventud del país esté pensando que la educación no sirve para nada como me decía Catalina y esté poniendo en práctica esa herencia maldita del narcotráfico, el enriquecerse rápido y fácil; ése es un mensaje letal" [Santa Cruz quoting Gustavo Bolívar in *El Tiempo N.P.* <<http://www.tiempodehoy.com/entrevistas/gustavo-bolivar>>]). If his only desire were attention, then he succeeded beyond his wildest expectations in exposing the troubles faced by these girls when his novel went into its thirteenth edition and sold over 100,000 copies in its third year—and this was before it became one of the most popular telenovelas of all time, in its Colombian (Caracol), US (Telemundo), and Spanish (Telecinco) versions. The "Tetas" brand has also produced a film of the same title as well as the sequel *Sin tetas sí hay paraíso*. However, at what price comes the success of the brand? Or, rather, who is compromised as a result of this cultural and financial juggernaut? Bolívar, the producer turned author may have intended to write a novel that called attention to the problems facing Colombian society or he may have just been riding the wave of *narcocultura* that Margarita Jácome affirms has become part of the Colombian national imaginary (Jácome, *Narco-novela* 28). The result, however, has nothing to do with what Bolívar claims. The outcome of the novel and its subsequent film and soap opera incarnations are nothing short of the reification and commodification of the people of Pereira, Colombia, especially women who are affected negatively by society's values and, in the end, must be punished for their transgressions.

The novel *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* tells the story of Catalina, a poor Colombian girl living in Pereira, whose location between Medellín, Cali, and Bogotá makes it a perfect hub for drug cartels. In order to escape the poverty and society's pressure of what it means to be a woman, the girls of Pereira look to become the "girlfriends" of *los traquetos* (drug traffickers). The *traquetos*, however, are only looking for women who do not exist, or exist only in the pages of fashion magazines or the surgically modified women of the telenovelas. The pressure on these girls comes from both the media and lure of riches that can be theirs if they can look more like the models that are airbrushed onto the magazines. Desperate pubescent girls, such as Catalina, who is the 14-year-old daughter of a single mother (Hilda), look to plastic surgery to fulfill the fantasies of the drug traffickers.

These surgeries are financed through the sale of the girls' bodies. The girls become known as *prepagos*. The girl sells herself for a pre-set amount of time and can make more money than through traditional prostitution. Catalina leaves her boyfriend and mother and soon finds herself at the ranch of a drug trafficker, where she is put in a line-up with dozens of other girls. The *traquetos* reject her because her breasts are too small. However, one of the bodyguards promises to help her raise the money she wants for her breast augmentation. He takes her into a room, brutalizes her, and then leaves her to be gang raped. She becomes pregnant and has an abortion, but eventually achieves her goal of breast implant surgery. She has several operations and her life continues to spiral out of control until she commits suicide by asking a friend if he could set up a hit on a friend of hers who betrayed her. She tells him where the other girl will be and what she will be wearing. Catalina herself then goes to the location wearing the dress she described. There she sits, reading the Bible and waiting for the *sicarios*

(assassins), one of which grabs and shoots her. It is apparent that *Sin tetas* is a sad story that is based loosely on the girls in Pereira who had suffered similar tragedies.

As noted earlier Bolívar decides that he is the best choice to tell this story and while it is an important story to tell the novel was not conceived of as an altruistic contribution to society but as a marketing tool. "In the past few years, the televisión market has been invigorated by works such as *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*, by Gustavo Bolívar, and *El cartel de los sapos*, by Andrés López, books known for their success on television. It would be an error to believe that, despite having tens of thousands of readers, an insignificant number compared to the viewers, the works of Bolívar and López make up part of literature" ("En los últimos años, el mercado televisivo se animó con obras como *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*, de Gustavo Bolívar, y *El cartel de los sapos*, de Andrés López, libros concebidos para ser éxitos de la televisión. Sería un error creer que, a pesar de haber tenido decenas de miles de lectores, un número insignificante comparado con el de sus espectadores, las obras de Bolívar y López hacen parte de la literatura" [Collazos <<http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/AM-4893325>>]). It is clear that the story of Colombia's *prepagado* prostitution is one in need of serious and sustained study, as more and more girls and young women are involved. Furthermore, fiction can be a powerful tool in addressing social problems especially since many in the lower classes, according to Bolívar's conversation with Catalina, do not see the benefits of a broken education system. Furthermore, the problem has grown beyond people trying to have their basic economic needs met to a wider sociological issue. For example, the city of Ibagué, located between Medellín and Bogotá has started offering financial assistance for aesthetic surgery to the city's employees (<<http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-2059817>>).

To study a system in which girls feel immense pressure to get surgery and try to find escape through drug money is of global importance as the influence of narco-money has always gone way beyond the borders of Colombia. Without Bolívar's novel, the problem would not be getting the international attention that it is starting to receive from such sources as the Associated Press and National Public Radio (NPR). There are two rather remarkable reactions to the show. The first is "Breast-Obsessed TV Show a Colombian Hit" by Joshua Goodman, Associated Press writer (<<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2006/09/19/entertainment/e062448D66.DTL>>) and the second is NPR's "Without Breasts There's No Paradise" by JJ Southerland (<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6111649>>). However, by even reading the news related stories regarding the novel and telenovelas, one can see that there is already a problem with the type of attention the events in Colombia are getting: there is a disconnect between the tragedy that is destroying lives and their fictional account. In the NPR story, J. J. Southerland describes the plot of the anticipated telenovela, "To make a long story short, she gets breast enlargement surgery, becomes disillusioned and commits suicide" (<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6111649>>). Southerland wraps the story up with, "I'm eagerly anticipating the American version of the show" (<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6111649>>). This is what has come of Bolívar's aspiration for a socially conscious novel: a desire for more, a global brand. For Southerland, the story is exotic and sexy. *Sin tetas* successfully Orientalized and commodified the women and their plight. The NPR and Associated Press writers do not claim that they want the terrible situation to stop, quite the opposite, they want more.

One of the issues that makes the situation problematic for Bolívar is that there are considerations that he does not address, or perhaps cannot address in the fictional novel genre, or to be more specific, the pop genre. According to Melissa Fitch, pop "elements tend to tap into collective concerns of any imagined community that is, in fact, a nation, or region, reflecting the common interests related to quotidian issues of life, love, death, family, and employment" (*Side* loc. 457). *Narconovelas*, and more specifically *Sin tetas*, register all of these daily aspects of Colombian interests. An additional problem, however, is that whereas, again according to Fitch, scholars, in the past, have dismissed or outright ignored popular culture, now critics see popular culture "everything from soap operas to Harlequin Romances [as] biting social commentary" (*Side* loc. 463). In other words, Bolívar's work, as well as many other pop-culture artifacts, go ignored or unchallenged. *Narconovelas*, more specifically, "are high selling works with hints of fiction infused with the figures of the cartel head or the traffickers, their assassins, and their lovers at the center of the narration and that, according to some booksellers and cultural critics, is characterized by a focus on sensationalism, the use of the vernacular, and a short shelf life despite commercial success; in a word the pop or instant book" ("obras de grandes ventas con tintes de ficción que instauran al capo o traqueto, sus sicarios y sus amantes en el centro de la narración y que, según algunos libreros y críticos del círculo cultural, se caracterizan por la preeminencia de la anécdota sensacionalista, el descuido en el uso del lenguaje y una vida corta en las estanterías después de un fugaz éxito comercial; en una palabra, los llamados *libros de ocasión* o *instant book*" [Jácome, "¿Narco-novela" [37]]). The target audience becomes even more apparent when Bolívar's novel is turned into a soap

opera, which are not the most efficacious venues for dealing with human rights issues, and since the novel deals with a problem that the state is not simply ignoring, but is in fact perpetuating, this abuse becomes a human rights story. Because this is a human rights issue there are a host of ethical concerns that must be addressed. One of the primary ethical questions is how one tells a story that is not one's own while respecting the various stake holders. Bolívar makes claims of attempting to document the plight of these girls, when he uses the "based on real events" trope, he makes a pact with the audience to represent the victims in an ethically responsible manner. The question is, then, does this novel respect the dignity of the victims, or are the girls being abused all over again by Bolívar's novel, the telenovelas, and movies? Is the reader, in turn, able to empathize with the characters? The quick answer is no; although the novel increases the awareness of these girls, it does not respect the victims and it does not create a situation in which the reader can connect with them on an empathetic level.

A collective approach such as the one taken by Alonso Salazar in *No nacimos pa' semilla: La cultura de las bandas juveniles en Medellín*, which included the voices of the stake holders offers a counter example to ethically problematic *Sin tetas*. In her article "*Nombrar la violencia desde el anonimato: relatos testimoniales en contextos de miedo*," María Helena Rueda speaks to the importance of the voices of those affected by violence in *No nacimos pa' semilla* and *Las mujeres de la guerra* by Patricia Lara and how important it is to identify with the pain of others. "This identification with the pain of the other, the basis for ethics in Emmanuel Levinas, signals the emergence of a sense of community, more profound than individual identity – defined in terms of ideological orientation, be it civil or military" ("Esta identificación con el dolor del otro, que está en la base de la concepción de la ética en Emmanuel Levinas, señala el surgimiento de un sentido de comunidad, más allá de las identidades individuales – definidas en términos de orientación ideológica, ser civil o ser militar" [237]). There is no such opportunity allowed by *Sin tetas* to identify with the pain of the stakeholders and there is no sense of an ethical community being developed here. The girls and women of Pereira are kept in a position as an object of desire and are denied the possibility of to be active subjects. In fact, they are doubly commodified as their bodies are sold as objects to the *traquetos* in Colombia and it is this act which becomes the basis for their commodification as characters in a novel.

The novel has led to other ways in which these girls are being offered up as cultural objects for international consumption and viewing pleasure, as three separate soap operas, a feature film, and sequels to the original telenovela have already been produced. This move from text to screen was not at all accidental and therefore needs some investigation.

Today certain publishing houses, such as Oveja Negra for example, specialize in books that deal with contemporary and often scandalous themes so as to assure instant profits. José Vicente Katarain, editor of Oveja Negra, is said to have invented a new genre of "audiovisual books" or rather text written for the purpose of being converted into television shows, with the aim of assuring in a very public way to be more rentable. *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* by Bolívar is precisely the thing that Katarain described as 'the inaugural audiovisual book'. ("El libro" 108), whose model has been repeated in *La muñecas de la mafia* by Andrés López, and now they hope to achieve the same with the recent bestseller called *Diario de una prepago adolescente*, which has been edited by Catarina Boham.

(Hoy en día ciertas editoriales, como Oveja Negra por ejemplo, se especializan más en libros que tratan de temas contemporáneos y muchas veces escandalosos, ya que ellos les aseguran ganancias instantáneas. José Vicente Katarain, editor de Oveja Negra, dice haber inventado un nuevo género de "libros audiovisuales", o sea textos escritos directamente para ser convertidos en series de televisión, con el propósito de asegurar de tal manera más público (sic) y ser más rentables. *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* de Bolívar es precisamente lo que Katarain describió como "el libro inaugural de los audiovisuales" ("El libro" 108), cuyo modelo ha sido repetido con *Las muñecas de la mafia* de Andrés López López y ahora se espera lograrlo con el reciente bestseller llamado *Diario de una prepago adolescente*, que ha sido editado por Catarina Boham. [Bialowas Pobutsky <<http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/especulo/unmero46/deleit.html>>])

Although, the goal here is to focus on the *narconovela*, as it is nothing more than a precursor to the visual iterations of the story, there needs to be some discussion of the *telenovelas* as a way of examining the reception of the novel. We can see how producers, writers, and directors read the novel by looking at the adaptations. Perhaps the most interesting in terms of how it represents the novel, is the Telemundo version that aired in 2008-9. The credit sequence makes clear that women's bodies are something to be mapped out and divided up according to the desires of men and the marketplace. It opens on the back of a naked woman. Black ink spreads across her skin. It only takes a fraction of a second to realize that it is the black outline of a map that is drawn and redrawn as the camera moves over her body. The first words that appear on her flesh are "*Telemundo presenta*." White "targets" then appear on her skin. The targets look like the marking for cities on a map that explode into concentric

circles on her body. As she writhes on an operating table the map moves across her body showing locations such as Colombia, Mexico, and the United States in black and names, mostly men's names, appear on her body in white. These lines and names have three significations: they are clearly a map, but at the same time they are reminiscent of the lines a plastic surgeon might draw on the body, and finally they show ownership of the body. Not only is the Colombian woman's body being mapped in this sequence, but it is also being divided up for consumption. While the audience is allowed to dissect her body from every angle with the help of the spreading map, there is a song that accompanies the visual that attempts to create a dialogue regarding plastic surgery. It is a duet in which the male sings that he likes the woman the way she is and that should not change. The woman responds by saying she wants money to get larger breasts so she can get out of this place. It is the woman that gets the last word, however, as she exclaims, "Without them there really is no paradise." ("*Sin ellas no hay paraíso, de verdad!*" [Las K-narias Song for Opening Credits]). What is of interest here is how the producers of the television program were reading the novel. From the above described sequence, they have clearly not read the novel as an ethical project meant to improve the lives of the girls drawn into this lifestyle. It is a money-making venture that employs the worst tropes of the telenovela playbook. The most desirable actors and actresses are used to entice an audience into a world of prostitution and drugs.

One of the keys failure in *Sin tetas*, as I mentioned earlier, is empathy, which is lacking throughout the novel. Again, the novel does not connect with the stakeholders and, in turn, the readers are denied the possibility of empathy with the women who feel that body modification and *traquetos* are their only way out of their economic situation.

Catalina wanted to get into the sordid world of being a sexual slave to the narco-trafficker, not because she wanted to enjoy the pleasures of sex, because among other things although she was a virgin and couldn't even imagine what it would be like to feel a man on top of her, but because she could not stand her friends from the block strutting around every day with new clothes, shoes, watches, and perfumes, that their houses were the prettiest in the neighborhood and that stored in their garages were new motorcycles. The envy ate at her heart and caused anguish and worry.

(Catalina quería ingresar al sórdido mundo de las esclavas sexuales de los narcotraficantes, no tanto porque quisiera disfrutar de los deleites del sexo, porque entre otras cosas aún era virgen y ni siquiera imaginaba lo que podría llegar a sentir con un hombre encima, sino porque no soportaba que sus amigas de la cuadra se pavonearan a diario con distinta ropa, zapatos, relojes y perfumes, que sus casas fueran más bonitas del barrio y que albergaran en sus garajes una moto nueva. La envidia le carcomía el corazón y le causaba angustia y preocupación [8]).

The reader cannot begin to understand the women's tragedy if they are unable to hear the traumas firsthand, in their own words. From the opening line, the novel describes women whose happiness and worth is directly correlated to the status of the drug trafficker they can attract through breast size and other body modifications. "Catalina never imagined that her prosperity and happiness of the girls of her generation were at the mercy of her bra size." ("Catalina nunca imaginó que la prosperidad y la felicidad de las niñas de su generación quedaban supeditas a la talla de su brasier" [Bolívar [7]]). Instantly, the novel sexualizes women and turns them into fetishized commodities. The novel, and the opening of the telenovela, dissect the female figure, offering it up for the reader's pleasure while simultaneously eliminating her as a thoughtful being. In fact, it is the omniscient male narrator that tells the reader what the girl imagines and thinks. Instead of the text leading a fight against dangerous body modification for the pleasure of the narco-traffickers that Bolívar claims, it is a recycling of those bodies for continued consumption. Perhaps the only way for Bolívar to have participated in a project of resistance and of emancipation would have been for him to subjugate his own subject position in favor of others. In other words, it would have taken honest empathy, a sort of border crossing, in order for him to recognize the victims as subjects in their own right.

The following list of toys that the *traquetos* parade in front of the girls is a typical move by Bolívar, who seems to scoff at the desire of their ownership, but does not understand the type of draw this might have on people who are constantly on the outside looking in:

The opulence: trips in helicopters to certain estates, overblown week long parties, Versace or Luis Vuitton bags of 5 million pesos, diamond encrusted watches, platinum rings, plastic surgery the length and breadth of the body that would cost more than the car we traveled in and in the end the physical and pure extravagance that underlined the sin: Men lighting cigarettes with hundred dollar bills, trays of pure coke in the eight bathrooms of the estate, two million dollar horses, landing strips, satellite telephones, planes chockfull of dollars shitting sacks of bills into the sea, gigantic yachts cutting through the oceans in the middle of the scandalous parties.

(la opulencia: viajes en helicóptero a ciertas fincas, fiestas de una semana a todo full, bolsos Versace o Luis Vuitton de 5 millones de pesos, relojes con diamantes, anillos de platino, operaciones a lo largo y ancho de su cuerpo que en total podían costar más que el carro donde viajábamos y en fin el físico y puro derroche fantástico que rayaba el pecado: Hombres prendiendo cigarrillos con billetes de cien dólares, bandejas de cocaína pura en los ocho baños de la finca, caballos de dos millones de dólares, pistas para avionetas, radioteléfonos satelitales, avionetas repletas de dólares cagando costalados de billetes en el mar, yates descomunales surcando el océano en medio de fiestas escandalosas [etcétera] [127]).

This rapid fire collection of opulence creates two problems when not contextualized by someone who has experienced having this lifestyle used as bait. The first problem is that for the women who have immersed themselves in this lifestyle; it is not real, it is just an illusion, something that is flashed before them, but that they can never truly attain. Bolívar hints at that dynamic with Catalina's death, but the direct testimony of a woman who had survived the torments, the rapes, the threats, and the beatings would be a constant reminder that the luxurious lifestyle for her was pure spectacle. The second problem, which would most likely be ameliorated by the direct address of a survivor, is one of desire. For the women of Pereira, who live a life of grinding poverty with little hope of escape, the cornucopia of material goods far outweighs the prospects of ultimate failure which only comes at the end of the novel and could be considered avoidable. To have the women's voices telling the story would be a persistent reminder of the actual pain suffered. Authentic voices better represent the women and the problems facing them. Hermann Herlinghaus's analysis of *No nacimos pa' semilla* speaks perfectly to that which is lacking in Bolívar's project. "In the case of authorship which is, we might say, an artistically restrained one, the writer has set out from an elementary ethics of narration. His driving force has been neither a striving for adequacy of representations when he deals with marginal adolescents nor a search for literary distinction, but instead the possibility of making voices speak that already carry the burden of the utmost stigmatization" (Herlinghaus, *Violence* 108). In spite of Bolívar's comments which indicate that he felt an ethical pull toward telling the story, instead of operating from a fundamental ethical position that puts the women at the center of their own stories, he begins with the proposition that he is the one who has to speak for them as though they were objects. It is precisely this appropriative approach which brings us to the problem of narrative voice in the novel.

The women's voices are both subordinated and sublimated when the form chosen is that of a fictional novel narrated by an omniscient male voice. The women's voices are seen as in some way substandard or, it can be inferred through the choice of narrator, that their direct testimony would make an inferior project. Their voices need to be supplanted by one of authority and thereby improved upon. The omniscient narrator of the story is hidden through the first twelve chapters and lulls the reader into a sense that the storyteller is outside of the narrative, giving him messianic presence. A look at how the narrator describes the decision-making process of Catalina as she resolves to get breast implants gives us a glance into his mindset: "Without thinking twice and convinced of the necessity of increasing her bust, Catalina decided, from this day on, with rigorous vanity and religious patience, to get the money to implant a pair of silicone that would fit in the hand of no man." ("Sin pensarlo dos veces y convencida de la necesidad de aumentar su busto, Catalina se propuso, desde ese mismo día, con rigurosa vanidad y religiosa paciencia, conseguir el dinero para mandarse a implantar un par de prótesis de silicona capaces de no caber en la mano de ningún hombre" [Bolívar [9]]). A closer look at this sentence reveals a number of ways in which the narrator conceives the object of his narration, and reveals how the author sees the girls about whom he is writing. The sentence begins with the fact that she does not think and that some undefined outside source has convinced her of the necessity of surgery. Furthermore, her vanity is rigorous, harsh, or even severe. While from the outside this may seem to be the case, it seems implausible that these girls would conceive of themselves in that way. What is even more telling about this sentence is that in the end it all comes back to what the male narrator thinks. She wants "silicone implants that would not fit in the hand of any man."

The narrator appears as a character in chapter thirteen, "I am the one that narrates" ("*El que les narra soy yo*"). The narrator is Octavio, a politician who confesses to the reader that he has no morals. He claims that the only person he has not cheated was his mother and not because she gave birth to him, but because she didn't have anything of value. Lastly, in his confession, the reader is told, "For this reason, do not confuse my pontificating about morals and the problems of the country with a tone of saintliness and solemnity, I only want votes." ("Por eso, no se confundan al escucharme pontificar sobre la moral y los problemas del país con un tono que raya en la santidad y la solemnidad, solo quiero sus votos" [Bolívar [126]]). In essence, the author is disrupting the narrative flow and, perhaps in a self-reflexive gesture, points at the flaws in the novel. In the narrator's confession, there seems to be a hint at an authorial confession—a larger, though somewhat closeted, admission of the appropriation of voice.

The reader is admonished to look for the real motivation behind what the narrator says because, after all, he is only looking for votes. What then does the author want when he writes *Sin tetas no hay paraíso*? Should we, as readers, understand this passage to say, do not confuse my moral pontificating with my desire to sell novels? Furthermore, it is this flawed minor character that controls the women, not only in a corporeal sense, but also in terms of language and their lack of access thereof. He knows the most intimate thoughts, hopes, and dreams of the women in the novel, especially those of Catalina. In the last chapter before the epilogue, Ocatvio explains how he got the story during a three hour interview with Catalina: "As her bus was to leave three hours later and as she knew that I was a businessman, she proposed to tell me her story so that I could write a book about her life and I would make a buck. I accepted." ("Como su bus salía tres horas más tarde y como ella sabía que yo era un hombre de negocios, me propuso contarme la historia par que escribiera un libro sobre su vida y me ganara una platica. Acepté" [Bolívar [207]]. Ocatvio, as narrator, makes the claim that Catalina is the one who offers up her story. He also describes how she tells her story including the mood and texture of her discourse: "It was three hours of fluid, sincere, crude, and painful conversation. It was like listening to the agonizing last words of the dying, letting a few threads of blood escape in the corners of her mouth and the full sun in her eyes." ("Fuera tres horas de charla fluidasincera, cruda, penosa. "Fueron tres horas de charla fluida, sincera, cruda, penosa. Era com, o escuchar a un moribundo agonizando, dejando escapar un par de hilillos de sangre por los costados de la boca y el sol pleno sobre sus ojos" [Bolívar [207-8]]. Interestingly enough, it is a mood that Bolívar could not replicate in the novel. Even after Catalina's rape, the infection caused by her implants, the death of her brother, and even her suicide, there is no sense of agony in the text. For the bulk of the novel, Catalina and her friends are happy with the lives they have chosen. She seems blissfully oblivious to what is happening to her.

Another example of the patriarchal narrator comes in the chapter titled "The End of the Flower" ("*El final de la flor*"). This chapter describes the brutal way in which this fourteen year old girl loses her virginity to an AK 47-toting bodyguard nicknamed "Horse." The narrator describes the rape in detail, along with the pain experienced by Catalina and what she thinks about in order to escape the mental and physical pain. The narration of Catalina's rape takes on eroticized and voyeuristic qualities. The readers are placed in the unfortunate position, which Diana Taylor points out in *Disappearing Acts*, "'of just watching'—a position often associated with voyeurism and morbidity, even disempowerment" (141). She goes on to point out that, "even the best intentioned and politically necessary reports on torture can be both perversely titillating and disempowering" (Taylor 141). If reports on human rights violations run this risk, then a novel with a photo of an attractive naked woman on the cover clearly has no chance but to be nearly pornographic in its depiction of the rape. The eroticizing of abuse is not an easy problem to address, and writers and playwrights have struggled with how to represent these acts that they feel need to be represented without simply repeating them. Unfortunately, the depiction of Catalina's rape, and even the title of chapter, "The End of the Flower" serve to undo any rationalization for writing the novel as an ethical counterpoint to the violence and subjugation these women experience.

Although the narrative voice in the novel creates an atmosphere of male domination, it is the end of the story that endeavors to prove most instructive. Here the narrator recounts how Catalina looked the last time he saw her and how she told him of how she was going to kill herself. The novel dramatizes just how far Catalina has fallen and there is a hint at the fatal flaw that brings her to this place. It is designed along the lines of an Aristotelian tragedy in that it reads as though there is supposed to be a cathartic moment for the reader. In the middle of these imagery laden descriptions of her emotional and physical state, a pitiful Catalina unburdens herself in front of a witness, Octavio, the narrator. She asks that he write her story, and then she plans and executes a rather impractical and farfetched suicide that is, nevertheless, dramatic. However, there are some oddities in the conclusion of the novel that need to be considered. After Catalina shares her story with Octavio, she has a pleasant and peaceful night's sleep. She does have occasional bouts of anger, but not toward the failed education system, the society that pressures women into this sort of modification, or the men that raped and abused her, but for another girl, Yesica who is in the same situation as her. Her anger with Yesica is over an old but rich man. Nevertheless, a calm comes over her as she carries out her plan to kill herself. None of the emotions that Catalina experiences seem the least bit plausible and at no time is there a connection that a collective project would have allowed the possibility for empathy.

The image of her death also needs to be examined further. She is in a café reading the Bible. Her demeanor is calm, she offers no resistance when the assassin grabs her, and she smiles as she lie dying. In the *Caracol* and *Telemundo* versions of the story, although she is supposed to be ill, she is beautiful. "The police tried to resuscitate her with CPR but the woman let out her last breath, more of satisfaction than of death and she succumbed." ("Los policías trataron de reanimarla con masajes cardiacos, pero

la mujer soltó un último suspiro, más de satisfacción que de muerte y sucumbió" [Bolívar [214]]. Catalina dies peacefully and with a certain amount of satisfaction. One could question the object of her satisfaction; however, it seems to further the idea that the lifestyle that Catalina got involved with is somehow worth all of the traumas she suffered. In the epilogue, the reader learns the fate of several of the characters, including what happens to Catalina's mother and her now ex-boyfriend, Albeiro. Around the time of Catalina's death, her mother has a daughter with Albeiro whom they baptize with the name Catalina in honor of the girl they think has only run off again. This reincarnation of Catalina seems to also undermine the message of the novel, and of course, establishes the foundation for the sequel. Catalina's death is a satisfying moment for her and perhaps we can see it as relief as well, but the rebirth of Catalina gives the reader a happy ending; a happy ending that Bolívar tries once again to subvert in the final paragraph.

During the visit to the Faroe Islands I heard a colleague say that his daughter of 16, who was finishing her high school degree, had asked for silicone breast implants as a graduation present. The girl's request didn't surprise me too much because at the end of the day the narcos, the vanity and the media have created, for almost all women, the need to obtain a busty figure. The part that surprised me was the father's response, "I have to get them for her because if not, who would put up with her." At the root of my friend's response and Catalina's drama is the obsession that these girls have to get a hold of the five million pesos that the tits cost and for this reason I think that the best business in the world is not a politician, nor a public position with a huge budget, nor a trafficker of drugs, animals, crocodile skins, or women. The best business is vanity and for this very reason I am going to buy myself a plastic surgeon's license and I am going to start a beauty clinic for which I already have a tentative name: "Tits Factory".

(Durante el viaje a Islas Faroe le escuché decir a un colega, que su hija de 16 años, que estaba terminando el bachillerato, le había pedido como regalo de grado el implante de silicona en los senos. No me sorprendió tanto la petición de la niña porque al fin y al cabo los narcos, la vanidad y los medios de comunicación y les han creado, a casi todas la mujeres, la necesidad de obtener una figura protuberante. Lo que en verdad me sorprendió fue la respuesta que me entregó el papá: "Tendré que regalárselas porque si no, quién se la aguanta." A raíz de la respuesta de mi amigo y del drama de Catalina que refleja la obsesión que tienen estas niñas para conseguir los cinco millones de pesos que cuestan unas tetas, he pensado que el mejor negocio del mundo no es la política ni un cargo público con alto presupuesto, ni el tráfico de drogas, animales, pieles de cocodrilos o mujeres. El mejor negocio es la vanidad, por eso voy a comprarme un diploma de cirujano plástico y voy a montar una clínica de estética para la que ya tengo un nombre tentativo: "Tetas Factory" [221-2]).

This paragraph seems to be in dialogue with the final words written by Catalina in the last chapter of the novel. Before she dies, she had underlined Luke 23:43: "Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'" In the margin next to this passage, Catalina writes, "Pure bullshit, without tits there is no paradise." ("Pura mierda, sin tetas no hay paraíso" [215]). She concludes that the only time she had the slightest chance at reaching paradise is when she had the implants and that she still believes that getting the implants was still a sound choice for her. We get the idea that if she had to do it all over again, she would follow the same path.

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