

REPRESSION AND THE ABJECT BODY: WRITING THE FAMILY HISTORY IN ARTURO ISLAS' *THE RAIN GOD*

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Another voice from inside his head kept saying, "You cannot escape from your body, you cannot escape from your body" (*The Rain God* 7)
I ran across a monster who was sleeping by a tree and I looked and frowned and the monster was me. (David Bowie, "The Width of a Circle")

The question of familial community is a central issue in Arturo Islas' *The Rain God* as it presents the trajectory of the Angel family in terms of the individual and collective experiences of its members. On the basis of this overview of its form and content, *The Rain God* would appear to have much in common with novels of authors such as Rudolfo Anaya, Americo Paredes, Nash Candelaria, Rolando Hinojosa and Victor Villaseñor whose writings, in the tradition of much ethnic cultural production, attest to a "genealogical imperative."¹ However, despite this fundamental similarity which places Islas' text alongside other works of contemporary Chicano narrative, *The Rain God* differs greatly from those accounts of identity and community.² Islas' novel consists in a double movement. Rather than chronicle the construction and development of the traditional familial community, it traces the demise of one form of the latter imposed by the matriarch Mama Chona while it simultaneously represents a revised form bound up with the emergence of the creative consciousness of Miguel Chico. More specifically, *The Rain God* charts the failure and subsequent reconstitution of community through a foregrounding and examination of certain considerations which have remained conspicuously absent from or at least unproblematized in many male Chicano narratives of family. These elements are those of body and affect which, although they comprise fundamental aspects of intersubjective relations, have remained largely unexplored in Chicano narratives of community.³

Certain tendencies in Chicano/a writing have conceived of cultural and historical identity in ways which suppress the dynamic complexities and conflicts involved in individual and group identities. The consequence has been the representation of an essentialized and homogeneous collective subject in terms of ethnicity and race as *given* categories of difference which appear to have very little to do with the processes of history. Many representations have construed of Chicano/a identity as essential and fixed rather than temporal and mutable, prioritizing descent over consent in their formulations of community. Aside from the dehistoricized status of ethnicity and race in such narratives, another problem may be located in their conceptualization of identity as determined by those two given vectors of difference alone. Such narratives are reductionist in that they repress other significant elements of difference central to the construction of identity; for instance, sexuality, gender, class and location, as well as the network of power relations within which these differences function.

In *The Rain God* that repressive tendency finds resonance in the figure of the matriarch and author(ity) of the Angel clan, Mama Chona, and in the rigid family structure that she seeks to institute through the denial of vital features of individual and group identities. While she attempts to reinforce the family, she initiates a nexus of trajectories of denial among its members vis-à-vis body and affect that impede community and prevent the Angels from establishing linkages beyond themselves and their own private familial sphere. Like that other famous literary clan with its own taboo, the Buendías of Márquez' *Cien años de soledad*, the Angels are condemned to solitude and their fall is marked by a crisis of community with similarly apocalyptic connotations. My reading of Islas' novel examines the nature and scope of Mama Chona's repression and examines how it is inextricably linked to the question of writing insofar as Miguel Chico's textualization of the body finally usurps the authority of Chona to explore different possibilities of community.

MAMA CHONA, AUTHORITY AND THE OEDIPAL NARRATIVE

Mama Chona eclipses the father of the Angel clan, her husband, who is absent from the text and, subsequently, as an archetypal matriarch, she comes to embody the varied possibilities of authorship. First, she is the author of the clan in that it is she who gives birth to Felix and Miguel Angel whose families are the focus of the novel. Moreover, as mother and grandmother she seeks to guide the members of those families. For example, as Miguel Chico's reflections reveal, she has to a large extent displaced the natural parents to play a decisive role in the lives of her grandchildren. With regard to Mama Chona and to María, the other albeit less crucial influence on his life, Miguel Chico feels that "he was... the child of these women, an extension of them, the way a seed continues to be a part of a plant after it has assumed its own form which does not at all resemble its origin, but which, nevertheless, is determined by it" (26). Second, given her strong determining role, Mama Chona is an author who directs her kin as characters in her pre-written text or script of the family. That text envisages the superiority and conservation of the clan through a recognition of and adherence to binary categories of difference, or "violent hierarchies" (Derrida, *Positions* 41), which privilege a Spanish heritage over Indian ancestry, the family as a private realm over the external public sphere and the development of the mind over

the corporeal. Of central interest here is that latter category of the corporeal which emerges as the specific territory upon which the whole range of Mama Chona's repressive politics is enacted.

Since Mama Chona instills a repressive, binary worldview in the consciousness of her clan, in her capacity as author she clearly exercises and embodies power. This aspect of her authority is evident with regard to her institution of taboos and prohibitions in order to secure those aforementioned categories of difference. Through a repressive coding of specific features of corporeality and affect she attempts to safeguard and to reinforce the boundaries of the family and its members against what she construes to be potentially destructive *exterior* forces. Chona attempts to cultivate a narcissistic family unit by territorializing its desire and depriving it of possible objects of affection beyond itself. She encourages narcissism among family members according to which there exists only the possibility of auto-affection between themselves. However, even that self-centered unit excludes intimacy as the kind of auto-affection envisaged by Mama Chona is one that avoids physical mediations or manifestations. In turn, despite her wishes for the perpetuation of the family line, Mama Chona is unable to accept the corporeal reality of the reproductive act. Accordingly, the body itself, its libidinal drives and its possible cathexes are silenced in her familial script. The following quotation, which is central to my analysis of Islas' novel, summarizes Chona's problematic relationship with the body and affect:

Mama Chona denied the existence of all parts of the body below the neck with the exception of her hands... "God forgive me," she said in her children's presence. "What beautiful hands I have" and she extended them palms down, so that they might admire without touching. Mama Chona was not physically affectionate. Touching other people reminded her of her own body, and she encouraged her grandchildren to develop their minds, which were infinitely more precious and closer to God. (164; emphasis added)

Indeed, it is in the context of the body that the ideologies of Mama Chona and María coincide. Mama Chona's Catholic narrative envisages a strong sense of community which, paradoxically, denies corporeality while María, as a Seventh Day Adventist, is specifically concerned with the apocalyptic community promised by death and the loss of the body.

In addition to negating physical proximity and intimacy, the matriarch "did not use endearments with anyone in the family" (27) thus denying the linguistic representation of affect. Moreover, as she nears death, Mama Chona's repression of her own body and the privileging of her mind culminate in a struggle in which "She was fighting to force her soul out of her body" (176) and that retreat from the physical realm is intensified as she strives to dehistoricize herself and to deny the materiality of her being: "She conquered time by denying its existence" (170). For Chona, death is "the moment she had been waiting for all her life" (174) as it liberates her from her own physicality and allows her to attain that state promised by her Catholic faith.

An internalized tendency toward repression runs through the lives of Mama Chona's children and grandchildren since, to varying degrees, they reconstitute her directive of denial. Moreover, the absence of the expression of physical and linguistic affect given in the enforcement of boundaries and thus, the absence of any fundamental solidarity, underlies a number of crises experienced by the family members re-

garding their sense of self and community. These crises reveal deep-rooted problems which they have in negotiating intersubjective relationships and are precipitated by the irruption of the repressed and the traumatic breaching of those very boundaries inscribed by Mama Chona. There is a disruption of categories of difference and, in each instance, the crisis emerges as the characters recognize that what Mama Chona has constructed as “otherness,” actually resides within themselves. That otherness surfaces momentarily to collapse the binary logic which they have internalized and which has rigidly structured their conduct and worldview. Crises occur when the illusory stability of the binary opposition collapses, questioning the differential certainties of self-other, public-private, mind-body, heterosexual-homosexual, family-society and so forth. For instance, Miguel Grande suffers a near breakdown given his *extra*-marital desires for his wife’s closest friend. He is unable to resolve the situation and remains trapped within his family unit in what degenerates into a loveless and emotionally barren marriage. In addition, Felix’ family is shattered by the latter’s violent death which is bound up with his sexuality. The case of Felix is significant as his bisexuality collapses and exceeds polarized notions of sexuality derived from a binary conceptualization of gender difference although that experience of “otherness” is catastrophic as it precipitates his murder. However, despite his apparent subversion of the traditional role of father and husband, due to his sexual preference, he reinforces a traditional family structure. As Rosaura Sánchez suggests, Felix “conforms to patriarchal practices” in that “he governs his home in a typically authoritarian way” (121). His relationships are marked by his imposition of authority, from his strained relationship with his son JoEl to his sexual abuse and exploitation of his Mexican workers. Furthermore, JoEl’s powerful poetic sensibility alienates him from the family and places him outside of that unit. He feels himself to be an outcast, that “the family no longer loved him” (151) and is driven to drugs and insanity.

While these crises hold a liberating potential for the characters the consequence is a renewed imposition of the binary imaginary, embodied in Mama Chona’s model of the family. The exception is the experience of Miguel Chico. His encounter with his own body, in the context of his near fatal illness, provokes a similar crisis with regard to his sense of boundaries and with regard to his view of the family unit. While others meet with disaster and fail to displace Mama Chona’s ideology, Miguel unravels the complex knot of the matriarch’s repression in his own narration. Miguel Chico alone is finally able to embrace his experience of otherness to arrive at a resolution or, better stated, an accommodation of the conflict. His experience, which definitively disturbs the “violent hierarchy” of mind-body and the boundary of interior and exterior permits his emergence as a writer. His writing, in direct contrast to the wishes of Mama Chona, is a writing of and from the experience of the body.

Although Mama Chona embodies that repressive authority outlined thus far and while she prompts the internalization of binary categories of difference, it is necessary to examine that which underlies and governs the imperative of repression manifested specifically in her emphasis on the strict adherence to Catholic doctrine. The longer of the previous quotations reveals the subtext of Islas’ novel and the determinant of Chona’s behavior [“Mama Chona denied...” (164)]. The subtext is the Freudian narrative of the Oedipal configuration which provides an initial account of the territorialization of desire through the family unit and the repression of the maternal body as the child’s first object of desire.⁴ That Mama Chona “denied the existence of all parts of the body below the neck with the exception of her hands” (164) and that

“Touching other people reminded her of her own body” (164) alerts the reader to the Oedipal narrative as it suggests the “primary repression” of the maternal body (Freud, “Repression” 148). Moreover, that “she encouraged her grandchildren to develop their minds, which were infinitely more precious and closer to God” (164) emphasizes the linkage of Oedipal and Christian narratives. The latter comprises a similar site of repression of the body, construction of family and inscription of the word of God, the father.⁵ In Lacan’s reading of the Freudian Oedipal configuration, the word or calling of God becomes the “Name-of-the-Father... the law of the signifier” (*Ecrits* 217); that is, language itself, or the symbolic order. The intervention of the father/language results in the disruption of the mother/child dyad and the interpellation of the child into the pre-existing structures of meaning and culture. The experience of language is, therefore, always one of inherent difference and absence as it stands in for the lost maternal body.⁶

MAMA CHONA AND THE ABJECT BODY

Bearing in mind that emphasis on the Oedipal narrative at the core of the matriarch’s propagation of Catholic doctrine in *The Rain God*, further explanation of the role of the mother in this configuration is required in order to comprehend fully the function of Mama Chona. As suggested, her ideology of family is marked by the inscription of binary categories of difference inherent in the symbolic order ushered in by the Law-of-the-Father. Consequently, it is necessary to account for Mama Chona’s complicity with the latter to explain how, in turn, Miguel disrupts the binary differences inherent in the Law-of-the-Father, or language, in his appropriation of the symbolic order, his act of writing. In this regard, the theoretical postulations of Julia Kristeva, derived from her reading of Freud and Lacan, are relevant. For Kristeva, in the phallic intervention which secures child’s passage to the symbolic order, it is precisely the repressed body of the mother which “mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations” (*Desire in Language* 27). Mama Chona’s repressive imperative reveals that it is she who passes on the Oedipal code directed at the interpellation of individuals and the territorialization of their desire and that it is she who perpetuates the Law-of-the-Father in her capacity as what Kristeva, after Lacan, terms “the Phallic Mother” (*Desire* 191).⁷ It is the denial of her own body, documented throughout *The Rain God*, which secures the inscription of the Law-of-the-Father in her children and grandchildren. Kristeva emphasizes the central role of the mother in this process in that, “Any subject posits himself in relation to the phallus... The Phallic Mother has possession of our imaginaries because she controls the family” (*Desire* 191). Due to its necessary primary repression, the maternal body therefore occupies a foundational position in the Oedipal configuration which is inextricably bound up with the accession to the symbolic and the very dynamics of socialization and culture.

Kristeva analyzes that pivotal sublimation in her account of the desired maternal body as *abject*. In her formulation, the abject is that which must be simultaneously included in and excluded from the Symbolic order. It is that which is, “radically excluded and draws me to the place where meaning collapses... There, abject and abjection are my safe-guards. The primers of my culture” (*Powers of Horror* 2; emphasis added). Abjection, implies a double movement: it attests to the claim of the sublimated maternal

body, in its imaginary dyadic relationship with the child, within the realm of the symbolic, while it simultaneously effects the denial, or the inscription of the maternal body as lacking, in order for the symbolic order to function. That dynamic of recognition and rejection or the “inescapable boomerang... of summons and repulsion” (*Powers* 1), given in the abject, “secures” the boundary between the Semiotic and the symbolic and the boundary of self and other, permitting the emergence of a “unitary” subject. That “place where meaning collapses,” signaled by abjection, is one of an undifferentiated experience of self and body. That pre-symbolic state, elaborated by Lacan as the Real and subsequently by Kristeva as the Semiotic, precedes signification (or the inscription of the Law-of-the-Father). In these terms, the abject, as the irruption of the Semiotic, stands for “the *matter*, the impetus, and the subversive potential of all signification. It is the *raw material* of signification, the corporeal, libidinal matter that must be harnessed and appropriately channelled for social cohesion and organization” (Grosz 151). Thus, the Semiotic constitutes a space of continuity, pleasure, and perversity and is characterized by the absence of difference and by the lack of fixed boundaries of self and other. Since that “meaning” mentioned by Kristeva is synonymous with language and culture, the Law-of-the-Father, the experience of abjection threatens a collapse into the realm of the Semiotic. Nonetheless, it is precisely the identification of abjection and its subsequent relegation to the unconscious which enables the constitution of subjectivity and societal structures.

Kristeva’s observations on abjection are all the more significant in that they draw attention to the phallic propensity of the mother *beyond* the child’s experience in the pre-Oedipal phase and, importantly, in the absence of the father. This is played out in *The Rain God* as the trajectory of repression is reconstituted by Chona although her husband is long dead.⁸ According to Kristeva, the Law-of-the-Father is always articulated and maintained by the mother and reinforced through the identification and feeling of abjection. The concept of abjection permits Kristeva to account for the sustained phallic identity of the mother and her central role in the processes of socialization and culture. In this way, the notion of abjection, intimately linked with the experience of the body, explains a constant replaying and strengthening of the “primary repression” as the underlying determinant of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Despite that apparently irresistible binary play of abjection (“the boomerang... of summons and repulsion”) which reconstitutes repression, Kristeva’s work suggests the deconstructive possibilities of the abject for ontology. As noted, the reaction of recognition and expulsion, prompted by an encounter with the abject, at once undoes and secures the Oedipal configuration: “The spasms and vomiting... protect me... ‘I’ expel it. ... ‘I’ expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (*Powers* 3). This attests to the double bind of abjection which simultaneously displaces and replaces fixed notions of boundary so as to permit the constitution of the subject. However, although that displacement is always supplemented with the repression of the abject, Kristeva identifies its final emergence as the privileged term by accentuating the *illusory* status of the unitary and singular self yielded in that binary play. This is encapsulated in the way that Kristeva writes the personal pronoun. By encasing the first person subject pronoun in quotation marks, she emphasizes the unstable and problematic status of the apparently unitary subject constituted through abjection and repression.

Therefore, the abject may be seen as a form of “transitional object” which is “used” by the self in a way that constitutes a repressed subjectivity.⁹ The use of the

object is seen in the double movement of “summons” and “repulsion.” Chona engages in such a use of the object in order to reconstitute repressed individual and communal subjectivities. She “establishes” self as Kristeva’s “I” and thus denies the instability and plurality of “her” subjectivity. Miguel Chico ends that repressive use by refusing to enact the second term of the binarism of summons and repulsion. He recognizes the inauthenticity of the unified subject (the “I”) and articulates its fragmented and multiple status. It is the undifferentiated realm of the unconscious that Mama Chona strives to resist yet which Miguel, as author, accepts in his writing of the body and its abjection.

MAMA CHONA AND THE IDEAL FAMILY

Having suggested the significance of the Oedipal narrative and the centrality of the notion of abjection in that narrative, I am better placed to examine Islas’ novel more closely. As has been suggested, Chona’s phallogocentric regime of difference has profound ramifications for her family. Just as she has denied corporeality by privileging the mind and by suppressing desire and physical affect, so her broader text of the family functions in terms of that same dynamic. Chona constructs the social body of the family as both a site and mechanism of that repression which she seeks to instill in the individual. Mama Chona attempts to territorialize or trap the flow of desire of the family within itself to create and secure that narcissistic unit mentioned above. The ideal of the family as an unquestioned, hermetic space is evident throughout the novel. This idea is clear as Miguel recalls one of Chona’s primary directives: “ ‘Just remember to have respect for your parents and everything will be all right... And be careful always when you are outside of your house and away from your family.’ No harm, Mama Chona made them believe, could ever come from within one’s own home and family” (163).¹⁰ Thus, the family is a focal point for the inscription of those binary categories of inside and outside, public and private which will structure the consciousness of the individual members.

As she nears death, Mama Chona becomes progressively more concerned with recuperating and maintaining the unity of the family. This is manifested in a growing preoccupation with her dead children: “Mema reported that Mama Chona now woke up in the middle of the night and wandered through the apartment searching for something. ‘Mama, what are you looking for?’ Mama Chona spoke only to herself... She did reply once to Mema’s questions, ‘I am looking for my children’ ” (171). On another occasion, in her increasing state of senility, she escapes from the house to search for her long deceased husband. This constitutes a final attempt to recover and to reinforce that phallic authority which she has administered to the clan throughout her life and comprises a last effort to hold the family together. She is found “standing on one of the busiest intersections in the downtown shopping district, facing toward Mexico and waving cars to the curb in order to ask the startled passengers if they knew where her husband was” (172). In view of her final endeavors to restore the unity of clan, it is apt that her penultimate words in the novel should be the simple utterance “*la familia*” (180) directed at the black sheep: “On her deathbed, surrounded by her family, she recognized Miguel Chico and said, *la familia*, in an attempt to bring him back to the fold” (5).

Indeed, the territorializing function of the family which Mama Chona supervises is most clear with regard to the experience of Miguel Chico and it is telling that he should recall that “attempt to bring him back into the fold” (5). Here, in Mama Chona’s narrative of family, the Oedipal and Christian texts collude most clearly as a mechanism of control and security against the flow of desire that threatens the Law-of-the-Father. This is emphasized where Miguel’s relatives are distrustful of him because he has moved far away from home, leads a lifestyle which resists so-called traditional family values and ceases to participate in the life of the family: “Miguel Chico knew that Mama Chona’s family held contradictory feelings toward him. Because he was still not married and seldom visited them in the desert, they suspected that he, too, belonged on the list of sinners” (4). These “contradictory feelings” derive from suspicions concerning his homosexuality which would strike at the heart of the Oedipal configuration and which signal the impossibility of advancing the family line. However, while Miguel Chico has breached the boundaries of the family unit both in terms of his apparent sexual orientation and his distance from the clan, it is his act of writing which offers a different form of community.

With regard to the securing of the familial territory through the negative coding of aspects of corporeality and affect, Mama Chona’s authority extends to differences of class and race which she maps out on the body in order to level discrimination at the Mexican, particularly the Indian, roots of her family. Her grandchildren are puzzled by “The snobbery Mama Chona... displayed in every way possible against the Indian and in favor of the Spanish in the Angel’s blood” (142). Moreover, “In subtle, persistent ways, family members were taught that only the Spanish side of their heritage was worth honoring and preserving; the Indian was pagan, servile, instinctive rather than intellectual, and was to be suppressed, its existence denied” (142). Chona equates the Indian aspects of her identity with the corporeal (the abject), and denies physical manifestations of the indigenous on her own body since they are “somehow impure” (27). Miguel Chico is aware of this paradoxical relationship between Mama Chona and her own body in the context of her racism and wonders, “What ...did she see when she looked in the mirror? As much as she protected herself from it, the sun still darkened her complexion and no surgery could efface the Indian cheekbones, those small dark eyes and aquiline nose” (27).

Chona’s self-contemplation and the emphasis on her mirror image casts the denial of her Indian heritage as an instance of Lacanian “misrecognition.” In order to secure a sense of self, Lacan’s “ideal I,” or perhaps Kristeva’s “I,” Mama Chona necessarily misrecognizes herself in her own mirror image. Žižek summarizes this process: “In the perceived deficiency of the other, each perceives —without knowing it— the falsity of his/her own subjective position. The deficiency of the other is just an objectification of the distortion of our own point of view” (*Sublime* 196). The misrecognition and the repression of the body which underlies her racism is further documented in that “Mama Chona did not approve of any of the Mexican women her sons and daughters hired to care for her grandchildren. They were ill-educated and she thought them very bad influences... Mama Chona taught all her children that the Angels were better than the illiterate riff-raff from across the river” (14-15). Bearing this passage in mind, it is important to return to the question of borders and boundaries mentioned with regard to Kristeva’s observations on abjection. As Klaus Theweleit shows in *Male Fantasies*, the erosion of established boundaries by flow and fluidity is a recurrent fear of the Oedipal imaginary. Conse-

quently, a negotiation of secure boundaries is central to the Oedipal configuration, "Whether the boundaries belong to a country, a body, decency or tradition, their transgression must unearth something that has been forbidden" (1: 232-33). Therefore, it is not fortuitous that the threatening Mexican and Indian presences felt by Mama Chona are located on the other side of the river in the above quotation.

While the river is a boundary, it is permeable insofar as it embodies fluidity and an unchecked flow of desire. As a result, its physical character actually corresponds with those identities which it apparently keeps separate from Mama Chona's territory. Therefore, the border itself is actually part of the "other side" as both are spaces which fall outside of the matriarch's authority. In addition, Chona's identification of those living on the other side of the river more precisely as "illiterate riff-raff" merits further examination since it comprises an overdetermined image which reinforces the Oedipal subtext of the novel. Given that "illiterate" suggests a lack of education and culture, as well as emphasizing Mama Chona's snobbery, the adjective refers specifically to a pre-linguistic state, or to a state outside of language, and therefore, resistant to the Law-of-the-Father. It is the latter which Mama Chona embodies as the Phallic Mother. While the term "riff-raff" means uncouth and uneducated it also suggests both refuse and chaos; refuse being an excess which cannot be accommodated by the symbolic order and which is subsequently repressed. In turn, chaos suggests the deterritorialized free play of difference and desire. Accordingly, that "illiterate riff-raff" resident across the river pose a deep-rooted threat to everything for which Mama Chona stands.¹¹ Furthermore, Chona also refers to the Mexicans as "illiterate masses" (143). "Masses" denotes the undifferentiated pre-symbolic identity which, as Theweleit shows, threatens the phallogocentric imaginary.

For Mama Chona, bodily and geographic borders are intimately linked. They are not flexible or permeable and they must be rigidly policed and fortified. Miguel Chico opposes this tendency as his experience and, indeed, that of many of the other characters, effects an ongoing erosion of boundaries, specifically in the context of the family, gender and sexuality. Although Mama Chona maps out the territory of the family through repression, the novel documents the progressive disruption of those very boundaries which she strives to maintain. The rupture of boundaries and the subsequent liberation of desire is enacted in terms of the experience of the individual body itself. Nevertheless, as noted, the transgression of boundaries leads either to their strengthening or to their complete disruption and rejection. For instance, while Miguel Chico problematizes and displaces the binary imaginary which has wrought havoc on his familial community, the experiences of the other family members, although they effect a similar momentary transgression, only contribute to the reinforcement of the Oedipal regime. This is so in that they are unable consciously to make sense of their experience as does Miguel Chico through his creative articulation. The experiences of Mama Chona and Miguel Chico dramatize opposing tendencies. They respectively reinscribe and resist the Oedipal imaginary. While Miguel Chico subverts the latter through his representation of a different view of body and boundary, Mama Chona's final traumatic encounter with her own corporeality reinforces phallogocentric ideology.

Mama Chona's experience is intensified toward the conclusion of *The Rain God* as the "monster" (174) invades her body (and later Miguel Chico's dreams). Throughout the novel Mama Chona endeavors to keep her physical and mental selves separate: "By not allowing herself to be naked she had successfully denied the existence of the monster" (174). However, the "monster" (which is actually her fallen uterus)

disrupts that illusion of boundary. Her increasing fear of the “monster” is evident in that it threatens to disrupt the binary certainties of inside and outside, self and other. Thus, the “monster” stands for the repressed abject, maternal body which underlies the institution of difference. Chona’s abjection returns as the “monster” inside her which she expels. She gives birth to, or perhaps aborts, herself in a way that highlights the insularity of the family and comprises a final effort to purge her body of its sexuality. Having encouraged her children to emulate the family name, this purging is her own attempt to become an angel as she strives to desexualize herself. She uses the abjection of the “monster” to establish herself and her illusory security as a subject: “The monster between her legs was almost out and Mama Chona was glad that it showed no signs of life... One should ignore those parts of the body anyway. Filthy children, all they ever thought about was the body” (177). As an instance of abjection, her experience momentarily disrupts the Oedipal narrative based on binary oppositions and, at once, serves for its reinforcement.

As the “monster” symbolizes an irruption of the Semiotic which threatens to disturb the Symbolic order, it is fitting that Mama Chona should also begin to lose her control of language as the presence of the “monster” grows. Most significantly, she loses the power to name and, thus, to differentiate between the members of the family. In this way, she begins to escape the Law-of-the-Father and to return to the Semiotic. Yet, at this point the presence of her husband, the father of the clan begins to figure all the more strongly in her mind as a timely reminder of the fading phallic authority. Despite the apparent return to the Semiotic, the experience of the “monster” ultimately culminates in her total repression of the body through the expulsion of her own uterus and her subsequent death. Before proceeding to the corresponding experience of Miguel Chico concerned with his sense of abject corporeality and the “monster,” further foundations must be laid for that analysis; it is necessary to examine a third aspect of Mama Chona’s authority and its implications and to account for Miguel Chico’s emergence as an author.

MIGUEL CHICO’S ANTI-OEDIPAL NARRATIVE

Thus far I have explored Mama Chona’s authority with regard to her role as the matriarch of the clan and in terms of her attempts to keep the family members in line with the already written Oedipal and Catholic scripts. There remains another dimension of her authority, inextricably linked with the latter two, as she is, albeit indirectly, the author of the novel itself. On one level, the novel is most certainly the work of Miguel Chico in that it consists of his recollections, or his recording of other people’s recollections, and is shaped by his creative consciousness. Nonetheless, despite his mediation, the material narrated comprises a textualized return of the unconscious realm of the family, comprising all that which Mama Chona has repressed and that which she has taught her children to keep silent: the private sphere of the family, the body, sexuality and affect. Although Miguel Chico writes the novel, its content exists only by virtue of the imperative of repression initially instilled by Chona in her children and grandchildren. Miguel Chico alone is aware of the significance of this material and recognizes the need to articulate and to come to terms with it through a textual rendering of that experience.

As an adult, Miguel Chico confronts his past specifically via the process of writing. Although he is not *explicitly* identified as the narrator and appears alongside the other characters portrayed by an omniscient voice, the text directly charts his evolution as a writer. In this way, *The Rain God* may be read as the very product of that latter process in which Miguel Chico is engaged. Therefore, within the text itself, rather than functioning as an identifiable narrator Miguel Chico's role is best understood as that of "focalizer" (Bal 102) since the narrative material is clearly selected and organized by his creative consciousness and in terms of his recollections. From the outset of the novel, Miguel Chico's focalization constantly refers back to Mama Chona as the embodiment of familial authority and as the author of the familial unconscious which he, in turn, will articulate. At key moments the reader is returned to the time and space of the writing of the novel: Miguel Chico's study in Northern California, far removed from the events and people which he reconstructs. The gaze of Mama Chona, immortalized in the photograph on the wall above his desk where his text takes shape, motivates Miguel's writing and remains constant throughout his emergence as the (co-)author of the text: "A photograph of Mama Chona and her grandson ...hovers above his head on the study wall... When Miguel Chico sits at his desk, he glances up at occasionally" (3). It is at one such moment when he contemplates the photograph that Miguel Chico explicitly establishes the link between Mama Chona's repressive imperative and his role as an author. He recognizes how his act of writing is dependent upon her in so far as "his" text comprises an articulation of all that has been denied in her lifetime. He refers back to Chona's repressive tendencies with regard to her *selective* representation or narration of people and occurrences. This tendency emphasizes the extremes of her authorial role. As noted, she attempts to direct individuals in terms of her text or script and then, after the fact, in her version of events, she intervenes again to alter specific details of behavior which are still disagreeable to her. Initially, Miguel Chico is conscious of "editing" people in much the same way as his grandmother in order to avoid unpleasant truths:

He was still seeing people including himself as books. He wanted to edit them, correct them make them behave differently... Most of the time his versions were happier than their "real" counterparts, and in making them so he was indulging in one of Mama Chona's traits that as a very young child—the child who was holding her hand forever in that snapshot—he loved most. Mama Chona was never able to talk about the ugly sides of life or people, even though she was surrounded by them. For her grandchildren she dressed up the unpleasant in sugary tales and convinced them that she believed what she was saying. (26-7)

As Miguel assumes his role as the writer of the novel, after his operation and his traumatic dream of the "monster," he recognizes the need for a different narrative strategy. He realizes that his rendition of the family history must not "edit" but rather that it should show and seek out those "ugly sides" of people and situations. He bears witness to all that previously subjected to Mama Chona's repressive authority and to her unreliable narration: "He looked once again at the old photograph of himself ...now that she was gone, the child in the picture held only a ghost by the hand and was free to tell the family secrets" (160). Miguel is aware that to make things "happier" by editing them would be to reconstitute Chona's repression and accordingly, "to make peace with his dead ...so that they would stop haunting him" (160), he

realizes that his act of writing must tell the whole story. Miguel Chico recognizes the potential of his narrative as a symbolic “feast” (160) for the familial ghosts and their repressed history and, thus, he construes of his text as an offering for the dead, resolving to “feed them words and make his candied skulls out of paper” (160).

Consequently, Miguel Chico understands the therapeutic value of writing. He feels that the “unedited” representation, which brings into the open the “secrets” of the family, may serve a liberating and ultimately curative function, minimizing any vestiges of Mama Chona’s negative authority and rendering her a more benign figure: “Mama Chona was still very much a part of him. ...he had survived —albeit in an altered form— to tell the others about Mama Chona and people like María. He could then go on to shape himself, if not completely free of their influence and distortions, at least with some knowledge of them” (28). Significantly, Miguel Chico believes that his act of writing will fulfill a healing function both in individual and communal terms. It will grant him a sense of stability and meaning regarding his own identity. In turn, his narrative will have the same effect upon the other members of the clan who, through their reading of the text, might come to terms with their own experiences.

In view of this desire to tell the “unedited” and distinctly “unhappy” version of events, Miguel Chico’s narration comprises a relentless catalog of disclosures concerning death, illness and deviation from Mama Chona’s pre-ordained family script. As he sets about writing, he is drawn to focus specifically upon that which Chona would have doubtless preferred to have kept silent in the realm of the family unconscious, or at least severely edited: “Thirty years later and far from the place of his birth... Miguel Chico, who had been away from it for twelve years, thought about his family and especially its sinners” (4). With regard to the immediate family, his story charts his father’s sexual infidelity, JoEl’s insanity and involvement with drugs and Felix Angel’s violent murder related to his sexuality. In addition, he tells how Antonia dies from tuberculosis, Sara from spinal meningitis and El Compa and Mr. Davis from heart attacks. He relates how Maria is killed by a drunk driver, how the eight-year-old Leonardo hangs himself, how Tony drowns, how Chona’s son Miguel Angel is shot to death and how her two daughters drown.¹²

In this catalog of the “ugly sides” of life, two specific instances merit further attention: the cases of Felix and his son JoEl. The insistent and graphic nature of the description of Felix’ corpse following his savage murder attests to Miguel Chico’s concern for the articulation of the body and its abjection as a vital part of that “unedited” narrative material.¹³ The corpse is “unrecognizable” (81) due to the excessive beating: “There was no face, and what looked like a tooth was sticking out behind the left ear. Dried blood and pieces of gravel stuck to the skin. The eyes were swollen shut, bulbous and insect like. The back of the head was purple, bloated, and caved in at odd places” (81). The description culminates in its focus upon the sexual organs as a site of the violence done to Felix Angel [“One of the testicles was missing” (81)]. Felix’ crime does not actually comprise a transgression of the incest prohibition, yet his sexuality and his behavior does constitute a marked resistance to the heterosexual territorialization of desire imposed by the Oedipal law. Therefore, in keeping with the latter, punishment is meted out to Felix for his violation of correct object choices.

Ironically, the repression of Felix’ desire through the mutilation of his body and his murder is the logical conclusion of Mama Chona’s ideology that sought to maintain and protect the family and its members. Felix’ disfigured corpse symbolizes both repressed desire and the consequences of the fulfillment of that desire according to

the Oedipal narrative. In this way, his corpse constitutes an embodiment of the object for those who behold it. On identifying his brother, Miguel Grande is overwhelmed by the sensation of abjection: "He felt nauseous ...the tooth behind Felix' ear continuing to glint at him obscenely... In all those years of dealing with humanity at its worst he had never seen a body so mangled by another human being" (82). After the death, " 'the family,'—as usual more concerned with its pride than with justice— had begun to lie to itself about the truth" (85). Moreover, the Law itself, in complicity with the Army, protects and reinforces the family unit, albeit at the cost of the truth and the punishment of the guilty. Given Felix' homosexuality, "The attorney thought it useless to subject the family to the shame and embarrassment of such an investigation. The young soldier had acted in 'self-defense and understandably,' and there was no reason to prosecute him" (87). Thus, the extra-familial institutional embodiments of the Law-of-the-Father (the Judicial system and the Army) step in to make sure that the family continues to function as a repressive unit.

Miguel Grande himself helps to reinscribe that repression within Felix' family as he does his utmost to prevent the widow and her children from learning the exact circumstances of Felix' death and from finding out about the latter's sexual orientation. It is fitting that Miguel Grande is a police officer, a representative of that institutionalized manifestation of Oedipal authority. He assumes his professional identity and enacts his repressive, authoritarian role to the family in its moment of crisis and potential fragmentation. En route to Felix' house with his own wife, Miguel Grande, "told her everything as if it were a police report and gave her strict instructions not to repeat any of those details to Angie" (83). Moreover, when Felix' daughter Lena demands the truth about her father's murder, Miguel Grande warns her, " 'I'll tell you but you're not going to like it, and I don't want you to repeat any of this to your mother' " (86). Like her father and Miguel Chico, Lena, is a character whose actions embody the repressed desire which the family seeks to territorialize and her behavior consistently goes against the grain of Mama Chona's authority. She is described as "a scandal to the family because she ran around with the 'low-class' Mexicans in her high school" (85). Moreover, it is noted that "She was not a good student ...and she enjoyed herself in ways that horrified her father's sisters and would have shocked Mama Chona had she known" (85). Like Miguel Chico, she flees to California in order to escape the influence of the Angel clan and to come to terms with her experiences and, although to a lesser degree than Miguel, she rejects the repressive ideology of Mama Chona. It is Lena who reveals the circumstances of her father's death to Miguel, who subsequently incorporates it into his narrative: "She told Miguel Chico many years later—after she had moved to California and could talk about it" (88).

Just as Felix Angel and his daughter clearly pose threats to the Oedipal order, Felix' son JoEl displays the same potential and, like his father, he meets with disaster. While Felix' transgression manifests itself in terms of his object choices, JoEl's identity as a poet marks him as a violator of the Oedipal law. As a poet, he is concerned with the essentially perverse activities of creation and play. From infancy, he displays a close connection with the pre-Oedipal realm of undifferentiation. This is manifested in his highly active unconscious as dreams and nightmares plague him throughout his short life. Moreover, as he begins to talk, he immediately displays his poetic sensibility of play and perversity by refusing to employ the symbolic order correctly, much to his father's despair. This is evident in the section "Ants," where he is entranced by the swarm of insects which crawl over his body.¹⁴ As he watches the ants,

Yerma notes that his face assumes the same color and expression as it has during his dreams and nightmares. That equation of the ants and the dream is telling since the two comprise images of the realm of the unconscious with which he is closely connected: the dream being the space of undifferentiation, just as the swarming insects symbolize formlessness, chaos and flow.¹⁵ Significantly, when she tries to teach him the Spanish word for ants, Yerma encounters resistance. Despite her assertion that the correct word is “hormiguitas,” JoEl insists on calling them “Moleecas” (122). On witnessing this scene, “Felix’ heart broke with the knowledge that his son was a poet” (122). Felix’ reaction is telling; recognizing the otherness in his son, the latter’s identity as a poet, Felix is perhaps reminded of his own difference related to his sexuality. Consequently, he treats the boy with a displaced severity that is, in effect, destined for himself.

As he grows up JoEl becomes more hostile toward the family. He refuses to take part in its communal life and is openly critical of its patriarchal nature. He taunts his mother “for putting up with Felix’ injustices” (125) although “They did not seem injustices to her but simply the rights of a husband and father” (124-5). At times he displays his resistance to the family by meeting paternal authority with silence. His refusal to speak, that is to employ language, constitutes a clear indication of his continuing defiance of the Law-of-the-Father, initiated with his refusal to name the ants correctly. That rejection of the Law-of-the-Father in terms of a retreat from language takes on another guise when Miguel Chico visits him shortly before his death. In a final act of defiance to the symbolic order, his everyday speech becomes perverse, ludic and apparently incoherent. He speaks to his family “only in riddles as if all the poetry guiding them through his nightmares had turned itself into them” (156). Indeed, as Kaja Silverman notes, “Because of the intimate links between the Oedipus complex and the larger and the larger symbolic order ...psychic ‘disorders’ can be read as a point of ...resistance to patriarchal culture” (144). Moreover, it is important that this visit occurs just prior to Miguel Chico’s dream of the “monster” and the latter’s acquiescence of his own repressed creativity. Miguel Chico’s narration will ultimately succeed in freeing, or unblocking, the repressed desire of the family where Felix and his son have failed.

Through his writing of the family, Miguel Chico does not simply play the role of chronicler of the family history. He does more than chart and describe the trajectory of the Angel clan. Rather, his narrative lays bare the interior life of the family and explores its psychological make-up in such a way as to explain that history. This is made explicit as Miguel Chico recognizes his role as “the family analyst, interested in the past for psychological, not historical, reasons” (28). The function of his analysis differentiates Miguel Chico from Mama Chona. His narration holds the possibility for understanding and for community while Mama Chona’s narrative is one which condemns and alienates people and enforces solitude: “unlike his grandmother and María, Miguel Chico wanted to look at motives and people from an earthly, rather than otherworldly point of view” (28).

The significance and power of his narration derives from its liberation of all those aspects confined to the familial unconscious by Mama Chona and from its subsequently therapeutic potential. While Miguel Chico sees himself as the *psychoanalyst*, he might be best considered the anti-Oedipal figure of the Angel clan as his narrative ultimately comprises a *schizoanalysis* of the family and its history. Rather than reconstitute repression, as Freudian psychoanalysis is seen to, his case history

and interpretation of the family articulates all that which has been denied in the conscious text of the family and refuses to frame that material within the Oedipal narrative.¹⁶ Miguel Chico's anti-Oedipal identity is made explicit as he refers directly to Freudian concepts and describes how he sought to escape Oedipalization. He claims to have consciously resisted the intervention of the Law-of-the-Father by refusing to end the bond with his mother: "Years ago, upon learning of the Oedipus complex Miguel Chico had savored the intuitive knowledge that his father was no rival for his mother's affections. It was clear to both mother and son that Miguel Grande could not break into their intricately woven web of feeling for each other" (94). However, this is not to say that Miguel Chico is automatically endowed with that anti-Oedipal tendency which is inextricably bound up with his eventual development as a writer. On the contrary, he initially experiences the imposition of phallic authority both at the hands of his father and his grandmother. Chona tries to make her grandson live up to the family name by encouraging him to repress his body altogether. Basing her authorial script on Catholic doctrine and on the primary importance of education, she impresses upon Miguel the prioritization of the cerebral, at the near total exclusion of the physical. Consequently, Miguel Chico "ignored his body and became a good student" (96).

This neglect of his own body is convenient in that it has become a burden to him due to his childhood infirmity. However, Miguel Chico's decision only incurs the wrath of his father who intervenes in the boy's emotional and physical development. On seeing his son weak and sickly in the wake of that childhood illness, Miguel attempts to force him to adopt what he conceives of as a male role through an emphasis on physical discipline and the cultivation of a stereotypically masculine body. To this end, he develops strategies to "make a man" of his son: "One device had been to encourage Miguel Chico's friends to engage him in fistfights so that he might learn to defend himself. Another was to enroll him in advanced swimming classes at the YMCA with private instructions to the teacher to be harder on him than on the other boys of his age" (96). Ultimately, the father's actions comprise an effort to instill in his son the Oedipally correct modes of behavior and, by extension, acceptable object choices. However, those strategies, directed at repressing his son's "femininity," are thwarted as Miguel's mother begins to protect her son all the more.

The grandmother and the father exert apparently opposing forces, yet with a similarly repressive aim. Miguel seeks to repress from his son's body and intersubjective relationships all that which he considers to be associated with his conceptualization of the "feminine," in turn construed as a deprivileged and essentialized category. At the same time, Mama Chona encourages Miguel Chico to deny the body in terms of a suppression of any expressions of sexuality. Both of these crucial influences culminate in equally repressive vectors focused upon his body. Given those two extremes forced upon him during his early life, Miguel Chico is caught up in intersecting repressive vectors and his relationship with his own body becomes highly problematic. It is precisely his reexamination of that initially traumatic experience of his own body which has been subjected to those repressive vectors that comprises the most important factor in his emergence as a writer. Accordingly, it is necessary to trace Miguel Chico's relationship with his body in more detail so as to appreciate fully the significance of his narrative.

The central concern of his narrative is the articulation of his own corporeality and the relationship of the latter with the abject and, therefore, with the realm of the

Semiotic. His emergence as the narrator of the repressed is linked to his particular experience of the corporeal as determined by his relationship with Mama Chona. Indeed, it is the crisis regarding his body, as an adult, which both permits and necessitates his narrative. There are two phases in his emergence as narrator/author which merit analysis: his experience at the hospital and his dream, or nightmare, of the same “monster” which “killed” Mama Chona. Both instances are instrumental in obliging Miguel Chico to address the abject and to write the repressed so as to liberate it. In particular, both experiences enable him to disrupt that binary code in terms of which his body has been denied. His narration allows him to represent the corporeal beyond the regime of difference as he comes to see his own physicality in such a way that undermines the phallogocentric imaginary.

It is apt that Miguel Chico’s narrative should begin with a section entitled “Judgment Day.” This day, eagerly anticipated by both Maria and Mama Chona, signifies the loss of the corporeal as well as a subjection to the reckoning of the Father and the assumption of a higher, spiritual existence untainted by the physical realm. While he is a child Miguel Chico is informed about the glory of Judgment Day by Maria who equates it with the attainment of a supreme happiness and the possibility of a sense of community that cannot be realized in life.¹⁷ In Miguel Chico’s story, this day marks the turning point at which his experience begins to problematize the Oedipal ideology that has been imposed upon him. The chapter title refers to Miguel Chico’s near-death experience in hospital, the point at which he comes closest to Mama Chona’s ideal. Throughout his life, the identification and repression of the abjection of the body has enabled him to approach that state of superior and pure existence suggested by the family name, Angel. As the reader encounters him in his hospital bed, his body is taken over by medical technology in such a way as to suspend his corporeal existence. Miguel Chico ironically muses over the effect of this management of his body by machines, realizing that, were it not for the post-operative pain, which reminds him of his corporeality, he would have attained “that consciousness his grandmother and the Catholic church had taught him was the highest form of existence: pure, bodiless intellect. No shit, no piss, no blood—a perfect astronaut. ‘I’m an angel,’ he said inside his mouth to Mama Chona already dead and buried. ‘At last I am what you taught us to be’” (6). This section of the novel dealing with Miguel’s hospital experience thus suggests the realization of Chona’s wishes with regard to one of the black sheep who had threatened to undermine her ideology of family. At this point, his physical life seems to be at a symbolic and literal point of expiration due to the culminative effect of years of denial of the corporeal instilled in him by Mama Chona. As noted, this trajectory begins in childhood with an illness that left him deformed and which prompted him to devote his energies to the development of his mind. Now, as an adult, medicine mistakenly prescribed for a urinary infection “aggravated a deadly illness dormant since childhood though surfacing again in fits of fatigue and nausea” (5). Again, the corporeal is equated with the abject provoking a physical reaction of “nausea” in Miguel Chico.

However, the very illness that first prompted him to ignore his corporeality returns to remind him of his body and to resist its repression, forcing him to come to terms with it. It is important to note that, during his apparent demise, Miguel has “lost control of his body” (7) and is unable to “use” its abjection to constitute himself by deprivileging his own physicality. More significantly, as noted, his pure, potentially angelic state is marred by pain; a “vague pain that connected him to his flesh” (7)

binds him to his body and cannot be denied. Moreover, on regaining consciousness after his operation, he hears a voice repeating, “you cannot escape from your body, you cannot escape from your body” (7). Thus, his illness reunites him with his body, albeit traumatically and the notion of rebirth is articulated explicitly: “Lying on a gurney in the recovery room, Miguel Chico came to life for the second time” (7).

Therefore, his rebirth through the experience of illness strikes at the heart of the Oedipal ideology. He no longer uses his own abjection to constitute subjectivity in terms of a violent hierarchization of mind over body. He finally refuses to deny the abject and thereby refuses to establish himself as a repressed subject. As a result, his body no longer remains suppressed as a deprivileged term in Kristeva’s binarism of “summons and repulsion” (*Powers* 1) and his hospital experience attests to the fluidity and permeability of his bodily boundaries. Although in the catastrophic context of his own potential demise, Miguel Chico’s body becomes cybernetic and undermines binary thought through a disruption of the notions of inside and outside.¹⁸ This is seen with regard to the manner in which his most intimate bodily functions are exteriorized: “Tubes protruded from every opening of his body... Looking down at himself, he saw that his body was being held together by a network of tubes and syringes... All of his needs were being taken care of by plastic devices and he was nothing but eyes and ears...” (7-8). That breakdown of bodily boundaries is crucial to Miguel Chico’s Anti-Oedipal role as his experience yields a subjectivity which differs from the Christian humanist and Oedipal narratives of a unitary ontology based on binary categories of difference and repression. Furthermore, due to his illness, he feels that he has been “grafted” (28) and undergone a “severe pruning” (28) and, through that experience of alterity and mutability, he attains a sense of the *non-essential* status of his own subjectivity.

EMBRACING THE MONSTER

Having experienced his body as a site of a resistance to Mama Chona’s Oedipal ideology and having undergone a symbolic rebirth, a rebirth in the symbolic order, Miguel Chico eventually recognizes the importance of articulating the experience of abjection and undifferentiation in terms of writing itself. To analyze that ultimate reconciliation with his own body and its relationship with his emergence as an author, it is necessary to return to the “monster” which brings on Mama Chona’s death. She recognizes its abject quality and *uses* it to reinforce her final, irreversible repression of the corporeal. The “monster” returns in Miguel Chico’s dream following his visit to JoEl. As a figure in a dream, the “monster” is characteristically overdetermined. It at once represents Mama Chona’s fallen uterus and the unconscious of the family, as well Miguel Chico’s own infirm and crippled body. In this way, it symbolizes the abject and this is emphasized by the physical repulsion which it produces in Miguel Chico since “the monster’s breath smelled of fresh blood and feces” (160). That interrelation of the abject, writing and the creative consciousness which coalesce in the dream of the “monster” is already present in Miguel Chico as a child. This is clear from the books he chooses for Mama Chona to read for him. Indeed, his favorite was “*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and he would look at it every night and pretend that he could read the words. He loved ...a torture scene that featured a wooden boot, and

he was simultaneously repelled and fascinated by Quasimodo (161). As a boy, then, Miguel Chico is sensitive to the abject which is represented by Quasimodo, the deformed and concealed, yet central figure of the novel. Moreover, it is significant that it is Mama Chona who reads *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* to the child who has yet to learn to read himself. It is she who instills in him and maintains the sense of repulsion and fascination characteristic of the dynamic of abjection.

The dream of the “monster” itself is especially significant as it closes the repressive circle of abjection. Miguel ends the “summons/repulsion” dynamic of the abject by incorporating it into his conscious self through writing. Initially, this is acted out in the dream as Miguel Chico, having been raped by the “monster,” confronts it face to face and, physically, draws it close to him. To begin with, the monster “put its velvet paw in Miguel Chico’s hand and forced him to hold it tightly to his gut right below the appliance at his side” (159). Thus, the “monster” emphasizes that which Miguel has repressed: his own bodily abjection located in that “piece of intestine sticking out from his right side” (25). Yet, rather than reinscribe phallogocentrism by using the abject to negotiate his identity, Miguel Chico accepts and returns the embrace of the “monster” in such a way that his “loathing and disgust” (160) are displaced as he identifies “tenderness” (160) in the “monster’s” eyes. This denotes the acquiescence of his own body which enables him to break with Mama Chona’s imperative of repression and to write his own unrepressed text of the family. Therefore, the suicide of the dream in which Miguel jumps from the bridge, locked in an embrace with the “monster,” is not the negative image it appears to be. As Rosaura Sánchez notes, it symbolizes a break with Chona’s ideology in such a way as “to end the silence and begin writing the story of his family and thus himself” (121). Having come to terms with the importance of liberating that which has been denied, his own abjection is finally accepted as “that tip of gut which would always require his care and attention” (28).

Furthermore, as an irruption of the unconscious realm, the dream impresses upon Miguel Chico the notion that his text should reproduce as much as possible its undifferentiated texture. Indeed, a clue has already been given to him by the poet JoEl who used “riddles” and linguistic play to liberate and to articulate the unconscious. Just as the dream is a text in which difference, ambiguity and contradiction have free-range in the absence of the ego, Miguel comes to realize that his novel should follow the same pattern to incorporate all that which is “edited” out of Chona’s text. The words of the “monster” itself embody that ambivalent texture of the unconscious from which it speaks. The “monster” accommodates contradiction and the play of differences as it tells him “I am the manipulator and the manipulated... I am the victim and the slayer... I am what you believe and don’t believe, I am the loved and the unloved. I approve and turn away. I am judge and advocate” (159-160). Finally, then, Miguel comes to terms with the abjection of his own body and embraces the “monster” and the undifferentiated, yet repressed, identities which it signifies. He awakens from the dream knowing that he has envisaged the kind of text he has to write and, moreover, he recognizes the therapeutic importance of that text which will provide a communal space for the mutual coexistence and recognition of that which has been repressed.

In the context of his realization of the interrelation of the body and writing, with regard to the representation of community, it is worth returning to the notion of Miguel Chico as a “grafted” subject (28). That recognition of the illusory nature of his own

singular self is bound up with the practice of writing. As Derrida notes, *graft* and the *graph* are linked by their shared etymological source, *graphion* or writing instrument (*Dissemination* 202). Just as the self comprises an ongoing series of “grafts,” through its fragmented nature and its intersubjective relationships, so writing is revealed to be the product and the producer of a “grafting” due to its process of supplementation. Subsequently, Miguel recognizes that, as his notion of self is the product of a multiple and ongoing grafting, so his inscription of that experience resists notions of a singular monologic narration. Thus, the apparently individualized textualization of his experience inevitably yields the representation of the multiple voices and trajectories which intersect and inform his subjectivity.

Following the dream of the “monster,” which jolts him back to wakefulness, or consciousness, he records the dream text as the basis for his creative offering to the ghosts of his past: “the sense of release was very much with him... he did not go back to sleep after changing his bag but instead sat at his desk and recorded the details of his dream” (160). At this moment, the first direct reference to textualization arises: “He needed very much to make peace with his dead, to prepare a feast for them so that they would stop haunting him. He would feed them words and make his candied skulls out of paper” (160). In Chona’s experience, the abjection of the “monster” is used to perform a final, apocalyptic repression of the body. She allows the “monster” to break her corporeal boundaries in order to effect an ultimate denial of the body, which is her death. However, Miguel’s experience of his body, culminating in the dream, leads finally to his acquiescence of the abject, to the constitution of an unrepresed subject and to the writing of the family history which comprises a healthier, although not necessarily happier, narrative.

The insistence of/on the body in *The Rain God* may be read in the terms discussed. As the Phallic Mother, Mama Chona mediates the repression of the corporeal and reinscribes the Law-of-the-Father. Thus, the Oedipal narrative is able to persist throughout the Angel clan. Mama Chona’s drive to instill repression in her children consists in making them as much like the family name as possible: angels, asexual and bound to the Law-of-the-Father. Yet, it is Miguel Angel, Mama Chona’s favorite, who begins to work against this narrative. It is he who resists the territorialization of the Oedipal family by articulating precisely that which Chona has silenced. Miguel Chico’s specific refusal to sever the bond with his first object choice (his mother) is that which underlies a different view of subjectivity and community displayed in his narrative. He rejects the model of subject formation and socialization offered by submission to the Law-of-the-Father which functions in terms of the institution of difference, separation and individuation. Rather, his resistance to the reconstitution of the phallogocentric imaginary enables him to conceive of a multiple subjectivity and a community of accommodated differences.

Through his writing, Miguel Chico comes to understand the workings of Mama Chona’s ideology and his account of the family resists the repression of the abject which he embraces in his perverse activities as the Anti-Oedipal author. That emergence as a writer is closely linked to Miguel Chico’s problematic relationship with his own desire and his own body. In the final analysis, however, he inscribes the perversity of the Semiotic in the symbolic through his writing of the abject in such a way as to account for the corporeal. Accordingly, his reappropriation of the symbolic order, the novel itself, attests to his attempt to minimize repression, to unblock the flow of desire and to accommodate otherness.

Notes

1. This term derives from Patricia Tobin's analysis of the chronicle of the Buendía family in "Everything is Known. García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*."
2. By "Chicano," I am referring specifically to male writers. With regard to narrative there are two principal tendencies which may be broadly distinguished along the lines of gender. Although there are very clear exceptions, Chicano narrative has tended to represent individual and/or group identities in terms of what Werner Sollors calls "descent" relationships, as opposed to those of "consent" (6). The accommodative practice of the latter is more marked in Chicana writing. Narratives of descent display a concern for the recuperation and articulation of vertical lineage within the "ethnic" group as the sole determinant of identity. Consent on the other hand is concerned with an identity based on an horizontal process of interaction and participation in a variety of social contracts. Descent and consent relationships embody the difference between the conceptualization of a given, essentialized identity with "ethnicity" as its determining factor and the notion of an "ethnic" identity in process, constituted by multiple informing vectors.
3. Clearly, there are other texts written by male authors concerned with these issues; for example, the works of Richard Rodriguez and John Rechy. Yet, to date, in all genres, it is specifically women writers who have displayed an ongoing interest in the representation of the body and affect. This may be seen in the poetry of Bernice Zamora, Naomi Quiñonez and Cordelia Candelaria, in the drama of Cherrie Moraga and in the narrative of Estela Portillo, Alma Villanueva and Ana Castillo.
4. Freud's most rigorous account of the Oedipus complex is contained in *The Ego and the Id*, although *Totem and Taboo* offers the most sustained account of the Oedipal dynamic in the broader process of socialization beyond the family.
5. Deleuze and Guattari identify this link in such a way as to see Oedipus as "the universal Catholic symbol" (*Anti-Oedipus* 53).
6. Freud had originally suggested that the dyad of mother and child is interrupted by the father whose threat of castration prompts the infant's repression of the desire for the maternal body. Lacan's re-reading of the Freudian castration complex emphasizes the language and its significance in this process. For Lacan, it is the intervention of Name-of-the-Father, or the phallus as primal signifier (Freud's threat of castration) which separates the child from the mother. This dynamic inscribes in the child a repression of that pre-existing unity and wholeness of its world and gives rise to the sense of loss and difference that underlies the very structure of language into which the child is interpellated.
7. Lacan introduces the notion of the "phallic mother" in his 1958 essay "The Signification of the Phallus." Kristeva's work in *Desire in Language* and *Powers of Horror* examines this concept in more depth.
8. That absent-presence of the father is stressed especially at the end of the novel. As Chona retreats further into senility, she is more concerned with her husband than at any other point in the novel. Near death, she imagines that he has returned: "In the daytime, usually before the late afternoon meal, she would ask, 'Where is your father?' The first time she asked, Mema, surprised, told her straight-forwardly that he was dead. Without blinking Chona retorted, 'Yes, but why doesn't he come to see me? Where is he?' " (172).
9. Here I am referring to the object relations theory of D.W. Winnicott. For an elaboration of the idea of the "transitional object" and the way in which it is "used" in the process of establishing subjectivity, consult *Playing and Reality*.
10. In addition, at the outset of the novel, as Miguel contemplates the photograph of himself and Chona, the reader is told that "Miguel Chico's grandmother never spoke to strangers" (3).
11. It is significant that one family "deviant" should be equated with the other side of the river, "The first family scandal that Miguel Chico was old enough to be aware of involved his aunt Mema. Before he was born, Mema had an illegitimate child and the family had

- decided she must give him up. *In protest Mema went to live across the river with her man, which in her sister's eyes was the same as becoming a woman of the streets*" (165; emphasis added).
12. According to the narrator, "They drowned in those few moments when one of the servants let down her guard" (164). It is telling that they should die in the river and through the negligence of the Mexican servants. As suggested above, the river, the permeable border, is the space of flow and desire which, at the same time, divides the Angel clan from the repressed indigenous identity. Also significant is the actual detail that one of the Mexican servants "let down her guard," thus emphasizing her unrepressed identity which conflicts with Mama Chona's ideology.
 13. Interestingly, the structure of the text itself parallels the retrospective process of uncovering the repressed. The reader first encounters Felix Angel's dead body yet only later, on page 137, the narrative analepsis provides a detailed description of the actual destruction of the body and the circumstances leading to the incident.
 14. This scene, which connects the ants with the unconscious of JoEl, echoes Buñuel's surrealist masterpiece *Un Chien Andalou* in which the protagonist is plagued by ants.
 15. The image of the swarm of ants is, in itself, ambivalent. Although, at first glance, it symbolizes the undifferentiated flow of the pre-Oedipal stage, it must be recognized that ants function in a highly organized and efficient manner. Indeed, this is in turn relevant for an understanding of the unconscious which they symbolize, since the latter's apparent chaos and meaninglessness certainly belies a very rigorous structure and logic.
 16. The contemporary problematization of Freudian psychoanalysis is typified by works such as Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*.
 17. While Seventh Day Adventist doctrine places emphasis upon death and the loss of the body, María and her church at the same time threaten the authority of Mama Chona. María is a Catholic who has left the faith and Mama Chona describes her as a deviant and a heathen and treats her with the same disrespect that she reserves for Mexicans. However, the Adventists provide an escape for Miguel Chico from the austerity of Catholicism imposed by Mama Chona. He describes the ceremony which he witnesses with an emphasis on affect and community which is absent from his own experience of religion: "The people at these services were very friendly and looked at him as if they all shared a wonderful secret... The more he smiled the more they smiled back; they spent most of the time smiling, though they talked about things that scared him a great deal, such as the end of the world and how sinful the flesh was. He could not rid himself of the guilt he felt for being there, as no matter how much they smiled, he knew he was betraying his mother and father and Mama Chona in some deep, incomprehensible way" (18).
 18. Miguel Chico's cybernetic experience is especially significant in the context of Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s." For Haraway, the cybernetic moment is the instant at which the binary opposition is collapsed by the postulation of a disruption. Cybernetics is "about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous opposites which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (196).

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